

# WHITE PRIVILEGE

## let's talk

A Resource for Transformational Dialogue

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# introduction

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*Greetings, gentle soul,*

I want to thank you for committing to an ongoing Sacred Conversation on Race, and for your willingness to enter into this particular aspect of the conversation that focuses attention on White Privilege in its manifestations and impact.

We don't promise that this will be easy to discuss. It will challenge basic assumptions about race that help white communities maintain a system of privilege that, while prevalent, often goes unnoticed by even the best-intentioned of white advocates for justice. Nonetheless, the work we do to deepen our awareness of how privilege is made manifest, and the commensurate work of unmasking and dismantling that privilege, is among the most important work we white leaders can commit to.

Be open to the challenges that will come. Promise to come to these conversations with open hearts and open minds. Commit to new insights that will lead to new alignments.

One of the pernicious and enduring characteristics of privilege is that even whites who long ago became aware of the endemic racism in America, and who challenged themselves to grow beyond their racist pasts, are yet still recipients of privileges that give them enormous economic advantages. Even more insidious is that some of the most committed white allies for racial equity remain largely unaware of the countless ways that privilege manifests itself daily in their lives.

This curriculum is a concerted effort to enable allies to see with new eyes how privilege works. It aims to illuminate how white people in America, at every economic stratum and in a myriad of ways, receive privileged consideration simply because they are white.

It offers the promise and the possibility that those who commit to engaging in this dialogue can develop higher degrees of awareness of privilege and its consequences. It is presented in the hope that such awareness, both in the individuals who participate in the curriculum and in the larger communities of which they are a part, will lead to more sophisticated and more impactful commitments to reducing the ongoing impact of white privilege as a means of distributing wealth and power.

It is important that some things be understood up front.

First, this is but another step in an ongoing commitment to engage in Sacred Conversations on Race. It is not the end of any journey, and it is certainly far from the beginning. It is merely the next step. That is important to understand, because the focus of this work is somewhat narrow. If seen as an attempt to finish something completely, it will fail.

Its narrow focus is on White Privilege as seen through the lens of Black/White divisions in America. Other material is promised in time that will delve into how privilege is filtered through the

lenses of other disadvantaged communities: Indigenous American populations; Latino/a communities; Immigrant and refugee populations; the LGBTQ community; female and womanist perspectives; those differently abled.

We made the choice to focus on one aspect of a conversation on privilege that is crucial on our journey to racial equity knowing it could not complete

the discussion. It is our hope and our commitment that future material will enable us to continue this conversation further.

Second, this material should not be used as a means for white allies to address questions related to what whites can do to create racial equity. The work of unmasking and dismantling privilege is important, and requires that whites everywhere learn to spot privilege when and where it exists. But no one using this material should see it as a means of achieving racial equity.

It is more appropriate to see this material as a means of reducing the impact of whiteness as a social construct, for it is the privilege that emanates from the deployment of that construct that is the greatest impediment to racial equity America knows today. White participants should know up front that the hope here is not that we as whites be relied upon to resolve racial injustice and inequity, but that we commit to reducing the impact our white privilege has on creating that injustice and inequity.

*Jesus said “Let those who have eyes to see, see.”*

Third, the fundamental work to be done here is to focus on seeing. Jesus said “Let those who have eyes to see, see.” This is not as easy as it sounds—the simple and hard truth is that most whites move through their days with a very deep denial, or at least a very shallow awareness, of how their privilege works. If you are a person of color in America, the seeing of privilege is inescapable. If you are white, you have most likely not been conditioned to even look for, much less see, where your privilege functions.

If there is one thing this curriculum seeks to challenge white participants to commit to, it is seeing. Ask

yourself every day this simple question: “What do I see?”

Begin to filter all your experiences through the lens of race. For whites, that not only sounds challenging—it sounds ridiculously unjust. After all, aren’t we trying to reduce the impact of race? Isn’t our goal NOT to filter things through the lens of race?

If you are a person of color, you know that there is not a day that goes by where you are afforded the luxury of NOT filtering your experience through the lens of race. White people in America don’t have to do that, and will find it difficult to begin thinking that way. It is the NOT seeing things through the lens of race that makes privilege invisible to whites.

Begin seeing. Be open to knowing what things happen or don’t happen because you are white. It will feel awkward, disruptive, and disorienting—until it stops feeling that way. Only then will you begin to understand what people of color have endured their whole lives: an experience of living in a cesspool of racial overtones that diminishes their capacity to pursue fully their pathways to happy and fulfilling lives.

Fourth, the work by whites to understand white privilege is more than the work of justice: it is the work of spiritual healing.

The truth is, the mental and spiritual health of even the oppressors is badly affected by the work of supporting or maintaining systems of injustice that privilege them financially, economically, and otherwise. One of America’s lingering realities is the unprocessed grief, shame, fear, anger, and guilt of living in a culture of racial inequity. It is a heavy price we pay to maintain our silence in the face of

such evil, no matter what benefits we accrue because of it. Every brown and black body we see

can trigger that guilt, shame, and fear.

## introduction

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It is far past time that we admit that and commit not just to the work of justice, but to the work of healing our own spiritual wounds and the wounds of our ancestors.

Again, thank you each and all for committing to this stage of a journey we all hope takes us down new pathways to racial equity. Hang in there for what promises to be a challenging, engaging, and enlightening experience. Your commitment to participate in this aspect of our Sacred Conversations deepens the collective hope that we can create Shalom and contribute to building the Beloved Community of which Dr. King dreamed.

Know that you are not in this alone. You are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, including the many who have gone before us and committed themselves to social transformation. On their shoulders we stand, and by their courage we are inspired.

Rev. John Dorhauer  
General Minister and President  
United Church of Christ



# part one

## THE SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY TOLD THROUGH THE LENS OF RACE

### chapter one

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JOHN PADDOCK

I am a white man.

I would never have thought to open a reflection on my life and spirit in that way until I participated, along with John Dorhauer, in a doctoral program where we were asked to write our spiritual autobiographies through the lens of race. Like John,

I went through numerous drafts of “not getting it” until I came to my own “aha!” moment.

I remember the exact moment. I had completed the latest draft of my spiritual autobiography and was driving from Dayton, Ohio to Kansas City on I-70 to attend a meeting of our peer group where I would present my paper. Somewhere in western Indiana, the thought flashed through my mind that I was white. I was driving a late model car down the interstate without a care in the world that the highway patrol would pull me over for anything but an egregious traffic violation.



“I am a white man.” Scales fell from my eyes, and for the first time I was able to see my life and being in a whole new light—through an entirely new lens, if you will. I, John Paddock, have race. By that I mean something far more than being conscious of my skin color when I’m with a group of blacks. In the same way that a tinted lens will color everything seen through it, seeing the world through the lens of race changed the way I see everything.

It began when I was able to see that I have race. Race belongs to me as much as it does to black, brown, yellow, and red people. Prior to that, to speak of a race problem meant that the problem belonged to someone else, because I didn’t see myself as having race. I was just the norm, which meant that I was oblivious to the implications and effects of my racial identity.

I had to tear up the latest draft of my “spiritual autobiography” because it was nothing more than a defense of what a great person I was when it came to supporting civil rights and working for equality. It was a whitewashed autobiography that paid scant attention to my blindness to privilege and its caustic effects on my own soul.

I grew up with stories that were part of the family lore. These stories worked to define who I am in the same way that “A wandering Aramean was my father and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and we became a nation....” (Deut. 26:5). The ancestors’ stories became those of their descendants and defined who the descendants were to become.

The first Paddock to these shores was Robert Paddock, who arrived in the 1630s. He was a blacksmith and served for a time as sheriff of Plymouth Colony. He had four sons. I am a descendent of one of them. Eventually, Robert and his family settled in Falmouth on Cape Cod.

There was a John Paddock who lived in Deerfield, Massachusetts at the time of the French and Indian War. He was in Boston when the Deerfield Massacre occurred. The town was attacked by a group of French and Native American soldiers from Quebec. Many of the men were killed, and the women and children were carried off into slavery. Upon his return to Deerfield, John Paddock organized a militia and followed the trail into Canada. He and his group recovered almost all of the captives and brought them home.

My great-great-grandparents, George Washington Paddock and Sophronia Sheldon Paddock, were abolitionists from Batavia, New York, where George was a Methodist minister. In 1854, Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which created two new federal territories and established the doctrine of popular sovereignty, which allowed the new territories to determine for themselves whether they would be slave or free. The North and the South began to flood people into the region so that they could sway the outcome of the coming vote. George and Sophronia accepted a call for George to become a Methodist Circuit Rider in the Eastern District of Kansas. They traveled west and

George kept a diary of some of their adventures. He had a number of small Yankee congregations on his circuit, which he visited by horseback.

The diary describes a typical Sunday morning with G.W. Paddock conducting services in a small country church with sentries posted on the roof to detect gangs of Southern sympathizers who would occasionally descend upon Yankee congregations. It was an easy way to kill a whole group of them at one time. My great-great-grandfather often preached with a six-gun strapped around his waist and a double-barreled shotgun leaning against the pulpit. My father possessed one of those six-guns and a cane that doubled as a rifle. These were a part of the living room “furniture” as I was growing up.

One of G.W. Paddock’s outposts was in Lawrence, Kansas. In 1863, a Southern sympathizer, William Quantrill, led his Raiders, 400 strong, into Lawrence at five in the morning with the intention of killing a number of prominent Yankees in the town. They missed only a few who were on their list. George was one of the survivors, and he performed a funeral service for nearly 150 people.

The Rev. Robert Paddock was Rector of a parish in Manhattan when Tammany Hall controlled the city. He organized a group to fight against the corruption of the New York City Police Department and is credited with helping to bring down Tammany Hall. In order to do so, he had to fight against his own Bishop and Diocesan leaders, who were probably

beneficiaries of the regime. He would patrol the streets at night among the prostitutes looking for police on the take.

Eventually he was given the nickname Red Light Bobby.

Later, he was appointed missionary Bishop of Eastern Oregon. He was eventually removed from that post after being found guilty of allowing Methodist clergy to preach in some of his churches. He returned to New York and engaged in chaplaincy and charitable work until his death in the late 1930s. While hospitalized during his final illness, he heard of a Negro woman who could not be admitted to the hospital because the Negro ward was full. He gave up his private room to her, arranged to pay all of her bills, and moved into a ward bed where he died soon after.

Shortly after my parents were married, they became missionaries on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota near the Canadian border. At the end of their time there, they boarded a train to go back east. Dad asked my mom what she had missed most during their stay on the Reservation. He expected her to say something like “running water” or “indoor plumbing.” What she said was, “I missed the Negroes most!”

Never did I hear either of my parents say a negative word about blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, or Asians. They had plenty of critical comments about

racists and bigots and groups like the Ku Klux Klan. My mom’s younger sister lived with us for a short while when I was in grade school. One of her boyfriends made a racist comment and my dad ordered him to leave our house and never return.

I was born in 1946, among the first wave of baby boomers, and came of age in the ‘60s. I was an exchange student in Stockholm, Sweden for my high school senior year (‘63-64). During that year were the March on Washington, violence against blacks, and the assassination of President Kennedy. I count it as a gift that I was able to see my country critically through the eyes of others.

My college roommate was a black man who suffered deeply from prejudice, racism, and (in hindsight) internal oppression. While in seminary, I spent an intern year working in Richmond, Virginia in a juvenile reform school (prison) largely populated by black youth, and watched overt racism up close.

My wife and I were foster parents for over thirty years in three different states. We fostered more than 70 infants and toddlers, both black and white. We adopted six black children, four of whom still live with us. We have experienced discrimination first-hand. We’ve watched our children suffer and struggle. I saw myself as an enlightened ally to blacks in the struggle against racism.

Perhaps you can now understand what an earthshaking moment it was for me, at age 55, with all this history and experience, to suddenly understand in a profound way that “I am a white man.”

At first it was devastating to see my life through the lens of race, to comprehend that I am complicit. To be born white in America is to experience advantages at almost every turn that are regularly denied to others.

*At first it was devastating to see my life through the lens of race.*

Jobs, education, where I can live, who I can associate with, loans and credit, even having a genealogy that can trace my people back to the 1630’s—these all provide unearned bonuses merely because I am a white man. My whole life is built on this system that continuously disadvantages people of color and benefits me—and for most of my life I was unaware.

Rather than standing outside of the problems of race, I am actually in the middle of them. My power and privilege are, indeed, part of the problem. Mine is a guilty conscience for thinking that I was such a good guy and such a great ally when all the while I was in denial. My soul was numb to my basic reality.

But at the same time, I was liberated. I am now free to engage race, not from a distance believing that race is something that belongs to someone else, but as a participant. And I have a new vocation—a calling to reach out to my fellow whites and invite them to think about their lives and spirits through the lens of race.

One of the small research projects we did during our doctoral work was to read over a number of spiritual autobiographies of past students. It was a requirement of that program that a spiritual autobiography be included in every dissertation. None of the earlier students had been asked to reflect “through the lens of race.” A professor familiar with the former students selected an equal number of autobiographies written by blacks and whites. We discovered that every black writer mentioned his or her race on the first page. Only one white ever mentioned his race, and it was buried deep in the document. (At one point he had done an internship in a black church, and he mentioned how uncomfortable he felt as the only white.)

I am not alone among my white brothers and sisters to have lived most of my life unaware of my race and its implications.

Part of privilege is that, as a white man, I can walk away from dealing with race—blacks cannot. I can simply move back into denial while others have to continue to live in a world of systemic racism,

prejudice, implicit bias, angst over possible brutality, and racialized politics.

This is not intended as an exercise in navel-gazing. It is a first step in opening our eyes to truths to which many of us have been blind for too long. It is the beginning of a new engagement in the work of justice.

### **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

*I invite you to write your own spiritual autobiography through this lens of race. Where and when have you been aware of your race? Think about where you were raised, your neighborhood and schooling, friends and acquaintances, church and work, family stories and traditions. Ponder how you think about yourself. Meditate on the ways that white privilege, power, and racism have touched and influenced your story.*



# chapter two

JOHN DORHAUER

I was 42 when I began my doctoral studies on White Privilege. My first assignment was to compose a “Spiritual Autobiography through the Lens of Race.” A what?!

I had to unpack that. Truth is, I had no idea what I was being asked to do. I made one false assumption that sent me down the wrong path. That would be an easy fix, but it wouldn’t come until it dawned on me that there would also be a larger problem to be fixed.

The false assumption was that “Spiritual Autobiography” roughly translated into “Faith Journey.” After 16 years in ministry, I could fake that part. And so I did. But it didn’t—translate to “Faith Journey,” that is. What I was being asked to do was tell the story of my “spirit.”

Has anyone ever asked you how it is with your soul? It is a way of digging a little deeper into your well-being. Think of the unfolding of a spiritual autobiography as a way of telling how it has been with your soul. This is what I was being asked to undertake. Clearing up that false assumption was the first step to helping me get this assignment right. That was the easy part to fix.

What was the hard part?

As a white man, being asked to tell my story through the lens of race was the hard part. It may not sound that hard, but I had to rewrite this first assignment five times before I understood how to do this.

The first time I tried, I thought to myself: well, can’t you find some black people to put in your biography? That’s what I set about doing.

It wasn’t easy. I grew up in a neighborhood, church, and school that were pretty white.

I brought my black grade school teacher into the story. Although I didn’t have a black classmate, there was a black family in the church who had a son a year younger and two sons who were twins a couple years older than me. I put them into my story.

Needless to say, this isn’t what was being asked. This only made my professor angry.

What he asked me to do to correct it made me feel awkward and uncomfortable—and it made no sense to me.

First, he asked me: “Why do you only identify the race of those who aren’t white? You talk about your ‘black teacher,’ your ‘black friend.’ Why don’t you write about your ‘white father,’ your ‘white teacher,’ your ‘white coach?’”

My first thought in response to this was something like: “Why would I do that? Everyone knows that these people are white. It’s simply stating the obvious.” I didn’t say those words out loud, but even thinking them made me aware of a whole new dynamic around white privilege that I will spend the rest of my life trying to unpack and unlearn: that there is a way of growing up white in America that teaches you that you are the normal one and everyone else is different.

*There is a way of growing up white in America that teaches you that you are the normal one and everyone else is different.*

I rewrote the paper and inserted “white” as an adjective in front of every person that entered my story who was white. It seems like such a small thing to ask—and it felt utterly ridiculous to me. But it slowly dawned on me that I racialize everyone who isn’t white while I act like whites are somehow above that. Being forced for the first time to attach racial identity to myself and other white people opened a door of insight and understanding that had heretofore been inaccessible to me. It kick-started a journey of discovery that I still find myself on.

I still didn’t know what a spiritual autobiography through the lens of race was, however, or why it was so important for me to write. I had another two

or three writings to go before it clicked for me: both how to do it, and why it was so important.

Somewhere along the way to that discovery, a single sentence was composed, and once it was, I understood how to write my spiritual autobiography through the lens of race.

The sentence reads: “My father was a racist; and I hated my father.”

Not long ago, my father died. Over the years, we learned to respect, trust, and love one another.

But there was a time when, for me, that love and respect did not come easily.

And while it is true that my father was much more than a racist, and even at times showed remarkable love and respect for people of all races, my childhood was marked with hateful words from my father that filled me with deep shame and confusion. His words, in the privacy of our own home, were hurtful and bigoted and spiteful and angry and arrogant and prejudiced. They reflected the teachings of his own father. For many generations, being a Dorhauer meant being a part of a white clan that taught its children to feel superior to other races.

When I filter my story through the lens of race, those words from my white father and my white uncle and some of my white teachers and white role models all resurface. And because this is a spiritual autobiography, what dawned on me for the first

time was that the health and well-being of my spiritual self was deeply impacted by all of this.

I carry a great deal of shame, of guilt, of remorse, of regret that attaches to my spirit as burden. There is a wound that festers. I was never permitted to even name it, and so could never begin to heal in any real way.

It is the pain of being ten years old and hearing my white father rant about N-----s, who, according to his wisdom, were different than Blacks. It is the pain of working in East St. Louis with Buck Jones, a black activist pastor and prophet, and then listening to my dad tell me how disappointed he is that I did that. It is the pain of listening to family members through the years tell jokes meant to deride black men and women, attaching to them caricatured aspects that reflect less the nature and abilities of a proud people than the prejudices of my family.

At 42, I had an awakening. I was allowed for the first time to examine a spirit that through those 42 years had been asked to accept and embrace a way of living that shamed and embarrassed me, but also, without my ever coming to grips with this hard truth, traumatized me.

The rehearsal of this part of my story has been healing. It has helped me to see things differently. It has laid bare a spiritual wounding that can now be tended to with love and care after 42 years of being allowed to fester and damage.

My father was a racist; and I hated my father.

Writing that line helped me to tell stories that needed to be told.

Writing that line helped me know things about myself that had been repressed.

Writing that line helped me discover new pathways to insight and healing that were heretofore inaccessible.

Writing that line engaged me in telling my spiritual autobiography through the lens of race. Whatever insights were to follow in pursuit of a doctoral degree on the subject of White Privilege would have been mostly academic but for this effort. Being able to unfold my narrative for the first time through the lens of race transformed an academic endeavor to a spiritual journey.

I would like to invite you to try the same thing.

Write and rehearse your story. You will choose which stories to tell. You will choose which stories matter. You will choose which stories have had an impact on the shaping and health of your spirit.

How did you first come to learn about and recognize the difference between races?

Who told you what it means to be white; what it means to be black; what it means to be Hispanic; what it means to be Native American?

What value did they attach to whiteness or blackness, to light skin or dark skin, to speaking in a foreign tongue or worshipping another God?



What do you remember feeling in those moments when words or actions expressed what others in your household or community thought or felt about racial identity?

What do you feel retelling or rehearsing those stories again?

Did the actions of those who taught you about the difference between races match up with the words that were used?

What did you see and experience in the world around you that affected how you relate to people of other races?

Growing up in America is an exercise in racial disparity. Even those of us who were raised with a healthy and genuine and deep appreciation for all people, regardless of their race or creed, did so in the larger context of a culture committed to racial inequity. The systemic injustices that perpetuate are a byproduct of the complicity of all whites, even the allies who struggle to free themselves from a legacy of racial hate and white supremacy, and who remain the beneficiaries of privilege afforded them because they are white.


Part of the deal for privileged whites is to grow up not having to announce your race as a primary descriptor of who you are. Our stories often unfold devoid of any need to be told through the lens of race. A conscious effort to do so opens up an opportunity to enter the process of enlightenment from a different starting point. It also enables us to name and identify the way in which our culture

and/or our families have asked us to carry spiritual wounds that will not heal without truth-telling, without clear commitments to racial equity, and without a very conscious effort to dismantle the privilege that exists.

My story told through the lens of race revolves around a myriad of childhood experiences that forged a deep and lasting impression upon me about what it meant to be white and what it meant to be black.

Those experiences include moments like these:

- Sitting on the couch watching a football game with my white dad, and when the white quarterback throws a game-winning pass to a black running-back who drops it, my dad saying to me: “Son, never throw to a n----r in the clutch. They’re great athletes but they don’t know how to think.”
- A white uncle driving me through the city and, avoiding a collision with another car driven by a black woman, sharing this with me: “Blacks are bad drivers; women worse. But the worst are black women.”
- Driving any street where we saw a black man walking on the sidewalk and my white dad telling us to lock the doors.
- My white dad repeating over and over again: “Always learn to tell the difference between a black and a n-----r.”
- Hearing many white role models repeat this line: “Never forget: the most persecuted person in America today is the white man.”



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Every one of these moments, and so many more besides, lingers as a burden to my soul and spirit. They wound this white child of white ancestors who perpetuated social constructs that privilege one race while they oppress all others. Healing these wounds, crafting a different narrative about race for my children, aligning myself with communities committed to racial equity—these things opened up for me when I began to see my story through this lens of race.

### **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

1. *I invite you to prayerfully consider taking time to reflect on those moments that shaped your understanding of race. I invite you to write those stories down, and if you are willing, share them with others.*
2. *How is it with your soul and spirit?*
3. *Do your stories, told through the lens of race, leave you wounded or whole?*

# chapter

## three

DA VITA D. MCCALLISTER

I wish I could remember the year of the great storm in the DMV (D.C., Maryland and Virginia tristate area). Back then we didn't call it the DMV, it was simply the D.C. or Metro Area. Perhaps I don't remember the year because it was during that time in life when you haven't learned to record such things. What I do remember is that I was in elementary school and we had more snow than I had ever seen. The entire D.C. area had come to a screeching halt... no school, no work for my parents and NO Church.

I didn't know such a thing was possible. How could you close church? It was like putting God on hold while you played elevator music. The reason this

pulled out her Sunday school lesson and my siblings and I all sat at the table and had church.

This was a big deal for a couple of reasons.


Number one, this was our formal dining room; as children we were only allowed in this space on Christmas morning for our egg-nog toast and on Thanksgiving for the table blessing. On Christmas and Thanksgiving, we sat at the 'kid's table:' a temporary accommodation for all of the members of the family who were NOT elders. Number two, the dining room table was reserved for grown-ups and the occasional birthday party celebration, but only during the cake-cutting. Yet, on this day we sat at that dining room table as my mother offered her Sunday School lesson as a make-shift sermon. I must confess I don't remember the lesson, the scripture or even her words; what I do recall, as vividly as any sunrise, was the real sense that church mattered.

It mattered whether the doors of the sanctuary were open or closed; it mattered whether the roads were clear or impassable; and it mattered even if my father didn't leave my parent's bedroom to attend our table fellowship. Taking the time, each week, to offer God praise mattered.

chapter three | da vita d. mcalls

storm sticks out in my mind is not the lack of school or even the lack of Church, instead it was one simple act by my mother. She sat her three children down at the dining room table to have CHURCH. She was, and still is a, Sunday School teacher. On that cold Sunday morning my mother

We are and have always been people of faith. A family deeply committed to the earth and rooted in a specific faith tradition. We were Baptists: both sides of my family have been Baptists for generations. To be clear we are (and I was) the "Baptist-born and Baptist-Bred and when we die Baptist-Dead" kind of BAPTIST. My maternal



great grandfather was a Baptist preacher and pastor for over 65 years in rural Florida. I was baptized into the faith at the historic Alfred Street Baptist Church, in Alexandria, Virginia. Nestled in the shadow of the nation's capital our church was filled with middle class and upwardly mobile families. Each week my home church heaped praise and awareness on both the joys and the responsibilities of Blackness. These two characteristics were intertwined in my mind as a child. I didn't know you could be Baptist and NOT Black. There were two things I knew to be true: we were BLACK and we were BAPTIST. All else was negotiable.

Though my heart was set on VUU, I carved my own path at the second oldest HBCU in the country, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. Our alumni include the likes of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and Harlem Renaissance poet, Langston Hughes. During the heyday of "The Cosby Show" (long before the eponymous star became mired by allegations), Vanessa Huxtable, I remember the pride I felt each time my alma mater was mentioned on the popular show. When I graduated from Lincoln with a Bachelor's degree in Religion and Psychology, I was the youngest of three children, I was the apple of my father's eye and his namesake. We lived in aCenter, the largest consortium of African-American neighborhood filled with single family homes, two theological schools in the United States. Both my parent households and two car garages. All of the undergraduate and graduate degrees were earned at schools I attended where on Allentown Road in FortHBCUs.

Washington, Maryland. I began at Tayac Elementary, walked a few feet away to Lord Baltimore Middle School and then a mile or two down the same road to Friendly Senior High, home of the Patriots. Many of the teachers in my schools were men and women of Color, as were the school administrators, the news anchors that my parents watched nightly, my pastor, a postman and neighbors. My school was diverse and so world that worked diligently to convince me that I was my neighborhood. The pastors at my church, both male and female, were seminary trained, and the school of choice was an HBCU (Historically Black College and/or University) in Richmond Virginia: The Virginia Union University (VUU).

I loved VUU, the campus, the sororities and fraternities, the fact that I could do my undergraduate and seminary work on the same campus. I visited the campus as often as I could (my older sister was a student there); drinking in the traditions, familiarizing myself with Richmond, attending chapel and sneaking into freshmen orientation, years before I had graduated of HBCUs and the inherent benefit in attending.

Our home was filled with the complete set of the *Encyclopedia of African-American History*, ordered



in protest by my mother, when one of my siblings COST me my sanity. I might have even been wrote one paper too many that failed to recognize theseduced by the images of a *White Jesus* into role of people of Color in American society. Thebelieving that God was white and unconcerned with coffee table in our home was covered with *Essence*,the plight of my people. I might have been *Ebony* and *JET*, all African-American ownedrendered silent after I discovered that I could not be publications dedicated to highlighting the lives,a member of the cast of one of my favorite passion, creativity, beauty and brilliance in the Blacktelevision programs. I would never be Pinky Community. Each week I scrolled through the pagesTuscadero<sup>1</sup> from *Happy Days*<sup>2</sup>; and Bo and Luke of *JET* to find the “beauty of the week.” Yet, theseDuke<sup>3</sup> would never welcome me to *Hazzard* were not the faces I saw staring back at me in theCounty<sup>4</sup>. checkout line at the super market.

*I could see the breadth of the Black experience in my own family.*

If it had not been for the protection of my parents, the extraordinary example of my siblings, and the foundation laid by my church family, I might have been convinced that I was NOT created in the image of God. If I had listened to the constant whisper that my Black was not Beautiful, or believed the stories of my people were NOT germane to American history; or accepted that the trajectory of my talents was limited by institutional and interpersonal racism, it might have

Those slights might have cost me my spirit or dampened my sense of call, but I had a grandmother who worked as domestic and a mother who worked in the insurance industry. I could see the breadth of the Black experience in my own family. I had Jacob

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy\\_Days#Minor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy_Days#Minor).<sup>2</sup>Recurring. Fictional character on *Happy Days*.

2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy\\_Days](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy_Days). *Happy Days* is an American television sitcom that aired first-run from January 15, 1974, to September 24, 1984, on ABC.


3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Dukes\\_of\\_Hazzard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dukes_of_Hazzard). Fictional characters on *The Dukes of Hazzard*.

4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Dukes\\_of\\_Hazzard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dukes_of_Hazzard). *The Dukes of Hazzard* is an American television series that aired on the CBS television network from January 26, 1979 to February 8, 1985. *Hazzard County* is the fictionalized location of *The Dukes of Hazzard*.

in my blood, a small town in Florida populated entirely by my kinfolk. (Though I failed to appreciate the sheer will and strength that owning that little town must have required for my family. I was too concerned with the menace of Southern insects as a child to notice.) I recall stepping onto

the edge of the fields my great grandfather owned and recognizing that as far as the eye could see was my family’s land.

Even today these stories provide strength for the journey: when my son is harassed by police for



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carrying a hair comb in plain view; when I am rendered invisible in a restaurant or store; when individuals reach for my hair or a piece of jewelry that I am wearing because they believe it is beautiful and therefore in their purview to touch. I am rooted and grounded back to my Black-Self when I recall: My mother gathering her children around a beautiful wood dining room table for church when snow made driving impossible; the insistent questions from my youth leaders, at Alfred Street Baptist Church, about which college I would attend and the watchful eye of my college and seminary professors that I not WASTE my God-given talents.

I am no longer a Baptist; I received special dispensation from my great grandfather to be ordained in another tradition. I haven't disavowed my heritage, I proudly embrace it and the other traditions that have informed my faith. Today, I describe myself as a "Baptimethocostal of Christ"

and a same-gender-loving Black Woman. A strong

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5 <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/50974>. A play on the poem "Won't you celebrate with me" by Lucille Clifton.

proud Black Woman; resilient, brilliant and beautiful in my own right, because every day someone tries to kill my spirit and deny my sense of pride and every night I rejoice that they failed!5

### Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics

1. *If you had to write a Spiritual Autobiography, what would the race of the majority of the characters be during your early childhood, elementary school, middle/junior high school/high school?*

2. *If the majority of the characters from any of the time periods mentioned in Question 1 were "white," what if anything did you learn about Persons of Color during that time period? If the majority of the characters from any of the time periods mentioned in Question 1 were Persons of Color; what did you learn about "white" people during that time period?*
3. *What race and/or ethnicity were the biblical characters in your Sunday School and/or Church settings (stained glass windows, photos or icons, etc.)? If the biblical characters were "white," were you ever exposed to a NON-white biblical character, icon or picture of the Divine? How did you feel when you saw the NON-White biblical character, icon or picture of the Divine?*

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## chapter four

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### TRACI BLACKMON

*The Lord is my Shepherd. I have everything I need.  
Psalm 23:1*

For people of faith, how one sees God is critical to understanding how one sees self.

I was taught early that God is male. And I learned to love this God before I knew God is also white. This

socialization happened through a host of overt and covert mainstream messages.

My formative years were filled with affirmations of God's maleness. The way our prayers were addressed to "our Father;" not just the special one that Jesus prayed, but even the ones we made for ourselves. The fact that all the key positions in the Bible and in church were held by men.

Men preached the sermons and men served communion. Men performed the baptisms and men counted the money. Only men sat in the pulpit and men made the big decisions. In hindsight, I have known I was to preach since I was 16 years old, but my reality offered no linguistic context for such a call until later in life.

My discovery of God's whiteness was more deductive than instructive. There were no images of God in my home or at my maternal grandparents' house where I spent most of my days, or at Lily Grove Baptist Church where my paternal grandfather served as pastor, or at Emmanuel Church of God in Christ, my grandmother's church where I felt God in the rhythmic beat of the praise.

I knew God danced.

I knew God listened.

I knew God spoke.

I knew God loved me.

And I knew God was male.

But God's whiteness was deduced from Sunday school books, and *The Ten Commandments* with Charlton Heston as Moses, and the statues of Mary that adorned every Catholic home in my neighborhood. Then there were the stained glass windows. Stained glass was common in the church of my youth, and either the glass depicted no image, or a cross, or a white Jesus. One popular reproduction was Jesus sitting on a rock surrounded by children: all white children, sitting with an Afro-Semitic Palestinian who is falsely portrayed as white. It's easy to miss

such an irony if one sees oneself included. Not out of any maliciousness, but simply, inclusion calms our fears.

I am reminded of when I took my 6-year-old daughter, Kortni, to interview for first grade at a Lutheran school in our neighborhood. Kortni attended daycare and kindergarten in a black faithbased school. I don't remember any images of Jesus in that school, but they learned about Jesus from teachers and workers who looked like them.

By the time Kortni was 6, she could recite a Bible verse for every letter in the alphabet. So when we arrived at the Lutheran school and I saw this huge mural of Jesus surrounded by children and one of the children was black, I was ecstatic a black child was included. I knew this would be the perfect place for Kortni. After the interview, the teacher asked Kortni if she had any questions and Kortni responded, "I have one."

"Why do you think Jesus is white?"

Neither the teacher nor I understood right away, and then Kortni reminded us of the mural. She did not mention the little black girl holding Jesus' hand. She wanted to know why this school did not think Jesus looked like her. The teacher responded that we do not know exactly what Jesus looks like, so many artists paint Jesus to look like themselves. This is true in some places, but in many places where black children worship and play, it is not.

In 2009 I travelled to Ghana, where I found everything black, except Jesus. Recently, I had the same experience in Egypt. I asked a minister from our hosting congregation in Ghana why there were so many images of white Jesus in their sanctuaries. He cautioned me not to look at Ghana through American eyes. "The word 'white' means something different in places with a history of racial oppression and marginalization. For Ghanaians, white is just a color," he said. It has been a long time since white was just a color.

The minister's explanation dismisses the psychological impact of Ghana's colonization just as our dismissal of this white Jesus phenomenon as inconsequential dismisses its psychological impact. Although most cultures display deities as recognizable reflections of themselves, black people, both in America and across the diaspora, have been slow to depict ourselves in the image of God.

*If the possibility of those sacred images changing is uncomfortable for you, or difficult for you to imagine, I ask you to lean in to that feeling and ask yourself why.*

What does it mean to love this white God in my black skin?

It is the social construct of whiteness as normative that allows us to ignore a narrative of scripture that clearly negates the imaginings of the Christ that adorn so many of our sanctuaries and fill so much of our Christian literature. If the possibility of those sacred images changing is uncomfortable for you,



or difficult for you to imagine, I ask you to lean in to that feeling and ask yourself why.

I was in high school before I saw a depiction of a black Jesus. I was in a church whose congregation was predominantly white and I remember walking in and seeing this huge crucifix behind the altar with a black crucified Christ.

*I was in high school before I saw a depiction of a black Jesus.*

I was strangely uncomfortable in its presence.

I do not remember why I was there. I do not remember what happened while I was there. I only remember that Jesus. Until that moment, I had not thought consciously about the color of God.

It is fascinating the things we notice, and the things we dismiss, when we are immersed in environments that celebrate our being and normalize our experiences.

*He leads me beside the still water for his name's sake ...*

By the time I entered kindergarten, I was reading, and by third grade I had become the teacher's helper for some children who lagged behind. At that point, Mrs. Hill, my former kindergarten teacher who was also my next-door neighbor, recommended that my parents transfer me to a more academically challenging school on the "other side of town."

My mother did not walk me into my new school. She dropped me off at the carpool, and I found my way to my class through a sea of strange students and overly friendly teachers, only to discover no one in my class looked like me. No one.

This was the beginning of a very long trajectory of appreciation of two worlds. I would not share any formal class with any other person of color until college, and Mrs. Sturdivent, my third grade teacher at my old school, would be my last black teacher until seminary.

On the very first day of fourth grade in my brand new school, my brand new classmate, Michael, called me a "nigger."

I had never been called that before, and I wasn't quite sure what it really meant, but I knew that it was something awful and disgusting because of the way he spewed that word from his mouth.

"You're a nigger," he said loudly enough for the entire class to hear.

My mind raced to search for a response and I reached for the only word I could find.

"Well, you're a peckerwood!" I exclaimed, a word I'd heard my father use under his breath when some white person made him angry. But somehow today this word just didn't seem to hold the same force as the one Michael used.

Imagine my surprise in my first chapel service at school when I learned that Michael's father was the school's minister.

I never told Michael's father, or mine, about the name calling, and eventually Michael stopped. Yet every Wednesday morning as we entered chapel, I wondered whether Michael had learned "nigger" from his father just as I learned "peckerwood" from mine.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley . . .*

Fourth grade was my first experience with a room filled with white people, and for some of my classmates it was their first experience with a black girl.

*There is church. And then there is black church. There is American cuisine. And then there is soul food.*

The first weeks were filled with questions about my blackness. Can I touch your hair? Why is your skin dark? What color is your blood? Kim became my best friend at school, and she never asked me questions about being black. I am still fascinated by such questions and the assumptions they reveal.

The questions are less frequent now, but they have not stopped. Questions about my hair, or my food,

or my neighborhood, or my church. Requests from confirmation classes to attend worship during their week of mission so that children can have an "urban experience."

I often surprise myself with my capitulation to such "exoticism." Exoticism in this context is my acquiescing to white culture as normative, thereby making it necessary to subtly and often unconsciously define my actions, my being, and even my worship as an exception to the norm.

I can hear you asking, "Then what should we do?" The answer is: I do not know. It will take all of us working together to discover ways of being that defy our learned behavior.

What I do know is our present way of being is not a sharing of cultures, but rather an explanation of one culture as seen through the lens of another.

There is church. And then there is black church. There is American cuisine. And then there is soul food.

There is history. And then there is black history.

There are neighborhoods. And then there is urban mission. There is Jesus...and then there is black Jesus.

One of the unnamed benefits of white privilege is the absence of any need to explain whiteness.

*I will fear no evil . . .*

My dream school was Harvard. My entire class, there were only 32 of us, visited the campus during our sophomore college tour and I fell in love. I knew that it would be difficult to get in, but I believed I had a chance.

I was excited when a Harvard recruiter visited our school campus in my junior year. It was another opportunity to hear about the program and the requirements, and also an opportunity to make myself known to the recruiter.

The recruiter reminded us once again what an honor it would be to attend Harvard. He also reminded us that Harvard receives enough applications each year to fill its freshmen class with 4.0 students, and warned us that if our grades and extracurricular activities were lacking not to get our hopes up for Harvard.

I was not a 4.0 student, but I had a solid 3.6, good SAT scores, and a huge amount of extracurricular activities, including the state oratorical championship, local winner of the French oratorical contest, debate team, thespian with lead roles in plays, summer scholar with college credits, and community theatre, on top of working a part-time job.

After the presentation, I was excited to share my accomplishments and see whether the recruiter agreed Harvard was worth a shot. But before I could tell him my story, he said to me, “If you can just graduate with a 2.5, you can get into Harvard.” I was the exotic.

My hard work didn’t matter. It didn’t matter that I actually qualified for Harvard on my merit.

Another consequence of white privilege is the normalization of the soft bigotry of low expectations of entire groups of people.

I attended one of the highest ranked high schools in our state. I was fully engaged, sometimes at great cost to myself. I not only did well, I excelled in some areas. But assimilation does not eradicate assumptions.

I wonder how often this has really been the context of affirmative action interventions. Not to accommodate the less qualified, but rather, to counteract the less aware.

I did not apply to Harvard.

*You prepare a table before me . . .*

I do not share these memories to generate pity or guilt. Everyone has a story. We are all made in the image of God, yet we are also molded by our experiences and our encounters with one another.

My experiences have prepared me to walk in the world as a black woman who preaches. My relationships challenge me to often wrestle with deep love and deep despair simultaneously. It is a journey of self-discovery, deep awareness of the other, and new understandings of God.

I have decided to pack lightly.

### **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

*Choose a listening partner. Each partner will be given 3 minutes to reflect on the following questions:*

- 1. What is your first recollection of your whiteness?*
- 2. What images of God do you recall from childhood?*
- 3. How has your whiteness helped to shape who you are today?*

*The purpose of a listening partner is to give their partner all of their attention, without commenting in any way on what is being said. Simply listen. When it is the other partner's turn to speak, the one speaking is to tell only their story. Commentary on what one hears is not allowed.*



# chapter five

Stephen G. Ray, Jr.

It is best to begin with a statement my mother would occasionally make as I was growing up. When some individual white person or larger organization did something unfortunate, or seemingly disappointing, my mother would intone: “Eh, white folks. Some is different, most ain’t.” I say seemingly disappointing because, for my mother, disappointment was not a lively option because she thought so little of white people as moral agents in the world. In fact, when a white person or organization did something that would normally be considered simply behaving by minimal moral standards, my mother would be genuinely surprised and often talk about the instance for days.

The moral nihilism my mother expressed with this phrase was born of her experiences as a domestic worker in the homes of wealthy white families in a small town in North Carolina. It was born of her coming of age in New York City during the high tide of Southern migration to the North, with the attendant backlash of the white community, and those ethnic communities aspiring to be white. It was born of beginning a career as a single parent in a city bureaucracy shot through with paternalistic racism and genuine comity based on the large presence of Jewish persons whose families were

just now coming to terms with the ravaging reality of the Shoah (the Holocaust).

So hers was a complex, though somewhat nihilistic, moral vision informed and shaped significantly by race. My own experiences of growing up Black in New York during the tumultuous years of my own forced school busing odyssey, white flight, and the consequent financial crises it left in its wake left me hard pressed to see that she was mistaken.

I begin my spiritual autobiography with this reflection on my mother because in both faith and life she has shaped me by her simple dictum, “God will provide.” Throughout my childhood, this simple (not to be confused with simplistic) faith gave her the strength to meet the many challenges facing a single mother in New York in the 1970s and ‘80s. So my faith in God, like hers, has been unshakable, deep, and *simple*.

A significant upshot of this is that the questions which have driven my ministry and career as a theologian—issues which have focused on social sin and evil—have rarely brought God onto the docket. Put another way, issues of theodicy have always seemed beside the point to me, given my sense that what evil there is in creation is of its own making.

God is, of course, implicated because God created a universe in which suffering could be acute and be used as a weapon, thus materializing evil—but not finally responsible for that use because the tools of

hate and suffering could just as well be used for flourishing and wholeness.

For me, then, the most pressing questions of evil have been those connected to “man.” It is this turn from God, if you will, in framing the workings of evil and faithful response which creates the space in which race is and has been a theologically significant category which has shaped my interpretation of my life, ministry, and their unfolding. In other words, I cannot narrate my life without significant resort to my narration of the workings of race precisely because the absurdity of trying to be human *while Black* in American society, to use Cornel West’s framing, has left me no alternative.

My own life’s experiences, while perhaps predisposing me to ways of thinking about God, faith, and life, did not in themselves crystallize a particular theological conviction beyond a simple faith in God. It was through my study of AfricanAmerican history and the Shoah, which began in high school, that I came to be a dyed-in-the-wool Calvinist in my mid-30s. The finding of a home in Calvinism resulted from my observation of how easily humans make peace with evil—how its workings become banal and the ways in which we absolve ourselves of responsibility for its dominion.

As well, it was many experiences, both in ministry and in basic human fellowship with many “good” white people, that belied for me any un-nuanced understanding of how people could be so human and yet so complacent in the face of evil. There is then something which rings true for me about the

idea of the total depravity of humanity. By this, Calvin means simply that however good our intentions, we, as humans, will always find ourselves mired in sin because we think too much of our abilities to be able to overcome it.

*It was through my study of African-American history and the Shoah, which began in high school, that I came to be a dyed-in-the-wool Calvinist in my mid-30s.*

It would be helpful to identify two recurring experiences which have left me so convicted.

My first religious response to this realization was not a turn to Calvinism, but rather a turn from Christianity altogether. For several years in my teens, I was a member of the Five-Percent Nation of Islam, an offshoot of the Nation of Islam. While never a wholly comfortable fit, the Nation provided a theological, historical, and cultural answer as to why Black people suffered so much. This was something my experiences with the Christian faith had utterly failed to do.

While there was indeed something existentially affirming about the cosmos the Nation invited me into, there remained the reality that I personally knew many white people who were decent; never a

majority of the white folks with whom I interacted, but many. The inscription of evil upon the very persons of all whites while interpreting most Blacks as morally ambiguous did not ring true for me. So, in my early 20's, I left the Nation and returned to the Church of which I had been a titular member since my baptism: the United Church of Christ.

Throughout my teens, I had continued to attend Nazarene Congregational Church UCC in Brooklyn, New York, because Sunday was the day that my father and I had our weekly visitation. As life is wont to do, something transformative was happening of which I was only liminally aware. During the time when I was simply “attending” Nazarene, the church was pastored by and lay led by strong Black leadership. The two pastors of the church during my adolescence were deeply interested in the emerging field of Black Theology. A voice and vision was being given to the Christian faith which centered explicitly on the recovery of our Black humanity and on the assertion of our dignity and joy in the face of the daily onslaughts of the racist structures in which we lived and had our being. Beyond a vision of integration that was turning out to be a bad joke for my generation, this community embodied a way of dignity and joy in our Blackness. While all of this had little effect on me then, I realize looking back that my experience at Nazarene would be decisive upon my “return” to the faith.

When my wife and I joined Horace Bushnell Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut, it was a church in the midst of transition to a wholly Black congregation. It was not an easy transition

because of the place the church held in our association and conference. We were transitioning from a donor white church to a “needy” Black church largely because, in the midst of the transition, the treasurer embezzled several hundred thousand dollars, decimating the endowment.

*I was not accustomed to being either an object of mission or the only Black person in the room.*

What made the transition particularly messy was that we were the only church to go through such a transition in either our association or our conference. The other Black churches were all historically Black churches. This was also the time and space when I accepted the call to ministry in the United Church of Christ. So here I found myself, a particularly militant Black man, shaped and formed by a Black church community of proud Black people who gave no quarter and asked for none in return, beginning ministry in a church in transition whose continued existence relied largely on white largess in a denomination, conference, and association that were overwhelmingly white. I was not accustomed to being either an object of mission or the only Black person in the room. Such was my life for the first 15 years of my ministry, with interspersing experiences of ministry in wholly independent Black spaces.

Having been a life-long member of the UCC and unfolded my ministry in the midst of this church, the “social justice” bent of our church has not been simply grafted into my own Christian DNA, but I have witnessed it in that of my sisters and brothers

in the UCC. Yet, I have also witnessed the ways that so many have made peace with the ways of residential and educational segregation, many with full knowledge of how these realities ravage the lives and futures of the Black community in which their sisters and brothers in the faith live. My personal experiences and studied observations of the ways that white people and the structures which they created have marginalized and oppressed Black people, indigenous peoples, other peoples of color, and the Jews have led me to be something less than sanguine about the basic goodness of human “nature.” So Calvin’s view of the complexity of human nature and the ways that mires us, always, in the ambiguities of sin in our lives and in the world resonates.

My career as a professional theologian over the last 18 years has unfolded in spaces and during a time in which the Black presence in theological education has been receding and the general tenor of our society has been one of animus toward the well-being of Black people and our communities. For most of this period, I have taught in institutions in the Midwest. It was during my time here that I came to use the descriptor “drowning in the vanilla sea” to describe my experience of vast swaths of geographic and cultural space rendered bereft of any meaningful presence of Black people because of the successful campaigns of ethnic cleansing in the early part of the 20th century (as described by James W. Loewen in *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*). My experiences as a teacher in theological education in classrooms in Kentucky and Illinois and as a pastor of a historic AfricanAmerican congregation in Kentucky all


contributed to continuing reaffirmations of my Calvinist bent.

*Calvin’s view of the complexity of human nature and the ways that mires us, always, in the ambiguities of sin in our lives and in the world resonates.*

This confirmation came in the form of the subtle yet ubiquitous animus I experienced as a Black person in virtually every sphere of my life while living in the Midwest. These experiences were heightened by the intersections of race and class. This nuance was simply that my life unfolded in upper-middle-class spaces in which Blacks were seldom present and certainly not warmly welcomed. This animus ranged from active expressions—many more than I had ever experienced in my life—to the more seemingly frequent expressions of surprise and discomfort at my presence. Were these experiences confined to particular geographic spaces, they could be avoided; one cannot avoid one’s classroom as a teacher or home as the resident of a neighborhood in transition, though. Nor can one avoid the Church.

I close, as I began, with the observation that because of the ways that sin has structured the very geography of our lives, race renders us all sufficiently ambiguous in a moral assessment of our





lives. This does not, however, give license to be bad actors. When the world is shaped in such a way to reward such proclivities, it takes an act of faith to live otherwise. The substance of such faith is, I assume, in Christ, in whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile, Male nor Female, Black nor White. So, being a man of simple faith, I will continue to navigate the currents of the Vanilla Sea even though my preferences would be for a life in a land far away.

### **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

1. *What do you think Calvin means when he writes: “We will always find ourselves mired in sin because we think too much of our abilities to be able to overcome it”?*
2. *How does this point of view help you understand or process your understanding of race relations in America?*



# part two

## WHITENESS AS THE NORM: FIVE LOCI OF INSIGHTS ON THE BINARY OF LIGHT/DARK AND BLACK/WHITE

### chapter one

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#### WHITENESS AS THE NORM: REFLECTIONS ON HOW THIS IS EVIDENCED AND EXPERIENCED IN AMERICA

*John Dorhauer*

As a white hetero male, this is the hardest thing for me to see. In essence, I move with great ease through a world that is set up to advantage me—and I just don't see the world that way.

As far as getting the impact of privilege, this is, for me, where it has to start.

When I look at the TV or go to the movies as a white man and see news anchors and lead actors who are white, I rarely note the fact that those who look like me are the given.

When I go down the street and look for a barber, it never occurs to me that I know I won't have any trouble finding a white guy there who knows how to cut the hair of another white man.

When I shop at my grocery store, I never stop to think that another white man owns it and will stock the shelves with food he knows I like to eat.

I don't even bother to ask, so it may not occur to me that 96% of news media outlets are owned by white men, and therefore they are going to choose news stories that they know I will care about, told from a perspective that doesn't threaten my worldview.

When I apply for a job in the church, I assume my education and skills are the reasons I am considered for the job—and never does it cross my mind that being white had anything to do with being hired in a denomination that is still well over 90% white.

When I run down the street in the evening, I routinely cross in the middle when traffic is light, never worrying about whether a police officer would stop me; or, if he did, that he would be anything but polite about reminding me that I shouldn't do that. I almost never have to worry about whether or not one of the police that stops me will be white, or if not, will treat me badly because I am white.

When I walk into a church, I never have to ask: "Why doesn't Jesus look like me?" And I don't even consider the fact that Jesus being white is not reflective of his true racial identity as a Middle



Eastern Jew. I grew up believing that he could, that he should, be white.

I am unaffected by incarceration rates that see one in three black men arrested before their 30th birthday. It is not I or my children who are impacted by that in a system where most police, attorneys, and judges are going to be white.

Whiteness is part of the air I breathe.

**Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

*Over the next week, try and take notice of whiteness around you. Where and when do you see whiteness? If you are white, try to say to yourself, even in some of the more routine aspects of your life, ‘this happened to me because I am white.’ Be open to discussing insights about what you noticed or experienced as you go through this exercise. For example, when in worship ask yourself “Is that a Hymn we only sing in white churches?”; when in grocery stores ask yourself “are these food products here because they meet the needs of white people?”; when walking down the street watch how people react to you and ask yourself “would that have gone differently if I were not white?” Play with this, and look for opportunities to recognize how whiteness establishes itself every day in very routine ways as the norm.*

**Stephen G. Ray, Jr.**

To be normal is to be unquestionably human. That is to say, the very idea of “the norm,” when applied to human beings, has attached to it more than simply presumptions about, dare I say, normalcy. The idea has attached to it the simple assumption that this is another human being with whom we are interacting.

This becomes clear when we notice how the idea of aberration functions to moderate the claims for a robust expression and acceptance of one’s, or another’s, humanity. The very idea of aberration calls to mind corollary notions like policing or expunging.

The aberrant is rarely treated as simply different; it is treated as that which is out of place, with such displacement creating disorder. Whiteness as norm is a useful way to describe the ways that our material world is shaped, so that the mental maps along which we place the variety of human beings who constitute our world place whiteness at the unquestioned center, with other hues at varying distances from it.

Usually, when the idea of whiteness as the norm is raised in social and cultural settings, we have in mind practices and cultural predispositions. For instance, in our racialized church settings, liturgical practices which are deemed white (e.g. hymnody rooted in the classical or folk traditions of Europe) become the basis from which practices rooted in other polyphonies are invited into a space in the worship experience. As generous as the invitation may seem, it is important to note who claims the



role of host and who visitor. This dynamic of host/guest is important for this curriculum because it focuses our attention on which bodies and cultural practices “belong,” and which are being granted space.

In an ecclesial environment, we get caught up in ideas of hospitality and welcome, which moderate the exclusionary effects of this dynamic. This, however, is not the case in the broader social and residential geographies that we all inhabit. In those spaces, the everyday of our lives, presumptively belonging or not deeply affects the expression and experience of our humanity. It can quite literally mean the difference between life and death. The instances of Black persons killed by either police or vigilantes because some “good neighbor” thought them out of place are legion. It is just here that we are reminded of not only the lethal consequences of whiteness as the norm, but also the capacity of this presumption to actually create physical spaces that are dangerous to persons who are not white. It is precisely the systems and forces that create this danger whose functioning circumscribes the full exercise of the humanity of brown persons.

*Because to be normal is to unquestionably be human, whiteness as the norm brings all other human lives into question.*

Whiteness as the norm is necessarily the circumscription of otherwise life-worlds and the diminishing of the lives of their brown inhabitants. Because to be normal is to unquestionably be human, whiteness as the norm brings all other human lives into question.

***John Paddock***

I love the title of Debby Irving’s book, *Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race*. This is, in effect, what happened to me, as I described in my spiritual autobiography in Part One. For us white folk to discover that we have race and that we are part of the story of race is to become conscious in a whole new way.

Professor Peggy McIntosh suggests that we whites are so much the norm in America that that we can easily go through our days oblivious to our race, but also to the privileges that are bestowed upon us. She says that we carry an “invisible knapsack” of privilege. Although the knapsack may be invisible to white eyes, the privileges it contains have real consequences.

It has been demonstrated many times that whites find it easier to get credit, education, jobs, and healthcare. If I enter a department store, I am free to roam about with no interactions with staff other than occasional offers to help find whatever I may be looking for. It’s quite a different experience for my black children. They are likely to be followed



throughout the establishment and to be treated with less hospitality.

We whites can expect to be able to live anywhere that we can afford, be treated with more dignity by law enforcement, be called upon in class more often. In an incredible demonstration of privilege, we can put on a flesh-colored band-aid that’s highly likely to come close to matching our skin color. People in positions of authority and power in government, industry, education, technology, sports, entertainment— almost every field of endeavor—are far more likely to be white than to be people of color.

W.E.B. Dubois wrote about the color line in his classic 1903 work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. On the black side of the line lives disadvantage, and on the white side is advantage. Although more than 100 years have passed since Dubois published his work, and 60 years since the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, the color line is still firmly entrenched. Implicit Bias studies demonstrate that whiteness is so much the norm in mainstream media and culture that even black folk often demonstrate preferences for whites.

We are seeing more barriers to voting being erected for non-whites and re-segregation of our schools in many parts of the land. And as Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and far too many other people of color have discovered, the consequences for being outside our culturally defined norm can be lethal.

***Da Vita D. McCallister***

I had two favorite television shows as a child: the *Dukes of Hazzard* and *Happy Days*. I loved them equally and with full devotion. I watched General Lee flying through the air in Hazzard County and considered Uncle Jesse my protector and friend. As I sat in my basement mesmerized by those images, the reflection I saw was Whiteness as Norm. It didn’t occur to me that I would not be welcomed in Hazard County. The image of the Confederate Flag atop the General Lee did not signal that I was unwelcome. Even the name “General Lee” did not resonate as trouble. The Whiteness I viewed on television was ubiquitous. My home, my church, and my community were filled with People of Color, yet white standards, white culture, and whiteness as the norm permeated even those spaces.

The harsh reality that whiteness was not only normative, but privileged above all other characteristics, occurred as I watched *Happy Days*. I had always assumed that there was a place for me in the Cunningham family. They had taken in the Fonz: he was a rebel, much older than their children, and a womanizer, yet they saw the humanity in his loyalty and deep sense of fairness. He was welcomed in their home and considered a member of the extended family.

I watched in horror as the gang traveled to eat and entered a separate diner for a meal. A man of color went to the counter and was refused service. It was the first time I had ever seen a Person of Color on *Happy Days*, and I was hurt by his treatment. The core members of the cast came to his defense, but



the impression had been cast in my mind; my humanity as a Person of Color was debatable. There were individuals who would be able to see me as a person, and others who would stop at my complexion. The Cunninghams’ home was not a place of safety, and neither was Arnold’s, because my very presence would have to be defended. This is *Whiteness as Normative*.

Every trip to the movie theater, to the mall, and to the grocery store reminded me that whiteness was the norm and my presence could, and often would, be viewed as problematic. I remember my mother giving me the same speech each time I entered a store by her side: “Keep your hands in sight and DON’T touch anything.” I didn’t recognize at the time that she was teaching me how to perform in *White Spaces*. I thought this was simply the polite way to behave in society until I noticed other children had either not been given this speech or were not required to adhere to it. Those children were White.

*Every trip to the movie theater, to the mall, and to the grocery store reminded me that whiteness was the norm and my presence could, and often would, be viewed as problematic.*

Whiteness as the norm was also evident in my education. I remember when sex education was

introduced in my middle school. As students, we were excited to learn the details of the “Birds and the Bees.” But the pictures were not at all what we expected: instead of images of men and women in the nude, we saw medical photos of our internal sexual organs. The thrill of being admitted into adult spaces was lessened by this clinical approach. Shortly after the sex education class concluded, my classmates and I were introduced to *National Geographic*. Our classroom was filled with those magazines whose borders were bright yellow. Inside were photos of naked bodies on display: women’s breasts in full view and scantily dressed men with little more than loin cloth as their shield from our peering eyes. I wondered aloud, “Why are we allowed to view these bodies and not allowed to view the others?” These were Brown bodies, and they were available for our voyeuristic gaze.

This is *Whiteness as Norm*. It is more than representing the majority in film, print, television, and media the majority of the time; it is privileging those images—protecting and exalting them above all others.

**Traci Blackmon**

This section has been particularly difficult for me to write, namely because my understanding of white normalcy is a one-sided analysis of what it feels like to be impacted by whiteness, as opposed to being infected with whiteness. How can I write about the impact of whiteness in a way that might illuminate an often unconscious reality for people who are perceived as white? I have decided to



follow the format of Lori Lakin Hutcherson, Editor-in-Chief of *Good Black News*, and share a few life experiences made memorable by the normalcy of whiteness in American culture.

As a young girl, I was a huge fan of Disney movies. However, I noticed that there were no Disney princesses that looked like me. The same was true of comic book and cartoon characters, and the popular dolls in high demand for Christmas. None of these childhood indulgences offered an opportunity for me to see myself reflected in the superpowers of my youth. **If you grew up with an expectation that images on TV, in books, and at movie theaters would share your racial identity, you have white privilege.**

In high school, I was a soloist in the touring choir. I was the only black in the choir. During a concert at an exclusive country club in the South, all of the service staff came out of the kitchen to hear me sing. They were all black. The audience was all white. I was glad I did not disappoint them. **If you have NEVER felt the burden of “representing your race,” you have white privilege.**

*If you have NEVER felt the burden of “representing your race,” you have white privilege.*

My junior year of high school, the area recruitment representative for Harvard visited my school. I attended an elite college prep school in Birmingham, Alabama with a reputation for a high percentage of Ivy League acceptances in every graduating class, so Ivy League recruiters were frequent visitors. The recruiter spoke with our entire class about the necessity for our high school transcript to reflect excellent academic grades and extensive extracurricular activities. I had both. Later, the recruiter approached me to say the previously stated requirements did not apply to me. I only needed a “C” average to be accepted, he said. I did not apply. **If you have NEVER been presumed as intellectually inferior or incapable solely because of the color of your skin, you have white privilege.**

All of my American History classes were centered around the narrative of white people in America. Black History, when offered, was always an elective. **If you can presume that history courses offered in your school will provide a narrative about people who look like you, you have white privilege.**

**If this country has NEVER debated the monetary value of all the people who look like you, you have white privilege.**

**If there have NEVER been laws passed to prevent your full participation in democracy, you have white privilege.**



Today at the airport, I was standing in the Global World Traveller line of United Airlines when a white man walked up and proceeded to stand in front of me in line. He informed me he was a premier customer and I was in the wrong line. I was not in the wrong line.

**If you have NEVER been categorized based solely on the color of your skin, you have white privilege.**

The unearned, unrequested, and unwarranted benefits of perceived white skin in America are only one manifestation of the way whiteness has been normalized in our culture. From literature to music to art, whiteness needs no qualifier. Whiteness is assumed unless we are told otherwise. There is no area of my life that is not impacted by the perception that whiteness is normal.

Nowhere is this injustice more pronounced to me than in the preamble to the founding document of this country: *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

**Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

1. *Take some time in your personal reflection and in your group conversation to think of some ways that your “norm” defines some others as “abnormal”—making life easier for you and more challenging for people of color.*

2. *Over the next week, try and take notice of whiteness around you. Where and when do you see whiteness? If you are white, try to say to yourself, even in some of the more routine aspects of your life, “This happened to me because I am white.” Be open to discussing insights about what you noticed or experienced as you go through this exercise. For example, when in worship ask yourself “Is that a hymn we only sing in white churches?”; when in grocery stores ask yourself “Are these food products here because they meet the needs of white people?”; when walking down the street watch how people react to you and ask yourself “Would that have gone differently if I were not white?” Play with this, and look for opportunities to recognize how whiteness establishes itself every day in very routine ways as the norm.*





# chapter two

## BINARY: LIGHTNESS AND DARKNESS

*John Dorhauer*

Metaphors of black/white and light/dark prevail throughout American myth and story, and reveal much about what is valued and what is not.

Even before my vocabulary could catch up to my conscious awareness of things, I knew the difference between what whiteness stood for and what blackness stood for.

If I saw a western, I knew that guy in the white hat was the good guy; the one in black, not so much.

I knew what the Psalmist was saying when she wrote: “cleanse me and I shall be whiter than snow.” (This wasn’t what she was saying, but I didn’t question that when growing up.)

When Robert Frost writes about being one ‘acquainted with the night,’ I could translate night into darkness, and darkness into depression.

When Tommie Smith and John Carlos stood on the podium with their fists upraised at the 1968 Olympic medal ceremony wearing a black glove, I was only seven, but I knew what I was seeing and why it made my dad so angry.

I knew why Disney wanted their hero to be Snow White, and why, when my own children began watching Disney, Aladdin, though Middle Eastern,

was white and Jafar, the villain, looked—well, dark.

I knew what it meant for the president to live in the White House.

It made perfect sense to me that churches were almost always painted white.

Before I knew it, I was a child who knew that white was good, black was dirty. That light was positive and dark was scary. No one had to tell me that when I look at dark skin, I should be wary. Metaphor works at a preconscious level—and my entire childhood prepared me for being an adult in a world of white privilege. It wasn’t that I had to make a conscious effort to choose to participate in a racist culture. If left to that, I would have certainly chosen not to.

It was more the case that the culture had so perfected its commitment to whiteness as a metaphor for goodness that I never had to be asked to make a conscious decision to benefit from the privilege I had as a white man.

But this I must now do: unlearn everything I have been taught about what it means to be white and what it means to be black. Learn and utilize new metaphors, becoming an active agent in the creation of a new world of racial equity. I must give my grandchildren a chance to shape deep understandings at a preconscious level before they

fully absorb the teachings of a culture with ongoing commitments to whiteness as the norm.

***Stephen G. Ray, Jr.***

In a world lit by not much more than a campfire or torch, the night can be wondrous. It can also be exceedingly dangerous, because it presents manifold opportunities for hurt and harm by the red tooth of nature or the bloodied hand of a fellow human. It is good for us to remember that this is the world in which scripture was written. One has but to hearken to the 23rd Psalm for a preeminent example of this reality.

This is a significant reason why our scriptures are shot through with images of the goodness of light and the evil of darkness. Light is a metaphor for safety and the leisure to enjoy the beauty of the world we inhabit; alternatively, darkness is a metaphor for danger and death. This is, perhaps, a contributing factor to heaven being associated with the sky and Sheol with the bowels of the earth. Additionally, scripture was written in a world in which soiled persons and clothing were closely associated with bodily decay—a particular obsession in the Hellenic world—and bodily decay with death. Consequently, “clean” bodies and garments were associated with health and wellbeing. All of which is to say, there are clear reasons behind the vibrant scriptural threads woven around light and dark as metaphors for clean and dirty. What is not so clear is how these categories and their import become attached to persons and communities.

A significant legacy of the cultural and theological rationalizations for chattel slavery has been both the explicit interpretation of Black bodies and the implicit interpretation of white bodies through the aforementioned lens. These interpretations created a continuum definitively locating goodness and health at the white end and badness and decay at the dark, with other-hued bodies placed along the spectrum between.

*It is good for us to remember that this is the world in which scripture was written.*

Perhaps the most significant operation of this continuum has been its effect on the distribution of social goods within our society. Put plainly, the more closely a person or community reflects the light (white) end of the spectrum, the more likely they are to have access to the best of whatever social goods exist in their context. If we understand social goods to include education, residential preference, financial access, and being the presumptive recipient of legal protection, it becomes quite clear that what we are dealing with is privilege. Correlatively, unearned disadvantage and lack of access increase the closer a person or community moves to the dark (black) end of the spectrum. It is important for us to recall that, for the most part, neither this privilege nor this disadvantage is earned. Both are consequences of the cultural interpretation of human bodies.

A significant challenge for the Church is then the retrieval of the intent of the religious language of light and dark in a cultural context that has profaned them through their use to rationalize histories and systems of racial oppression. It is an open question whether we can. Can the words “wash me white as snow” ever be sung innocently again?

### ***John Paddock***

We have so many metaphors about the lightness and darkness that surround us: metaphors in which light is good and honorable and pure, whereas dark is evil and dishonorable and impure.

I am writing this a few days after Easter. This past Holy Week, I was very conscious of the contrasts painted in the stories. Jesus was betrayed in the garden at night. When he was crucified, the Gospel of Luke says, “It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed . . .” (Luke 23:44-45). Jesus was buried in a dark tomb. The resurrection was discovered in the morning during the light of day. Young men (angels) in dazzling white proclaimed that Jesus had risen.

I know that neither racism nor the color line existed when the biblical texts were written, but within our cultural context, they feed into the binary of lightness and darkness. We talk about the “Dark Ages” followed by “The Enlightenment.”

Years ago, I lived for a time in Scandinavia where during late fall and winter, nighttime lasted for up to 18 hours a day. It is a time of deep depression for

many people and suicide rates peak. Here in the U.S., many folk are afflicted with SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) when they are not exposed to enough sunlight. And, of course, spring in the northern hemisphere brings more light and growth and new life to the earth.

We speak of “night and day,” “white hats and black hats.” Brides wear white dresses to represent purity and innocence. “Dark thoughts” are bad thoughts. A quick glance at a thesaurus yields synonyms for dark as dim, shady, shadowy, murky, dusky, and gloomy, whereas light is sprightly, bright, sunny, graceful, nimble, elegant.

Brain science teaches that each time a synapse fires, it reinforces the connection between synapses. Clusters of synapses can form frames that contain thoughts and/or emotions. Our linguistic, historical, and cultural environments create many of these frames that assign good, happy, and joyful feelings to lightness, and bad, fearful, and anxious feelings to darkness. When applied to skin color, these same frames can be activated. When racist language and metaphors are attached, the frames reinforce negative stereotypes.

### **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

*In your group, discuss some examples of the light/dark binary in literature, music, television, advertising, and movies. Ask what kinds of things might be done to shift and challenge these frames.*



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***Da Vita D. McCallister***

My maternal grandfather was a small-framed man with kind eyes and a huge heart. He and my grandmother were married for over 50 years. His skin was black like a country night unfettered by city lights. It was smooth like deep rich chocolate and tight, yet soft to the touch. My grandfather was born and raised in Florida, and like many People of Color raised in the South, he spent many days and nights in the sun. The richness of the melatonin in his skin allowed him to hold onto those “kisses” from the sun and caused his hue to darken with time and age. As a small child, his color represented strength and power, but my ideas shifted as I entered school.

In school you could and often would be ridiculed for having “dark” skin. I grew up in Maryland and no one had skin as dark as my grandfather in any of my schools. Yet, I heard the teasing of classmates on a daily basis; the binary we lived in wasn’t White and Black, it was Light and Dark. As a Person of Color you were viewed more favorably if you had “Light” skin and harshly if you had “Dark” skin. I not only heard taunts hurled toward Children of Color but I am ashamed to admit that I was silent while it happened. Somehow, I didn’t think of my grandfather in those moments, I was just happy that I wouldn’t have to bear that burden.

I learned early on that the standard of *Whiteness* required for beauty to be equated with lighter skin and this meant that Black skin could not be too Black; caramel was preferred to chocolate and tan over brown. The cost of the Binary of Light to

Dark was steep. It reared its ugly head in the safety of my own home. My father was deeply concerned with my complexion. He worried that I might hold onto the “kisses” from the sun way past the summer and into the fall. Perhaps I had inherited my grandfather’s abundance of melatonin and I too would darken with too many days spent outside in play. I adored my father and sought to please him often, but his fixation on my hue often frustrated and perplexed me. We were “Black” and there was no way to confuse that point regardless of how much time I spent inside or outside of our home. I did not recognize that as a son of the South, my father was passing on his understanding of Whiteness as norm. He had learned the hard way that darker skinned Black people were treated more harshly and lighter skinned Black people were treated more favorably. This treatment was due to the assumption that the lighter the Black person the larger the influx of *Whiteness* in their gene pool.

I needed a way to push back on the binary of Light and Dark; some small way to make room for all of the beauty I found in the *Blackness* that surrounded me. I turned to my words and began to write prose. My attempts failed to capture my frustration and they did no justice to the beauty in Blackness that I dreamed to exclaim, but it pointed me in the right direction. I began to search out the prose of other Men and Women of Color. When I heard James Weldon Johnson’s “The Creation” I leapt with joy.

*“And far as the eye of God could see Darkness covered everything, Blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp. Then God smiled.”*

Johnson declared “And far as the eye of God could see *Darkness* covered everything, Blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp. Then God smiled.” The idea of God smiling at the Darkness gave me such a sense of pride and joy. My grandfather’s skin was blacker than a hundred midnights and it was glorious to behold. Later in Johnson’s work he penned these words:

Up from the bed of the river  
 God scooped the clay;  
 And by the bank of the river  
 He kneeled Him down;  
 And there the great God Almighty  
 Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky, Who flung  
 the stars to the most far corner of the night,  
 Who rounded the earth in the middle of His hand;  
 This Great God,  
 Like a mammy bending over her baby,  
 Kneeled down in the dust  
 Toiling over a lump of clay  
 Till He shaped it in His own image;

The image of God scooping clay from the riverbed reminded me of all of the clay I had seen, the dark

lush and moist clay; the deep brown and dry clay; the oozing odd shaded tan clay; each of them hues in my family. Then just in case I had missed the inclusion of my people Johnson invoked a term that had been used as scorn for Women of Color – “Mammy.” Yet, in his mouth this term was not a derogatory slur used to belittle Women of Color who cared for and nursed *White* children, but instead an image of the Divine creating humanity. Blackness was no longer the seat of scorn but a joyous celebration of Creation. The Binary of Light and Dark had been broken open in a retelling of creation. Thanks Be to God!

### Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics

1. Watch the video clip of James Weldon Johnson’s “The Creation” read by Wintley Phipps on YouTube: [https://youtu.be/C-h4\\_VPXdoY](https://youtu.be/C-h4_VPXdoY) What did you hear as you watched the clip? What did you see?
2. Divide a single piece of paper in half with the word “Light” on one side and the word “Dark” on the other. Draw a single vertical line between these two words. Then write all of the terms you associate with the word “Light” on one side of the paper and all of the terms you associate with the word “Dark” on the other. Notice how many of the words include an implicit judgement (good/bad etc.). Are any of the terms associated with “Light” also associated with Whiteness and are any of the terms associated with “Dark” also associated with Blackness?
3. Return to the YouTube clip (<https://youtu.be/>

[C-h4\\_VPXdoY](#) of James Weldon's Johnson's "The Creation" read by Wintley Phipps and this time listen to the clip with your eyes closed. What did you hear as you listened and what did you see as you heard the words?



# chapter three

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## ICONOGRAPHY: THE INVESTMENT OF WHITENESS IN NARRATING HISTORY

*Stephen G. Ray, Jr.*

It is perhaps obvious to observe that the scriptural imagination of most Christians past a certain age is shaped and formed by character and historical depictions that are almost exclusively white. Even when people of color appear, it is always as members of the crowd, always having the feel of an homage to ideological commitments to inclusion and not a “natural” depiction of the truth of the matter.

This imagination was formed through the stained glass that surrounded the faithful, and most importantly the Sunday School curricula, whose pictures created the imaginative space into which generations of children would form their own appropriation of “our” story as Christians. Such iconographically formed imaginations go a long way toward explaining why the Christian faith has long been an arch defender of the privileges and prerogatives of white people in this nation.

There is a puzzling dimension to all of this that we do well to note: namely, the historical coincidence of biblical archaeology, the rise of photography, and the university model of theological education during the 18th and 19th centuries. I suggest puzzlement because the confluence of these three cultural events would seem to lead to a profound

alteration in our iconography, yet they do not. Biblical archaeology has made it clear that the people in the biblical narratives did not bear very much resemblance to those pictured in our stained glass or Sunday School materials; photography has embedded in our understanding the difference between symbolic images and actual “pictures;” the modern model of theological education has placed at its center a dedication to the actual—the actual history narrated in the Bible, the actual meaning of the text, and most importantly the actually probable truth of the biblical stories. One would think, then, that a church such as ours, thoroughly modern and dedicated to an educated clergy committed to the best contemporary human knowledge, would have an iconography that consistently reflects a biblical narrative peopled by the shades of brown which have historically been visible in the inhabitants of the Holy Lands. Yet . . .

An answer to this puzzlement draws us to the notice of another cultural event emergent during the same period as the preceding. That event was the development of a national economy in the United States largely dependent on the institution of chattel slavery, which occasioned an ecclesial project of making sense of how “good Christian” people could participate in a system so evidently evil. Concisely, this project focused on the divine vocation of white people as God’s agents in the world. It is a short

step from here to an iconography that retrojects this theological commitment back into the pages of the biblical text, which is, after all, made up of stories about God's agents in the world living out their divine vocation.

*Why do we allow our children to be shaped in their faith by an iconography which would surely fail any test of acceptability in classrooms outside of our churches?*

A good question to ask ourselves is this: why do we allow our children to be shaped in their faith by an iconography which would surely fail any test of acceptability in classrooms outside of our churches?

**Da Vita D. McCallister**

### *Science Fiction*

Saturday mornings in my childhood were filled with three things: gospel music, housecleaning chores

was Gospel Music, old school artists like James Cleveland and Shirley Caesar. The sounds were so rich they perfumed the house and created a cloud of witnesses to our work. The only interruption in this process was *Star Trek*. The moment it came on, no matter the stage in our work, all things came to a halt. My mother watched *Star Trek* every Saturday morning. I sat with her, happy for the break it provided or glad to have it as the final act of my Saturday duties. Captain *James T. Kirk*, *Lt. Uhura*, *Scottie*, *Bones*, *Spock*, *Chekov*, and *Sulu*<sup>6</sup> were my playmates and teachers. This host of characters represented the most diverse cast ever assembled in mainstream TV in the late 1960's and early 70's. It was ground-breaking and my mother was drawn to these images. The TV show was based on a premise that the future was a place where the division of *light and dark* would be seen as ridiculous.

The original series poked holes in stereotypes that suggested People of Color could not speak proper English. *Lt. Uhura* served as the Communications officer. As a brown skinned Woman of Color, she offered a stark contrast to other popular Women of

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star\\_Trek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek) *Star Trek* is an [American science fiction entertainment franchise](#) created by [Gene Roddenberry](#) and owned by [CBS](#) and [Paramount Pictures](#). It debuted in 1966 and ran for three seasons on NBC. It followed the galactic adventures of [James T. Kirk](#) and the crew of the [starship Enterprise](#), an exploration vessel of a 23rd-century interstellar "[United Federation of Planets](#)".<sup>3</sup> Robinson, Randall, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*. New York: Plume Books, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Members of the Star Trek crew on the starship Enterprise. and *Star Trek*<sup>6</sup>. My mother would wake us up early to begin the work of the day. The house was cleaned with care each Saturday before we could leave or begin to play. The soundtrack of our work

Color actresses during the late 60's and early 70's who were *Lighter*-skinned, like Lena Horne. In both her role, Communications officer, and her color, brownskinned, she shattered stereotypes. She



was beautiful, brown and bold. In addition to a Woman of Color, there was *Sulu*, a Man of Color who honored his Asian ancestry and charted the course for the ship. These characters were going “where no man had gone before<sup>4</sup>” and this was not just a reference to space. It was an indictment of our contemporary inability to travel to a place where there is *Universal Acceptance* of each person’s undeniable humanity. The *Starship Enterprise* was a vessel that allowed us to travel to this unfamiliar yet possible place of racial equality. In the fifteenth episode in the third season entitled: “Let that Be Your Last Battlefield,” the crew encountered *Lokai and Bele*. Two survivors of a world destroyed by a war between races. Lokai and Bele are both half black and half white. They were NOT biracial characters, one half of each of their bodies was black and the other half was white. The division of these colors could be seen on their faces. On one the left side of his face was Black and on the other the right side of his face was Black. When the crew encountered *Lokai and Bele*, they did not recognize this distinction. Yet, for *Lokai and Bele* the differences between them were readily apparent and stark. On their home planet, these two races had been at war for centuries after one race had enslaved the other race. (Even as a child I could see the not so subtle jab at the racial caste system constructed in the United States of America.)

While *Lokai and Bele* are on board the *Enterprise*, they are frustrated by the crew’s inability to recognize the superior and inferior race as represented by this division of skin color. The

violent episodes between *Lokai and Bele* are so severe that the crew returns them to their home planet. When they arrive they

<sup>4</sup> Lines from the opening of the TV Series: *Star Trek*.

discover the devastation that their racialized hate has caused. The entire planet has been destroyed and *Lokai and Bele* are the sole survivors of their species. Rather than use this as an opportunity to reconcile they continue to fight and are removed from the ship. Even after they witness the cost of racial hatred, they continue to fight with each other. That episode provided a powerful lesson for me about the absurdity of White Supremacy and the absolute danger in racial hatred. If left unchecked it could destroy an entire civilization.

As a cultural marker, science fiction projects our shared values and beliefs onto a canvas that allows viewers to examine and reexamine the validity and/or absurdity of long-held traditions and ideas. Science fiction has the ability to demonstrate our human frailties and our greatest attributes. When done with a commitment to inclusivity it can recast our imagination toward God’s magnificent Creation, but left unexamined it can manifest our short-sighted biases into the foreseeable future and beyond. **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

1. Consider the images you have consumed in science fiction, including *Harry Potter*; *Lord of the Rings*; *Star Wars* and *The Marvel Universe of Super Hero* themed films. What has science

*fiction taught you about Whiteness and People of Color?*

2. *How many Super Hero movies have you watched that included Asian-American; Latina-American; Native American and/or African-American Super Heroes? Of the movies that did, how many of those Heroes of Color were the main character in the film?*
3. *Create a science fiction character that is smart, analytical, strong, sensitive, courageous and caring. What does the character look like?*

## **John Paddock**

### ***The Doctrine of Discovery***

It is a truism that the victors have the privilege of writing history. Some stories are told, taught, and celebrated, while others are suppressed and forgotten. Authors like James Loewen (*Lies My Teacher Told Me*), Randall Robinson (*The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*), Howard Zinn (*A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*), and many others have worked to recover some American history that is not taught in our textbooks and classrooms, or to correct other stories that are taught inaccurately.

My junior and senior high school years were spent in Columbus, Ohio, named after our great discoverer. Columbus Day is a federal holiday. American history begins with the “discovery” of the New World. Every school child knows about Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand. *Pinta*, *Niña*, and *Santa Maria* can still roll off my tongue more than a

half-century after I learned about them. Columbus’ discovery of America was a triumphant event.

What I was never taught was what Paul Harvey used to call “the rest of the story.” Columbus is a primary exemplar of the Doctrine of Discovery.

In 1452, forty years before Columbus’ first voyage, Pope Nicholas V issued a papal bull declaring that non-Christian nations were fair game for Christian nations to conquer, exploit, and colonize. Under this Doctrine of Discovery, indigenous peoples were subjected to persecution, enslavement, and even genocide. Pagans were considered less than fully human and had no rights to their own land. The Doctrine has been used by the U.S. Supreme Court to justify sovereignty of Christians over indigenous peoples. As recently as 2005, it was used in *City of Sherrill, NY v. Oneida Nation* to support the taking of native land.

*What I was never taught was what Paul Harvey used to call “the rest of the story.”*

My American history textbooks did not mention that the island of Haiti had an estimated population of up to 8 million Arawak people when Columbus “discovered” it. In 1493, Columbus returned with an armed armada of 1,200 to 1,500 troops to begin a systematic regime of forced labor, rape, murder, and the transportation of Arawak slaves to Europe.



By 1555, as detailed in Loewen’s book (p 63), the Arawaks had been completely exterminated.

Columbus and his son began the trans-Atlantic slave trade by sending Arawak slaves to Europe. The trade in slaves from West Africa going the other way began when the labor force was decimated and new workers were required.

My own Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ have repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery. We have to start telling the truth about our past. The UCC’s resolution of witness on the subject can be found online (<http://www.doctrineofdiscovery.org/ucc%20gs29-1.pdf>).

**Possible Action Item**

*Consider the possibility of replacing Columbus Day in your congregation. Plan instead an Indigenous Peoples’ Day or a Native American Day. Use it as an opportunity to teach about white privilege in our history.*

**Traci Blackmon**

***Black Barbie***

Christmas is always a festive season in our church. In my second year as pastor of Christ The King, one of our members stopped by my study following Christmas worship to offer a holiday greeting. In one hand, she clutched the hand of her six-year-old granddaughter, whom I will call Lauren. In the

other hand, she held a Barbie that Lauren had rejected as a gift that morning.

This was not like the Barbies I played with as a little girl. The Barbies of my childhood did not look like me. This Barbie was black. This Barbie was more than a mocha-tinted doll with European features. She was a Nubian princess, black with short nappy hair. This Barbie was Black, and despite her anatomically impossible figure, I loved her instantly.

But Lauren hated her.

For Lauren, this Barbie was too black. And no amount of rave reviews about this Barbie's beauty and uniqueness was enough to even convince Lauren to hold this doll that she called ugly. Of course, it is perfectly fine for little girls to not like dolls. Many do not. But it wasn't dolls that Lauren didn't like, it was blackness.

How do we create counter-narratives of beauty for little black and brown girls in a world that idolizes whiteness as the standard of beauty? We must tell a different story.

My Old Testament professor, Dr. John Bracke, taught me an invaluable lesson. He cautioned me that congregants will pay attention to what I pray about publicly and what I read privately. This will tell the congregation what touches my heart, and that will help them decide whether or not their hearts are safe with me.

I heed that advice and pray broadly. I arrange the books in my study so that controversial and urgent topics are eye level when seated at my desk. On this particular Sunday, when I observed this grandmother's exchange with her granddaughter, I asked her to sell me the Barbie instead. Barbie holds a prominent spot in my office. And every young person who enters my study sees my black Barbie.

Over the years, many have loved her. Some have asked to take her home. But Barbie stays in my study.

Barbie is a reminder that we are fearfully and wonderfully made as the sun-kissed children of God, and beauty is our name.

I was reminded again of the significance of countercultural narratives when an eight-year-old Nubian princess black girl child raised her hand to ask me a question after a recent lecture: "What do you love about being Black?"

*"What do you love about being Black?"*

I told her I love the color of our skin color in all its many tones. I told her I love the texture of our hair whether it is kinky or wavy or straight. I love my broad nose and wide hips and full lips, and I love our rhythm and the music black people create. I love our strength and the way we automatically speak to one another, and I love our traditions and our culture.

She smiled.  
Thank God, I know.

### **John Dorhauer**

#### ***John Brown***

In his landmark book *Lies My Teacher Taught Me*, Smithsonian historian James Loewen dedicates a chapter to what our history books get wrong about John Brown and Abraham Lincoln. We are going to focus now on what white privilege has done to reshape the story of John Brown—a white man and abolitionist who armed slaves and rebelled against white establishment.

The subtitle to a biography of John Brown written by David S. Reynolds reads: "The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights."

That subtitle references an impact and a presence often left out of whitewashed history book accounts that tend to portray him as mad, crazy, or unstable. From the lens of white privilege, the story of a white man arming black slaves to rebel against white power, white government, and white establishment has to be accounted for so as not to inspire other white children to rebel in similar fashion.

To this end, histories written by whites and for whites have not been kind to John Brown. James Loewen has spent his career studying history and evaluating what those who wrote our children's textbooks have done over time to perpetuate the

mythologies of white power, white privilege, and white supremacy. He notes that what they did to John Brown is just one example of what a retelling of the story through the lens of white privilege looks like.

Looking beyond these textbooks, we can find a very different history told of John Brown. Ralph Waldo Emerson, as a staunch Northern Abolitionist, saw in John Brown an inspiration to the freedom movement. The speech Brown wrote at the close of his trial was noted by Emerson as one of the two greatest speeches, along with Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, in American history.

Look around the room you are in today and ask the group assembled: how many of you can quote a single line from this speech? How many of you have read it, or even heard of it? Unlike the Gettysburg Address, with which we are all familiar, John Brown's stirring speech has been hidden from us.

A copy of Brown's speech can be found online at NationalCenter.org. (<http://www.nationalcenter.org/JohnBrown'sSpeech.html>)

Take the time to read it aloud. You can also watch a brief video of highlights of the speech performed by David Strathairn on History.com.

(<http://www.history.com/topics/john-brown/videos/john-browns-last-speech>)

While reading, think about how seeing this speech might affect students' perceptions of a figure portrayed in their textbooks as a madman:

None other than Frederick Douglass, a contemporary of John Brown's and one of the leading Black scholars and liberationists of his generation, wrote of him:

His zeal in the cause of my race was far greater than mine—it was as the burning sun to my taper light—mine was bounded by time, his stretched away to the boundless shores of eternity. I could live for the slave, but he could die for him.

Likewise, W.E.B. DuBois, a Black scholar of the early 20th century and author of the landmark book on race in America, *The Souls of Black Folk*, wrote in the opening lines to his biography of John Brown:

Of all inspiration which America owes to Africa, however; the greatest by far is the score of heroic men [sic] whom the sorrows of these dark children called to unselfish devotion and heroic self-realization: Benezet, Garrison, and Harriet Stowe; Sumner, Douglass and Lincoln—these and others, but above all, John Brown.

Above all, in a list that ends with the name Abraham Lincoln: John Brown.

This short essay is not intended to sing the praises of John Brown. He was a complex character who, over time, has come to be seen through the lens of white privilege as having but a single dimension: lunacy. This essay intends to introduce the reader to more complex renderings of our shared histories and the characters who appear in them. John Brown is used here as an example of what rewriting history



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to perpetuate an ideology looks like. The hope is that it inspires us to inquire about what new stories must emerge, both to unlearn what the previous ones have instilled within us, and to open our eyes, ears, and minds to knowing what was always there to be seen: the truth. Such truth cannot be seen when filtered through a lens of privilege that favors one race over another.

**Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

1. *What does the lens of privilege do to change the way we tell a story?*
2. *What stories are being told today that might be told differently when viewed through the lens of privilege?*
3. *If you could explore a story of our shared history through another lens, what would you be most curious to learn something new about? What might be a resource you could draw on to hear that story through a different lens?*



# chapter four

## THE WHITE JESUS

*Stephen G. Ray, Jr.*

The recent spate of films drawn from the Christian scriptures, such as *Risen*, raises an important question for this curriculum. The question is simple. Why is it culturally so important that Jesus be white? The question arises because film, particularly as a marketable cultural production, reflects the sensibilities of the target audience. Rarely is it the case that in both subject and character portrayal do films so violate the general sense of possibility and accepted order of things that they become unintelligible.

This is particularly the case when the subject is a central figure for the narration of a community's history, one that guides the construction of its identity. For example, it is unimaginable to most people within our society that film and theater would routinely portray our Founding Fathers as people of color, save as an ironic device of disruption, as in the musical "Hamilton." Why, then, is it more than just imaginable but customary that Jesus be white?

We can trace the migration of the phenomenon from the symbolic portrayals of the pre-modern era, which no one presumed to be anything more than the appropriation of Christ into their context, to the modern era, in which portrayals of Jesus are

generally accepted as real. This reality is presumed ambiguous in most aspects, save one. So—while some films and books portray Jesus as regal and others common, some as a wise teacher and others

as a rabble-rouser—they all share a common sense about the racial identity of Jesus. As a historical matter, we can trace this modern sensibility back to a faux archeological find, the Letter of Lentulus, which purported to give a contemporaneous description of Jesus:

His hair is of the colour of the ripe hazel-nut, straight down to the ears, but below the ears wavy and curled, with a bluish and bright reflection, flowing over his shoulders. It is parted in two on the top of the head, after the pattern of the Nazarenes. His brow is smooth and very cheerful with a face without wrinkle or spot, embellished by a slightly reddish complexion.

The import of this document is that it fixes within the popular imagination the idea that Jesus looked more like a European than either his immediate kinsmen or others in the geographic area of his ministry. The importance of this "find" is clear when we recall that this was the historical moment in which race was used as both a sense-making tool for interpreting human diversity and a rationalizing discourse for the beginnings of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. There was very much at stake in the flesh taken on by the Word being white. Its continuing importance has to do with the social and theological systems and structures built upon that commonsense. Then, as now, the idea of the whiteness of Jesus was more concerned with locating God's providential presence in some in ways that it is not located in others. In the end,

white supremacy is the idea that God is ultimately concerned with the people who hold a central place in God's plan: white people.

*White supremacy is the idea that God is ultimately concerned with the people who hold a central place in God's plan: white people.*

#### *Da Vita D. McCallister*

Alfred Street Baptist Church, a 213-year old congregation in Alexandria, Virginia, was the faith community of my childhood and remains the faith community of my family of origin. The pastor of my youth was the Rev. John O. Peterson, Sr. Rev. Peterson had a staff of clergy who supported the ministry and each was seminary-trained. Each Sunday when I entered our Church I was

hidden stairs and a small sanctuary. I spent time in all of the classrooms and learned the best places to play when I needed to entertain myself as my mother attended Bible Study. Yet, the building that I loved, which was filled with brown bodies, was adorned with images of a *White Jesus*. He was in the stained glass windows on either side of the sanctuary. I walked past his image on most Sunday mornings and recognized his pale skin, brown silky hair, and small frame draped in a white garment and sandaled feet. I never questioned why he was the only white person in our church.

When I graduated from high school I attended Lincoln University just outside of Oxford, Pennsylvania. Founded as Ashmun Institute in 1854 (the name was changed to Lincoln University in 1866 in honor of President Abraham Lincoln), the college was known "colloquially as 'the Black Princeton' due to its Princeton University-educated founder and early faculty; rigorous classical curriculum; ties to the

9 A new edifice was erected when I was in high school and serves as the primary worship today. The new structure does NOT contain the historic stained-glass windows

10 Lincoln University Website: <http://www.lincoln.edu/about/history>

surrounded by erudite, edifying ebony faces. This was and is a Black Baptist Church. Our pastors were educated at a Historically Black Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. They studied Hebrew and Greek, Liberation and Systematic Theology and were versed in Administration and Liturgy. Our choir directors were classically trained and the range of music I heard was diverse and deeply rooted in the African-American tradition. Growing up I knew our old church building like the back of my hand. It was an older building<sup>9</sup> with a basement,

Presbyterian Church; and its similarities in colors and mascots (Princeton's colors: orange and black; Lincoln's colors: orange and blue; Princeton's mascot: the tiger; Lincoln's mascot: the lion.)<sup>10</sup> My favorite spot on campus was the Mary Dod Brown Memorial Chapel. The deep dark paneled walls, matching hued pews and brick exterior made it a place of comfort and sanctuary. Our Chaplain, Rev. West, was a dark-skinned man with an unassuming voice and the energy to lead young adults. Yet, here in the cradle of Black Community, I did not



find a single rendering of a Black Jesus.

When I graduated from Lincoln and began my matriculation at the Interdenominational Theological Center I wondered why those pastors from my youth had never distanced themselves from the White Jesus. I read Liberation Theology, just as they did, I was exposed to the Hebrew Bible, just as they were, and in every setting the *White Jesus* was questioned and interrogated. The likeness I had known throughout my childhood and early adulthood was not consistent with the biblical text's description, nor was it consistent with regard to the geography of his birth or the place of his hiding (Egypt).

Everything I read and studied in Seminary pointed to the probability that Jesus' skin was closer to mine and his hair felt like mine. So why was I denied this image of Jesus? Why did I feel no connection to the images that were hued with sun-kissed skin? Why was the conversation of Black Jesus problematic in my grandmother's home? What had worshipping a *White Jesus* done to my understanding of God and my place in creation? It took years for me to answer these questions. Here is a question I hope you will give serious consideration to: Would placing a photo of anything other than a White Jesus cause a conflict in your church?

*Everything I read and studied in Seminary pointed to the probability that Jesus' skin was closer to mine and his hair felt like mine.*

#### Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics

1. Consider the images of Jesus that you have seen throughout your life in Church buildings and sanctuaries. How many of those images were of a non-white Jesus? How did you feel when you saw a non-white Jesus?
2. When you participate in Holy Communion what color juice do you use in the service? Why do you use this color? How would individuals react in your community of faith if you changed the juice in the Communion cup to apple juice? If this would be a problem please explain why?
3. When you participate in Holy Communion what color bread do you use in the service? Why do you use this color bread? If the bread is not rye or pumpernickel, how would changing to either rye or pumpernickel be received in your church? Assume that this change would be for the majority of Communion services.

#### *John Paddock*

There is an Episcopal church in my community that is predominately African American. Their worship space was completely inaccessible to folk with walkers and wheelchairs, and the only way into the Sunday school and fellowship areas in the basement was a stairway. There was neither enough land to

build a proper ramp nor enough space within the building to put in an elevator.

The church was located in a poor neighborhood with declining home values and rising crime rates. Many of the parishioners had previously moved to the suburbs and had to drive quite a distance to attend church events. Parking was also limited.

### *Who does Jesus look like?*

When I had a Sunday off from my own parish, I would attend that church whose pastor (a black priest) and I are friends. One of the features of that old building was a giant crucifix that hung over the altar. Nailed to that cross was a very white representation of Jesus. After much soul searching and fundraising, the church acquired land in a suburban area and built a magnificent new building. It has a very large parking lot, a completely accessible building, and plenty of worship, education, fellowship, and office space. The sanctuary is beautiful with all new furniture, altar, pulpit, and organ. It has a state of the art sound system and adjustable lighting.

So you might imagine my surprise the first time I entered the new church to discover the white Jesus crucifix from the old building hanging above the altar. Apparently, it had been purchased by a parishioner in Italy and donated to the parish. They weren't about to dispose of their white Jesus. Every time I go into that sanctuary, I ask myself what it must be like to be black and to have the Savior represented as white. Does that make God white?

When Christian education materials, church art, stained glass, and other representations of Jesus predominately show Jesus as a white man, what impact might that have? How do black children identify with their savior? How do descendants of slaves feel about being called into service of a white master? How is white privilege reinforced? Who does Jesus look like?

*Traci Blackmon*

In 2009, I visited the Dutch slave castle El Amin on the Ivory Coast of West Africa. There were many traumatizing moments during that visit, and even now, eight years later, I can close my eyes and remember that place vividly, even down to the thick stench of blood that permeates the dungeon air all these years later.

I was expectedly angered by the cells where Africans who were to be enslaved were held until ships arrived. I was enraged by the portal in the floor of the courtyard surrounded by balconies where African women were roped and lowered into water to be cleaned off before being delivered to whatever hunter desired them for their rape pleasure. I grieved as I stood in the door of no return and wondered whether or not my ancestors passed this way. But nothing traumatized me more than the pristine chapel erected in the center of the courtyard so that those responsible for the brutality of those days could still gather to worship their god.

And on the wall of that chapel, there is a white Jesus.

For me, white Jesus is a reminder of the dominant

culture's insatiable need for supremacy and the toxic roots of racism woven into the fabric of American Christianity.

If my faith demands that I follow Jesus, then Jesus cannot be black. What does it mean that even staunch biblical literalists are resistant to displaying more likely depictions of the Afro-Semitic Palestinian named Jesus in houses of worship?

What does it mean to gather for worship in sanctuaries surrounded by lies etched in stained glass?

What might it mean to actually be confronted with images of Jesus that are not white? Is this incarnation of God somehow less worthy of our worship?

When I took my daughter, Kortni, for a 3rd grade admissions interview at the Lutheran school in our neighborhood, there was a large mural of Jesus with the little children in the foyer. I was impressed to see a black girl child among those surrounding this Jesus. Even in church, all the children depicted as having access to Jesus in this familiar scene are white.

After the interview, the teacher asked Kortni whether she had any additional questions, and Kortni replied, "Just one. What makes you think that Jesus is white?"

*In Christian churches in Cairo, Jordan, Beirut, Ramallah, and Israel, there is white Jesus.*

The teacher and I exchanged glances, both baffled by the question. What was the impetus for this inquiry?

Kortni explained that she noticed the painting of Jesus and the children on the wall and she wanted to know why Jesus was white. She never mentioned the little black girl included with the children. She wanted to know why Jesus himself was not painted to look like her.

The gift, to a black child, of being nurtured in an environment where blackness is not exclusive, yet blackness is the norm, produces for all children equal self-actualization in the midst of crafted narratives that do not always affirm every being. Such an environment caused Kortni to question something I had long ago stopped noticing.

The teacher responded well by saying to Kortni that we do not have actual photos of Jesus and most artists tend to paint Jesus in their most comfortable image, and many of these artists in America are white.

There are many who embrace this explanation, but I suggest there may be something more.

In the Christian churches of Ghana, there is white Jesus.

In Christian churches in Cairo, Jordan, Beirut, Ramallah, and Israel, there is white Jesus.

Jomo Kenyatta, former prime minister and president of Kenya, is quoted as saying, "When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and

we had the land. They said ‘let us close our eyes and pray.’ When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land.”

I would add something else was left behind: white Jesus. I am not suggesting some conspiracy theory. However, I am suggesting that the soil of this country has been so thoroughly saturated with the fallacy of white supremacy that any depiction of a Savior with black skin creates dissonance.

I am suggesting the need for a white Jesus satiates a hunger for the worship of whiteness.

### *John Dorhauer*

I remember the first time I walked into the Church of the Rock with Fr. Kevin Hederman, a white Catholic priest who was showing me around the streets of North St. Louis. There on the back wall was a large painting of Jesus that took my breath away. It was the first portrayal of Jesus I had seen in my entire life to that point that was not white. Jesus was black.

### *Seeing black Jesus was shocking to me.*

I distinctly remember thinking, but not saying, that there was something very wrong about that. I was 19, maybe 20 years old. No one had ever said to me that Jesus had to be white, but I clearly had developed a sensitivity to that—and with that an expectation that he better be. Seeing black Jesus was shocking to me, I didn’t dare ask, but I really wanted to know why Kevin, this white priest, would put up with such radical behavior as this.

I am not very proud of that moment. Clearly I had absorbed fully what my white normative culture expected me to: that Jesus must be white. I had to resensitize myself, reorient myself to a whole different set of assumptions and expectations. Seeing that single portrayal—and it would be years before I would see another one, set me to asking questions about why I reacted the way I did. For the first time in my life, I told myself the truth about Jesus: that he wasn’t white. I knew he wasn’t black, either— but probably an olive-skinned Galilean Jew. Now, though, I had to come face to face with my privilege. I could allow for—no, require—that Jesus be white when I knew he wasn’t in fact white; but I could not tolerate him appearing black in front of me.

My personal faith journey has brought me to a place where I see beauty in all the ways that artists appropriate Jesus to reflect their culture’s expectations. Of that I am proud. But I am aware that the whiteness of Jesus remains for many white members, white churches, and white institutions a given. When my home church in St. Louis decided to replace their white Jesus painting with about a dozen or so pictures of Jesus—each with a different cultural shading and skin tone—the church had four or five white families leave the church.

One of the lingering, and actually pretty damaging, manifestations of white privilege in the life of the church is the ongoing commitment to portray Jesus as white. There is nothing at all wrong with expressing solidarity with Jesus by making him look like you and your race. There is something very wrong with accepting a status quo which makes that white Jesus your, or anyone else’s, only

choice.

### **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

1. *Can you remember the first time you saw a portrayal of Jesus that was not white? What was your reaction?*
2. *Take a walk through your church and find every painting or picture of Jesus. What does it reveal to you?*



# chapter five

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## LIGHTNESS AND DARKNESS AS EXPERIENCED IN THE GENEALOGY AND LITURGY OF THE CHURCH

*Stephen G. Ray, Jr.*

A few years back I had the good fortune of preaching at the wonderful church of a friend. They were a warm and welcoming expression of their Lutheran faith. In fact, during the service an older woman said aloud “God Bless Martin Luther!” The ways of prayer, the approach to the altar, and the liturgy bathed in the language of grace felt quintessentially Lutheran to me. This congregation of West Indian and African immigrants persuaded me that perhaps there was a way that the traditions of the Lutherans might yet be given voice in rhythms familiar to my ear.

Returning the next day to the Lutheran seminary at which I taught, I was struck by how unique my experience had indeed been. For to my Lutheran colleagues this particular congregation was quaint and an interesting appropriation of the Lutheran tradition. What struck me was the term “appropriation” used to describe this congregation. So, theirs was not an authentic expression of Lutheranism, per se, but rather a quaint adoption. I had not heard other congregations described in this way, even where the congregants were largely converts to the tradition. The irony of the situation was that for the most part these West Indian and

African immigrants had brought their Lutheranism with them as family traditions of some generations. From this experience I noted a deep assumption which would recur again in my experiences teaching there and which resonated with my own experiences in the United Church of Christ. That assumption was quite plainly that the proper heirs to the Protestant traditions here in America are most authentically those who can trace some visible genealogical heritage to Europe, usually through white embodiment.

While this assumption makes sense in our racialized context, it holds within it two deeply troubling demonstrations of its participation in the corruption of our faith by white supremacy. The first is that on its face it is a denial that faith given to us by scripture is one whose genealogy is pneumatological (the work of the Holy Spirit through Scripture) and not physical. We are all adopted into the family of God. To say otherwise is to make ours a religion of the flesh and not a faith of the Spirit. When this becomes the basis of the faith, the question immediately comes to the fore: whose flesh? Whatever flesh is then identified becomes the most authentically the family of God and bearers of the Church’s traditions. It is a short step then to implicitly attribute divinity to that flesh even if there is no such explicit identification made.

I would suggest that this implicit dynamic is at work in much of the Church of our day and helps explain the earlier question: why is it so important to so many that Jesus be white? It is important because without it the whole ecology of genealogical inheritance becomes terminally unstable, as most idolatries are wont to do.

### **John Paddock**

*The existence of these songs (Negro Spirituals) is in itself a monument to one of the most striking instances on record in which a people forged a weapon of offense and defense out of a psychological shackle. By some amazing but vastly creative spiritual insight the slave undertook the redemption of a religion that the master had profaned in his midst. 11*

This observation by Howard Thurman is testimony to how far some white Christians had moved from the faith proclaimed by the apostles.

Christianity was often imposed upon the slaves. It was used as a form of social control. Live a life of obedience to your owner, your master, then you will be rewarded with eternal life in heaven. Some of the slaves started paying attention, learned to read the Bible, and studied their new religion. Rejecting the theology of the official plantation preachers, they began to respond to and hold up the messages of liberation for God's oppressed and suffering people. They often had to meet in secret to hear their own

slave preachers. The spirituals evolved out of the matrix of tribulation, pain, biblical tales of exodus, and hope for release. "Tell ole Pharaoh, let my people go." The spirituals sometimes contained coded messages of liberty and directions for escape to the north. "Follow the drinking gourd" was a reference to the Big Dipper pointing to the North Star.

So it was, as Howard Thurman suggested, that the slaves saved the Christian religion from the narrow messages of social control and individual salvation in favor of the proclamation of the Good News of freedom for all God's people. Social control was what the Romans were about with crucifixion, which was reserved as the death penalty for slaves and rebels whose bodies were often left to rot. Passers-by were reminded that it didn't pay to disobey the master or rebel against the emperor. The same message was sent with the lynching trees of the Jim Crow era, or the prison system of today. "Slaves or uppity people of color, beware."

Every now and then I'm asked to make sure that our teenagers "are taught morals." Usually that means refrain from sex and honor your father and mother. Rarely does it mean to teach them to love their neighbor, to respect the dignity of every human being, or to work for equity and justice for all.

### **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

*What kinds of messages are contained in your parish histories and stories? What do your worship*

11 Thurman, Howard J. *Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death*. Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1975, p. 36.

*materials, prayers, hymns, special liturgies, and education programs teach about the purpose of the Christian life?*

**Stephen G. Ray, Jr.**

A few years back, I had the good fortune of preaching at the wonderful church of a friend. They were a warm and welcoming expression of their Lutheran faith. In fact, during the service, an older woman said aloud “God bless Martin Luther!” The ways of prayer, the approach to the altar, and the liturgy bathed in the language of grace felt quintessentially Lutheran to me. This congregation of West Indian and African immigrants persuaded me that perhaps there was a way that the traditions of the Lutherans might yet be given voice in rhythms familiar to my ear.

Returning the next day to the Lutheran seminary at which I taught, I was struck by how unique my experience had indeed been. For to my Lutheran colleagues, this particular congregation was quaint, an interesting appropriation of the Lutheran tradition. What struck me was the term “appropriation” used to describe this congregation. So, theirs was not an authentic expression of Lutheranism, per se, but rather a quaint adoption. I had not heard other congregations described in this way, even where the congregants were largely converts to the tradition.

The irony of the situation was that, for the most part, these West Indian and African immigrants had brought their Lutheranism with them as family traditions of some generations. From this experience, I noted a deep assumption which would

recur again in my experiences teaching there, and which resonated with my own experiences in the United Church of Christ. That assumption was quite plainly that the proper heirs to the Protestant traditions here in America are most authentically those who can trace some visible genealogical heritage to Europe, usually through white embodiment.

*I had not heard other congregations described in this way, even where the congregants were largely converts to the tradition.*

While this assumption makes sense in our racialized context, it holds within it two deeply troubling demonstrations of its participation in the corruption of our faith by white supremacy. The first is that it is on its face a denial that faith given to us by scripture is one whose genealogy is pneumatological (the work of the Holy Spirit through Scripture) and *not* physical. We are all adopted into the family of God. To say otherwise is to make ours a religion of the flesh and not a faith of the Spirit. When this becomes the basis of the faith, the question, and second demonstration, immediately comes to the fore: whose flesh? Whatever flesh is then identified becomes most authentically the family of God and bearers of the Church’s traditions. It is a short step then to implicitly attribute divinity to that flesh even if there is no such explicit identification made.





I would suggest that this implicit dynamic is at work in much of the Church of our day and helps explain the earlier question: why is it so important to so many that Jesus be white? It is important because without it, the whole ecology of genealogical inheritance becomes terminally unstable, as most idolatries are wont to do.

### ***Da Vita D. McCallister***

I have memorized many scriptures in my life. Several were required in my childhood while others were memorized due to my reoccurring use in sermons: the 23rd Psalm with the imagery of God as Shepherd and the fifth chapter of Matthew commonly referred to as the Beatitudes, to name just a few. One Saturday afternoon I stumbled upon a scripture that caused me to wonder why it had not been included in my required memorizations. I was a high schooler and I had just received a copy of a Non-King James Bible (I must confess that I do not remember the translation). My step-sister Jenny and I began to read the book of Revelations as a dare. The first chapter begins with a vision in which Jesus' physical description is offered. Revelation 1:14-15 states: "The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters."

We continued to read unfazed by the discrepancy between this text and our experience of the sacrament. We were too interested in the four horsemen and the coming apocalypse to be bothered by a Jesus with hair like wool and feet that were

bronze. This text returned to my life in seminary and then I recalled how easy it was for Jenny and me to overlook it. We had been trained to ignore examples in text that pointed to anything other than *Whiteness* in our reading. It was the same as expecting a doctor or attorney to be male if no gender was noted or a nurse to be female, unless specifically stated as otherwise. *Whiteness* was the norm when reading, whether the text was current, historical or futuristic.

How was it that the bread that was broken before me during Holy Communion was a white loaf? Wouldn't pumpernickel or wheat have been more symbolic of this bronzed feet Jesus? The Cup of the New Covenant was not fashioned with white wine and we were not required to drink apple juice as children to celebrate the Eucharist. So why were we committed to replicating the *blood* of Christ but not the *body*? Surely, it was not because we were afraid to witness the breaking of brown bodies; I had been shown that repeatedly without warning.

These were not just questions for my church but for the industry that had evolved around Communion. When I was gifted with my first travel-communion set it included a small roll of white circular wafers. The wafers were uniform in color, size and logo; each was stamped with a tiny cross. They were mass produced and disseminated at Christian bookstores and church supply companies across the globe. How had an entire industry developed based on a historically inaccurate description of the most important person in the Christian faith?

The words of the table echo in my mind: “The Body of Christ broken for you.” How difficult would it be to imagine a middle-eastern body broken in order to save a whitened-world? How would it change the way we view brown and black bodies if we had to consume them in our worship? What would the word “remembrance” mean if the symbol of the body of Christ gathered around the table began with a brown body and added white bodies to it? What if *World Communion* day was the only day to witness a *White* Christ in the loaf, how would that shift the thinking in your church?

*How difficult would it be to imagine a middle-eastern body broken in order to save a whitened-world?*

### Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics

1. *How do you think worshipping a Black or Brown Jesus would change your worship experience? Would it change the images in your church; in your Bible; in your Sunday School classroom?*
2. *Do you think worshipping a Black or Brown Jesus would change the style of your worship or your music? Do you think it would resemble other Black and Brown faith traditions around the world?*
3. *Do you think worshipping a Black or Brown Jesus would impact the way that other Black and Brown bodies are viewed around the globe?*

### **John Dorhauer**

My first church was in a town of 250 people.

It was ten miles from a gallon of gas and a loaf of bread.

The town was about 33% black, and the mayor of this town was a black woman.

As well integrated as the town was (quite remarkable for a rural, Midwest farm town), the churches were something quite different.

There were two black churches in town, and two white churches. Two of the four churches were located on top of a hill that sat as the highest point in the county, overlooking the expansive vistas of the surrounding countryside with access to sunrise and sundown views: stunning ones, at that. Two churches were at the bottom of the hill, blocks off the main road that ran through town – hidden from view. Guess which two belonged to the white churches?

One of the first stories I was told was that a few decades earlier, a few black families were invited to attend Zion United Church of Christ. That was my church. Two white men, head ushers in the church, had heard they might be coming and stood outside the front door waiting for them. They refused to let them enter, telling them and their families that everyone would be better off if they just left.

Every week, one of the white farmers who was a member of my church used to tell me, “You made



me want to say ‘Amen’ again today, John. I swear, one of these times I’m going to actually do that.” He never did. Hold that thought.

I took my confirmation class one year from that small town to an inner city black church at a city about an hour away. They were having a youth revival. My youth sat with their jaws dropped when they heard that black youth choir sing. They talked about how amazing that was, and I said, “There’s no reason you couldn’t sing like that.” The pastor had just come by, heard me say that, and said back to me: “Yes there is.”

In his book *Deep River: the Negro Spiritual Sings of Life and Death*, Howard Thurman writes: “By some amazing but vastly creative spiritual insight the slave undertook the redemption of a religion that the master had profaned in his midst.” The slaves redeemed the Christianity that the slaveholders had profaned.

In its original meaning, something profane was something ordinary, normal – like everything else. What Thurman suggests is that the religion of the white man had been profaned: made common, ordinary. The slave redeemed it. The descendants of the slaves embody that posture before God: a recognition that before God they sing of life and death.

That is what my confirmation class heard. It was what they could not replicate – that posture before God that emanates from the shadows of now centuries of injustice heaped upon you. White religion in America has not replicated that. Staid,

comported, dignified. No Amens, no displays of emotion, no outbursts. Decorum being the order of the day, the cultural differences made manifest in worship display the clear divides that privilege engenders.

### Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics

1. *For many white communities who wish to integrate, there is an expectation that black families and black members will adapt to a normative white, worship experience. There can follow a deep frustration that efforts to become more diverse fail. Talk about this.*
2. *What do you imagine the pastor meant when he said, “Yes there is,” referring to a reason why the white youth could not sing like that?*



# part three

## THE CASH VALUE OF WHITENESS OR WHITENESS AS A TAX-EXEMPT STATUS

### chapter one

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#### HOW THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM ADVANTAGES WHITES

***Stephen G. Ray, Jr.***

The goal of this section of our curriculum is to help readers understand how being white in the United States inclines our systems, financial and otherwise, to work for your economic benefit relative to people of color generally and Black people more specifically.

There are many ways to approach this issue. The one I find most helpful is to explore how being white exempts one from what I term the Black Tax. The Black Tax is simply a way of describing the situation in which Black people and communities

pay the same for services and amenities but receive less value than do their white fellow citizens. I choose this way of proceeding for two reasons. First, to meet head-on the cultural idea that Black people and our communities are undue beneficiaries of the tax dollars paid by “hard working Americans” (here read “white people”). Second, I want to shift the conversation from what white people are getting from the workings of systemic racism to what Black people are paying to maintain this unfair system, thereby recentering the project away from whiteness being the normative center of the conversation. While there are any number of ways to describe the inequity that creates the Black

Tax, the three expressions that I want to focus on are:

- the municipal tax
- the property tax • the education tax.

The idea of the Black Tax emerges from observations that I have made over my lifetime that Black persons and communities pay the same in support of our common life, but more often than not receive disparate benefit. Put another way, we pay the same dollar for public services but receive less value. In my community, this reality has taken the form of an adage that “the garbage men just don’t seem to work as hard when Black folks move in.” What is being captured here is the recognition that the municipal structures of many localities demonstrate a diminished commitment to service delivery when Black people become an appreciable number of residents within these communities. A recent University of Southampton study (*Racial Discrimination in Local Public Services: A Field Experiment in the US*, Corrado Giulietti et al, <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/news/2015/08/africanamericans-discriminated-against-in-access-to-public-services.page>) found that:

- People with distinctively African-American names are less likely to get a response to requests for information from local public services, such as sheriffs’ offices, school districts, and libraries.

- A new study finds email queries coming from those senders are four percent less likely to receive an answer than identical emails signed with “white-sounding” names.
- The difference in response was most evident in correspondence to sheriffs’ offices, with black-sounding names seven percent less likely to receive a response than white-sounding names.

This disparity can be seen starkly in the differing approaches taken to policing in communities. The recent report issued by the task force convened by Chicago’s Mayor Emmanuel found that Black communities were subject to significantly more unwarranted stops, arrests, and filing of charges than white neighborhoods. As the report (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/14/us/chicago-police-deptplagued-by-systemic-racism-task-force-finds.html>) phrased it:

C.P.D.’s own data gives validity to the widely held belief the police have no regard for the sanctity of life when it comes to people of color. Stopped without justification, verbally and physically abused, and in some instances arrested, and then detained without counsel — that is what we heard about over and over again.

To fully understand the impact on a community of the policing outlined here, it is important to recall the material costs to the people unfortunate enough to be caught up in this system. The costs:

- lost wages which are unavailable to the families because of court appearances and any time spent in detention;
- the cost of bail bonds which are never recouped regardless of the outcome of the case;
- the costs of unexpected child-care in order for families to be present in court;
- the prospect of diminished employability because of an arrest record which emerges from behavior of the police and not the person arrested.

The consequences of this problematic policing can therefore have intergenerational impact on both the accumulation of financial security, or lack thereof, and life opportunities that emerge from these resources.

To step back for a moment, let me be explicit about why I am framing this as a tax. From the most basic service provided by the answering of a phone to the life-altering, or ending, encounter with the police, we are dealing with the realm of public service—public service supported by tax dollars of many sorts. So when we have a starkly different delivery of those services, the citizens and communities receiving less for the same tax dollar are effectively paying an additional levy relative to their fellow citizens who receive acceptable levels in the delivery of these services. This latter group might be thought of as receiving an exemption from this additional levy, thus my usage of the idea of whiteness as tax-exempt status. This disparate treatment in the delivery of social services acutely

affects the desirability of areas for residential and commercial investment. The effect in this area is what I term the Black Property Tax.

As noted in other articles in this section, there is a tipping point in neighborhoods and communities at which the presence of Black families motivates significant, if not total, relocation of white families to other areas. What happens at this tipping point is that the dynamics I have noted above begin to kick in, and there is a noticeable decline in the quality of public services and different patterns of policing emerge. This creates somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy in terms of property values because it cannot be gainsaid that underserved areas with intense police presence are less desirable and therefore less valuable.

Critical to note here is that these dynamics have little or nothing to do with the actual behavior of Black people, but rather the municipal response to our presence. Two features of this situation that bear our notice are:

- This dynamic of decreasing property values means that Black people and communities are circumscribed in their participation in what for working and middle class families has been one of the greatest engines for the production of intergenerational wealth: home ownership; and
- This disparity, driven by the municipal response to the presence of Black people in a community, becomes inescapably bundled with the services, or lack thereof, which tax dollars fund.

The corollary is, of course, that those not subject to this levy are tax-exempt. This particular levy has perhaps the most significant effect because it shapes educational opportunity—a major element in the creation of, or preclusion from, the accumulation of intergenerational wealth.

In virtually every place in the United States, the funding of education is a local matter. Systems are funded by local property taxes, some level of state contribution, and occasional national and business grants. This means that there is a direct link between the value of properties in a given locale and the resources available for the funding of teacher salaries, the creation and care of educational facilities, the provision of curricula, and the provision of competent administration.

It has long been noted that underfunded systems have difficulty preparing students to compete in emerging economies, and that this then affects their life chances and the possibilities for the creation of intergenerational wealth. Often when comparing the different realities that exist in communities with disparate school systems, the thing least noticed is the role that the municipal response to the presence of Black people plays. The particular effect that I want to bring attention to is the way that this municipal response actually works to devalue every dollar that is spent on education in communities with appreciable Black populations.

As mentioned earlier, the decline in the quality of public services and the change in policing patterns

affect the desirability of neighborhoods when Black people move in. The way this deleverages every dollar in educational spending is two-fold. First, the care and maintenance of educational infrastructure declines. Given that Black communities virtually always arise in the footprint of pre-existent white communities, this means that these facilities are older and require more care. So the infrastructure requires more from a municipal system that is inclined to do less. Each dollar is therefore not maximized but diminished. The mill rate to support the system does not change whether it is attentive to the provision of the highest level of service or not.

The second effect of this deleveraging is that the diminished value of each dollar means there are more dollars needed to provide the minimal levels of functioning which developed within the system when its functioning was less ambiguous. The effect is higher mill rates, which adversely affect communities' stability by diminishing resources which could otherwise be used to sustain civic and business opportunities. This levy then creates a cycle of disinvestment, further diminishing desirability and property values. Communities not subject to this downward pressure of devaluation of every educational dollar might then be thought of as being exempt from this levy.

The point of approaching this issue of whiteness as cash value from the perspective of the Black Tax, from which whites are exempt, instead of the usual way of beginning with white privilege, is to re-center the conversation toward the economics of

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that privilege. Unfortunately, the economics of the matter have been obscured by a broad-based effort within our society to hide these dynamics by painting the primary beneficiaries of our tax dollars as Black people who do not pay the taxes. This widespread sentiment is captured perfectly in a comment former Senator Rick Santorum made when talking about entitlement reform (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/santorum-targets-blacks-in-entitlement-reform/>):

I don't want to make black people's lives better by giving them somebody else's money; I want to give them the opportunity to go out and earn the money.

This problematic statement shows the way that Black people and communities have their contribution to the economic common life dismissed, thereby making it nearly impossible to see, much less deal with, the ways municipal systems function to actively disadvantage them. When we can't see this, we are surely blinded to the ways our system financially supports and furthers the interests of white people and their communities at the expense of Black communities.

This system of racial levy is present not only in the instances just reviewed. We see it also in the policing and judicial operation condemned by the Department of Justice in their report on the municipal courts of St. Louis County (<http://graphics.stltoday.com/apps/muni-courts/>). We thus have municipal systems that actually

hamper the development of intergenerational wealth for Black people and communities while facilitating its formation in white communities. This facilitation is made possible through both the systems just outlined and the largely unnoticed contribution made to the wealth and infrastructure of white communities through the salaries of civil servants who largely do not reside in Black communities. This municipal operation is the Black Tax from which whites are largely exempt.

What we are dealing with here are matters of economic injustice. This is what makes this whole conversation relevant for a Church curriculum. In the preceding, I have invited a way of thinking about how this injustice works but is largely obscured by the ways our culture portrays wealth, taxes, infrastructure, and public investment. It is my sense that we are all diminished by these public discourses and the operation of the municipal systems which they obscure.





# chapter two

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## HOW EDUCATION ADVANTAGES WHITES

**John Dorhauer**

This section is an exploration of the notion that whiteness has a cash value.

In his landmark book on this subject, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, George Lipsitz writes:

Whiteness has a cash value: it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing secured in discriminatory markets, through the unequal educations allocated to children of different races, through insider networks that channel employment opportunities to the relatives and friends of those who have profited most from present and past racial discrimination, and especially through intergenerational transfers of inherited wealth that pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations. (p. vii)

He goes on to write: “I contend that the artificial construction of whiteness almost always comes to possess white people themselves unless they develop antiracist identities, unless they disinvest and divest themselves of their investment in white supremacy”

(p. viii).

Education is an economic tool. Our government and our society recognize that investing in the education of our children and youth fuels a strong economy and provides the country and its businesses with skilled laborers. The better one’s education, the greater one’s earning potential over a lifetime.

A recent study done by the Center on Education and the Workforce by Georgetown University, entitled *The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, and Lifetime Earnings* (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2011/collegepayoff.pdf>) reports that the average lifetime income for a graduate with a Bachelor’s degree is \$2.7 million (in 2009 dollars), 75% higher than a worker with only a high school diploma.

This raises the question: is the American educational system as we know and experience it today, given that it is a principal driver of economic outcomes and benefits, in any way affected by a culture of white privilege that consistently advantages those with white skin over those with darker skin?

There is evidence that strongly suggests that race plays a significant role in determining what

educational opportunities are available to you, and how much education you can afford to acquire before leaving school to enter the workforce. This evidence will not suggest that race is the only factor, nor will it suggest that race is the primary factor. But it will be hard to deny, given current data and research in the field, that race is a neutral factor when it comes to determining both the quality and the quantity of education available to anyone in America. It is also important to note that this will have a significant economic impact, as education affects earning potential. This data, and current research in the field, supports the statement that whiteness has a cash value attached to it.

Let's look at what we know before we discuss what knowing calls us to do.

- From a recent study (<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar01/vol58/num06/Closing-the-Achievement-Gap.aspx>) done by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, a global community dedicated to excellence in learning, teaching, and leading comprising 125,000 members made up of superintendents, principals, teachers, and advocates from more than 138 countries:

In every subject area, students in high-poverty schools are more likely than other students to be taught by teachers without even a minor in the subjects they teach; only about half the teachers in schools with 90 percent or greater

minority enrollments meet even their states' minimum requirements to teach those subjects—far fewer than in predominantly white schools.

- That same website reports that:
  - In just one academic year, the top third of teachers produced as much as six times the learning growth as the bottom third of teachers. In fact, 10th graders taught by the least effective teachers made nearly no gains in reading and even lost ground in math.
- The NAACP Fact Sheet on African Americans and Education (<https://www.naacp.org/page/-/education/documents/AfricanAmericansAndEducation.pdf>) reports that “greater percentages of African American (33%), Latina (35%), and American Indian/Alaskan Native (25%) students attend high-poverty schools than did white (4%) or Asian/Pacific Islander students (13%).”
- In 2007, the immediate college enrollment rate was 70% for white high school graduates and 61% for Latino high school graduates, compared with 56% for African American high school graduates.
- African Americans trail other ethnic groups in terms of college completion. Based on the most recent college completion data, Asian/Pacific Islanders had the highest six-year graduation rate (67%), followed by whites (60%), Latinos (49%), African Americans (42%), and

American Indians/Alaska Natives (40%). This pattern held at public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit institutions, with African Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives

having the lowest graduation rates of the five racial/ethnic groups.

I want to pause here. That only 56% of black high school graduates start college, compared to 70% white students, and that of the 56% who enroll, only 42% end up with their Bachelor's degree means that only about 23% of all black students will achieve the lifetime earning potential of a college graduate. That is almost exactly half of the proportional number of white laborers who enter the market place with a college degree.

These last items that we will look at come from U.S. News and World Report: "U.S. Education: Still Separate and Unequal"

(<http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/datamine/2015/01/28/us-education-still-separate-andunequal>):

- Disparities in discipline begin in preschool and continue through every level of schooling. While blacks make up 18 percent of students in preschool, they account for 42 percent of students with an out-of-school suspension and 48 percent of students with multiple out-of-school suspensions.
- Black Americans are suspended and expelled at three times the rate of white students. They

make up 16 percent of school enrollment, but account for 32 percent of students who receive in-school suspensions, 42 percent of students who receive multiple out-of-school suspensions and 34 percent of students who are expelled.

- Black children are less likely than white or Hispanic children to live in households where at least one parent has secure employment, and black children have the greatest rate of any race for families with children living in homeless shelters. Nearly 25 percent of black parents report that their children live in unsafe neighborhoods, compared with 7 percent of white parents.
- Fewer black students graduate from high school (16 percent of blacks drop out compared with 8 percent of whites), meaning fewer are eligible for college enrollment from the beginning. Yet, disparities continue to snowball at every level.
- Of individuals aged 16 to 24 who completed high school or earned GED certificates in the last year, 56 percent of black students enrolled in a two or four-year college compared with 66 percent of whites. Fewer black students make it from enrollment to graduation, and, for the ones that do, graduating takes longer. For the class starting at a four-year college in 2006, only 20 percent of black students graduated in four years versus more than 40 percent of white students. Within six years, 40 percent of blacks finished, but 60 percent of whites did.

These are sobering data.

They demonstrate that skin color impacts educational quality and access, disciplinary protocols, dropout rates, and overall ability to navigate what can be a very challenging and expensive undertaking.

None of the subjects that we discuss in this section on Whiteness as Cash Value are independent of one another. Incarceration rates that find black males disproportionately picked up, arrested, convicted, and serving longer sentences have a direct impact on educational outcomes. Housing values that decline, regardless of one's economic status, in any neighborhood with more than a 9% non-white makeup affect both tax bases built to support public education as well as a family's ability to fund a child's education. Inheritance laws that distribute wealth accumulated during slavery to succeeding generations also give whites a greater ability to fund expensive college degrees. The same can be said of white families who earn tens of thousands of dollars a year more than racial minority families working the same jobs. The single greatest factor in finishing college once one is accepted and enrolls is ability to pay. That a far higher percentage of black college students fail to complete college than their white counterparts is mostly due to the lack of a sufficient financial safety net for either the student or their family.

*This all amounts to an environment where whiteness remains an economic, financial, and cash advantage. Over a lifetime, that difference is profound.*

When it comes to education, statistically whites have greater access to schools with higher tax bases to support them. Because of that, their teachers get paid more and have, on average, much better education themselves in the courses they teach. White students have more electives and accelerated programs to choose from during their secondary education, making it even more likely that they will succeed once they decide to pursue a higher degree.

This all amounts to an environment where whiteness remains an economic, financial, and cash advantage. Over a lifetime, that difference is profound. Over generations of tens of millions of lifetimes of white students advantaged by factors beyond their personal control—the difference is incalculable and indefensible.

America's schools remain, as the U.S. News and World Report study concluded, separate and unequal. The inequalities and inequities have a clear, direct, and lasting impact on the earning potential of an entire generation of minority students. Legislation and regulations written to remedy this have proven to be ineffective in a

culture that continues to maintain its possessive investment in whiteness.

This is what we know. What does knowing this call us to?

That is an important question.

What do white leaders of white churches have to say about the discrepancies that race engenders in educational opportunities and outcomes between whites and students of almost every other race?

What actions can be taken by committed community leaders to create educational opportunities that don't disadvantage racial minority children and youth?

Some Affirmative Action policies designed to level the playing field in college admissions, to respond to and minimize the inherent advantages that white students assume upon application, were ruled unconstitutional in *Gratz v. Bollinger*, decided by a 6-3 vote of the U.S. Supreme Court. White leaders in white churches can both learn more about the effectiveness of Affirmative Action policies, and be strident vocal supporters of such policies. White silence on this matter not only casts doubt on their public commitments to racial equity, but also enables predominantly white legislative and judicial bodies to perpetuate their own inertia on these matters.

In a brilliant article written for the *Harvard Law Review* entitled "Whiteness as Property," UCLA

law professor Cheryl I. Harris distinguishes between corrective and distributive justice. Without getting too distracted by the subtleties of law that most of us will struggle to understand, suffice it to say that corrective justice seeks to remedy an imbalance created when one individual acts in a way that harms or disadvantages another individual. Corrective action is sought by a court to restore what was illegally deprived of another.

The challenge comes when systems exist that advantage one race over another. Because those systems of privilege were constructed over centuries of commitments to whiteness, entire populations are advantaged without active agency while simultaneously other communities are collectively disadvantaged. When courts are restricted to identifying a single person who is accountable for the damage done, much of the injustice perpetrated by privilege must go unchallenged and unpunished. As Harris points out:

The focus on innocent whites changes the affirmative action inquiry from one of rectifying harm to Blacks to invoking legal protection for the rights of whites who are innocent to discriminatory acts, although they have benefited from prior discrimination. (*Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 106:1707, p. 1782)

Affirmative Action as Distributive Justice is the remedy to that. It is a way of ensuring that all individuals receive their share of the benefits they would have secured in the absence of racism. It

changes the lens of inquiry from “what did any individual do to create the harm” to “. . . what would have been the proper allocation of resources in the absence of the distortion of racial oppression.” (*Harvard Law Review*, p. 1784).

An unfair distribution of educational resources remains one of the most entrenched impediments to racial equity in America.



# chapter three

## HOW HOUSING PRACTICES ADVANTAGE WHITES

**John Dorhauer**

No single factor impacts the wealth disparity between whites and people of color more than housing.

Owner-occupied property is the single greatest factor in determining one's wealth capacity. Blacks and people of color seeking to own homes have had to overcome centuries of laws, regulations, zoning restrictions, inheritance rights, and real estate practices. Consider the following historical factors or conditions that explicitly disadvantaged people of color from the start:

- A constitution written to define non-whites as 3/5 human and property laws that restricted ownership to whites
- Supreme Court decisions, like *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, which held that Americans descended from African slaves could not be citizens of the United States
- Laws that prohibited slaves from marrying
- Black Codes written in Southern states after the Civil War that restricted black citizens from voting, bearing arms, gathering in groups (including assembling for worship), and learning to read and write

- Vagrancy laws written during Reconstruction that imprisoned former slaves in forced labor camps and prevented them from acquiring property
- Red-lined real estate covenants that, into the 1950s, prohibited white real estate agents from “introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood” (former National Association of Real Estate Boards ethics code, article 34)

The impact of these injustices continues to be felt today through the intergenerational factors discussed throughout this curriculum. Beyond just the residual impact of these practices, though, people of color continue to be actively disadvantaged today. Consider how Fair Housing laws written to reverse this type of discrimination have gone largely unenforced. According to George Lipsitz' book, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Benefit from Identity Politics*, fewer than 30% of complaints in the 1970s led to any mediation, and of those, 50% remained noncompliant. By 1986, only about 400 fair-housing cases had led to damages being awarded, and all but a small handful of those were for under

\$3,500. Even after aspects of the law were strengthened starting in the mid-80s, an estimated 2 million cases of housing discrimination still occur every year with no recourse (p. 29).

Consider that, according to a Zillow report on racial disparities in home ownership trends, one in ten whites who apply for a home loan are rejected, while one in four black applicants are turned down for the same type of loan (<http://www.zillow.com/research/minority-mortgage-access-6127/>).

Consider that, in December of 2011, the U.S. government successfully filed a lawsuit against Countrywide Lending, an arm of the Bank of America, alleging—among other things—that Countrywide’s policies and practices caused more than 200,000 Hispanic and African-American borrowers to pay higher loan fees and costs for their home mortgages than non-Hispanic White borrowers, based not on their creditworthiness or other objective criteria related to borrower risk, but because of their race or national origin. The court also found that black and Hispanic homeowners were placed into subprime mortgages when similarly qualified whites received prime loans.

Bank of America was required to pay \$335 million to compensate victims of these practices. That averages out to about \$1,675 per family affected—a total insufficient to restore the families’ access to home ownership in middle-class neighborhoods.

The effects of these practices reverberate throughout the housing market. Take the foreclosure crisis of 2009, which hit Black and minority homeowners disproportionately hard. For every 10,000 homes, white homeowners suffered 452 foreclosures during the crisis. For Latino homeowners, that number was 769; for blacks, 790.

In an article titled “Them That’s Got Shall Get” (published on the website *The American Prospect*), Nathalie Baptiste cites a study of the Washington D.C. region which found that black homeowners were 20% more likely to lose their homes during the crisis than whites with similar incomes and lifestyles. The disparity persists even as income increases: high-earning blacks were 80% more likely to lose their homes than their white counterparts (<http://prospect.org/article/staggering-loss-black-wealth-due-subprime-scandal-continues-unabated>).

These foreclosure rates affect entire communities, because foreclosures can negatively impact the property value of surrounding homes. When foreclosures are more heavily concentrated in neighborhoods that are primarily black or Hispanic, that drives the wealth disparity even further. The Center for Responsible Lending estimated in 2010 that between 2009 and 2012, the loss of property value to homeowners living near foreclosures would drain \$194 billion from Black communities and \$177 billion from Latino communities, on top of the cost of the foreclosures themselves.





(<http://www.responsiblelending.org/mortgage-lending/researchanalysis/foreclosures-by-race-and-ethnicity.pdf>)

White Privilege is evident throughout the history of land wealth and home ownership. At the birth of the nation, only white men could own property; only property owners could vote; only whites could transfer property through inheritance laws. After the Emancipation Proclamation, the Civil War, the 14th Amendment, and Reconstruction all sought to create a legal racial equality, the entirely white legislative and judicial bodies found ways to circumvent these new freedoms.

One strategy was to write new laws intended to criminalize blacks, starting with the Reconstruction era vagrancy laws and continuing in practice today with the war on drugs, as documented in Michelle Alexander's landmark book *The New Jim Crow*. This particular strategy both strips blacks of the right to vote and keeps them from earning wages that can be invested in land accrual. Even after release from prison, the earning potential of a convicted felon is impacted over a lifetime—thereby reducing how much wealth can be accumulated and invested in property.

Another strategy was to refuse to comply with laws written to level the playing field. As long as whites continue to hold most of the public offices, laws can be passed to assuage public rage over discriminatory practices—but failure to prosecute,

fine, or punish those who transgress those laws renders them utterly ineffectual.

This combined history of white America restricting access to property ownership—of refusing to enforce laws intended to level the playing field, of real estate agencies outright refusing to sell to families of color in certain neighborhoods, of banks charging higher rates leading to disproportionate foreclosures and higher costs for lower property values—all of this has combined to ensure that whites consistently control more wealth than other races.

*If you are white, what commitment do you have to racial equity? Are you willing to invest your capital wealth in a diverse neighborhood if you know that at a certain point your property will be devalued?*

Even today, there is a 10% rule in effect in America. Less a rule than an actual phenomenon, what this means is that any home, in any neighborhood—regardless of the economic stratum—is worth less once the black population of the neighborhood hits 10%. That poses some very compelling questions for whites and for blacks.

If you are white, what commitment do you have to racial equity? Are you willing to invest your capital wealth in a diverse neighborhood if you know that at a certain point your property will be devalued? Will you move out of a neighborhood that reaches that saturation point once you see how your property is now worth less?

If you are black, you are faced with a very different question—and one with very different consequences on the other side of the answer. The question is this: if you are part of a population that has a 12% demographic ratio, and you aren't among the first 9% to live in a neighborhood of your choosing, where do you live without compromising the return on your investment and the value of your property?

This phenomenon has nothing to do with economic or even legal impediments. This is nothing more than the byproduct of the privilege given to whites to build communities that conform to their liking. This gets reduced to whites feeling threatened when blacks move in—regardless of how rich they are or how much money they bring to the table (note, not *being* threatened, but *feeling* threatened).

Whites will tolerate some diversity on their street—up to a point. Without calculating anything, without legislating anything, without drawing up new covenants or codes of ethics, white America has uniformly decided that 10% is too much. There is no formula that announces that at 10% we are going

to reduce our property value. It just is a consistent phenomenon that shows that at the 10% mark, whites begin to feel as if—*feel as if*—they don't want to live in that neighborhood anymore. That alone—that desire to flee to greener grass—makes the same house on the same street in the same neighborhood worth less money.

In community after community across America, only 9% of racial minorities are able to invest in property commensurate with the values that whites with the same earning potential receive. This is a manifestation of whiteness that carries a cash value.

Property values then affect a whole array of other community assets. They establish the tax bases that generate revenues for schools, for roads, for common services that every neighborhood wants and needs. Business owners will make decisions about where to locate their businesses. Grocery stores, department stores, gas stations, hospitals, restaurants—all look for neighborhoods where enough wealth is accumulated to make it worth their while.

Where neighborhoods are populated by largely minority communities, the tax base generated from property value is often insufficient to provide those things that white families take for granted. Food deserts are becoming more and more common in minority communities.

So much of what middle class white families take for granted is a byproduct of their property value. During one's lifetime, it generates higher taxes to support the schools, hospitals, and government agencies built to meet the common needs of any community. After they die, inheritance laws afford them the opportunity to transfer that accumulated wealth to another generation. Centuries after a system that began with an instantiated prohibition against property ownership by anyone but white men, these current biases that manifest when more than 9% of a community is no longer white conspire to perpetuate white privilege.

*one thing you will commit to do as a result of this new insight.*

### **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

1. *Talk about the racial composition of your street or neighborhood. How did the racial composition of your neighborhood affect your decision to move into this house or this neighborhood?*
2. *Often in conversations about privilege, and in particular in conversations about the communities in which one lives, one will hear it said: "But we don't have any people of color in our community/ neighborhood/town." If that is true of your community or church, take some time to talk about what conditions and circumstances contribute to that being the case. How does it feel for you to live in an all white community or worship in an all white church?*
3. *Share something that you learned about how white privilege affects housing markets. Name*



# chapter four

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## HOW INCOME AND WEALTH DISPARITIES ADVANTAGE WHITES

*John Paddock*

One of my adult daughters called recently after a storm had blown through with high winds. A backyard tree had been split. Half of it had fallen into her yard, and the other half was partially standing but leaning in the direction of her neighbor's property threatening the neighbor's power lines. Some of the siding and roof shingles had been blown off of her house as well. "Dad, what do I do?" she asked.

I told her to call her insurance agent, who would advise her about how to proceed with assessing damages and might even recommend possible contractors to safely remove the tree and make the house repairs.

"But Dad, there's a \$1000 deductible, and I don't have it."

I reassured her, saying that her mom and I had her covered. We could easily pay whatever portion of the deductible she couldn't afford.

There were a number of times that earlier generations of Paddocks had enough resources to

help the next generation. When my parents' home burned in the 1940s, my paternal grandparents had a large enough home and income to take them in for six months and feed them. (I was born during that period.) When I was in college, my grandparents were able to help me with clothing, laundry, and spending money. At seminary, I needed to have a car to do field work. My parents helped with car payments and insurance for my VW bug.

After marriage and starting my own family, there were two times that we inherited money—from parents and from a great aunt. It never amounted to vast wealth, but those funds allowed us to make improvements that increased the value of our home, paid for children's educations, and replaced older vehicles.

In addition to our daughter's most recent experience with her homeowner's deductible, we have had the wherewithal to assist two other children with plane tickets home when they were stuck overseas. We've helped with deposits for cars, purchase of college books, emergency dental expenses, and countless other needs.

Whiteness has cash value.



The Pew Research Center reported that in 2007, just before the Great Recession, the median white household was worth 10 times more than the typical black household. By 2013, the ratio had risen to the point that white households had 12.9 times more than blacks. The median white household was worth \$141,900 while the median black household was worth just \$11,000. (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-greatrecession/>)

Other researchers and studies reveal similar or even worse gaps. A New York University study cited by the Slate.com blog “Moneybox” showed that if one removes the value of a car, the median black family is worth only \$1,700, with 40% having zero or negative wealth. This would make the median white family 69 times wealthier. ([http://www.slate.com/blogs/moneybox/2014/12/15/the\\_black\\_white\\_wealth\\_gap\\_it\\_s\\_bigger\\_than\\_you\\_even\\_think.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/moneybox/2014/12/15/the_black_white_wealth_gap_it_s_bigger_than_you_even_think.html))

**Whiteness has cash value.  
The history behind this is clear.**

I’m fairly certain that my family’s wealth doesn’t quite reach the median for whites overall, but we have the capacity to effortlessly cover our daughter’s emergency need. If we did not have the money in liquid assets, we definitely have enough credit to meet that and much more.

Whiteness has cash value. The history behind this is clear. Slaves were brought to these shores primarily to work the land. They enriched the plantation owners in the South. The proceeds from slave labor served to create wealth for many in the North as well. There were cotton mills, clothing factories, foundries, ships, and railroads that united North and South and connected with overseas markets.

In a fascinating documentary film, *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*, the producers demonstrate how the “triangle trade” created tremendous wealth for the DeWolf family of Bristol, Rhode Island. It is a description of how rum produced in Bristol was then traded for slaves on the west coast of Africa. The slaves were taken to Cuba to be sold for transport to the American South or put to work on the family’s Cuban sugar plantations. DeWolfowned ships then transported the sugarcane back to Bristol for conversion into rum, and the cycle began again. This practice continued for many years after the trans-Atlantic slave trade was banned.

During the years of the American practice of slavery, whites conquered and confiscated land, bought and sold slaves and real estate, profited from the sale of agricultural products, built and created factories and businesses and banks. And we invested.

From the perspective of today, we look around and see all sorts of inequalities between whites and



blacks. Without the perception of the great White Bonus we've inherited, it's too easy to blame the victims and believe that they should just try harder. Born on third base, many whites believe that we've hit a triple. It is often heard that blacks should just "pull themselves up by their bootstraps."

The Rev. Lynice Pinkard, quoted in the *Sun Magazine* article "Dangerous Love: Reverend Lynice Pinkard On the Revolutionary Act of Living the Gospels" (October 2014, p 13), explains why many slaves and their descendants had no bootstraps: ". . . the truth is we were too busy pulling *your* bootstraps up— picking your cotton, chopping your cane, plowing your fields, raising your children, cooking your food . . . ."

At the end of the Civil War, a number of people began to think about reparations for former slaves. How would such large numbers be able to support themselves and their families when they had nothing? Some black leaders and whites like General Sherman talked about breaking up the plantations and giving the land to former slaves as a way of getting a leg up. In addition to being the name of Spike Lee's film company, "Forty Acres and a Mule" became the slogan for this effort. Unfortunately, it never came to pass. Instead, many former slaves became sharecroppers, wasted away in refugee camps, or were re-enslaved through laws that criminalized vagrancy and unemployment that put them in prison from whence they were "rented

out" for labor to white land-, mine-, and factory owners.

Throughout the era of Reconstruction and Jim Crow, whites continued to see our Bonus grow. While the Great Depression hit both blacks and whites very hard, World War II, and particularly the G.I. Bill of Rights, boosted many whites out of the Depression. Prior to the war, secondary education and homeownership were often beyond the means of many whites. My own maternal grandparents lived in West Virginia, where my grandfather was a self-taught mining engineer. Initially, they lived in a "company house" and shopped at the "company store." They were paid in script that was only good at company owned businesses. After the war, they were able to buy the "company house" and were paid in U.S. dollars.

My paternal grandfather saved and scrimped until he was able to buy a house kit out of the Montgomery Ward catalogue in the late 1920s. He built it with his own hands and held it free and clear before the Depression hit. He and my grandmother lived in that house until their health failed in the 1970s.

The G.I. Bill of 1944 provided assistance with college education, home loan guarantees, unemployment pay, and buying farms and starting businesses. Many credit the G.I. Bill with creating the great American middle class. But we need to put a big footnote here. Although this was a great



welfare bonus for white G.I.'s, it was largely denied to black G.I.'s. Southern congressmen insisted that "agricultural laborers" be excluded before they gave their needed support to pass the measure. The vast majority of blacks were employed as agricultural workers.

For most of my working life, my church employers have paid into a pension fund that was created, in part, by a banker by the name of J.P. Morgan. John Pierpont Morgan inherited wealth. During the Civil War, he paid another man to take his place in the Union Army. He was a war profiteer who, according to Howard Zinn:

. . . bought five thousand rifles for \$3.50 each from an army arsenal, and sold them to a general in the field for \$22 each. The rifles were defective and would shoot off the thumbs of the soldiers using them. A congressional committee noted this in the small print of an obscure report, but a federal judge upheld the deal as the fulfillment of a valid legal contract. (*A People's History*, p 255)

Morgan was numbered among the Robber Barons (or, more positively, "Captains of Industry"). Zinn opened his chapter on the Robber Barons with these words:

In the year 1877, the signals were given for the rest of the century: the blacks would be put back; the strikes of white workers would not be

tolerated; the industrial and political elites of North and South would take hold of the country and organize the greatest march of economic growth in human history. They would do it with the aid of, and at the expense of, black labor, white labor, Chinese labor, European immigrant labor, female labor, rewarding them differently by race, sex, national origin, and social class, in such a way as to create separate levels of oppression—a skillful terracing to stabilize the pyramid of wealth. (p 187)

Whether one accepts that J.P. Morgan and others deliberately collaborated in creating the *pyramid of wealth*, the fact remains that there is real financial benefit that accrues to whites. In addition to family wealth and inheritance, white wages are higher, whites are less likely to live below the poverty line, and whites have lower unemployment rates.

I  
In a few years when I retire in a predominately white denomination where the majority of senior clergy jobs are held by white men, I will continue to have an income close to what I have now. And I will owe that to a pension system designed by J.P. Morgan and other Captains of Industry in the early years of the twentieth century. Unlike some pension plans (think of retired public employee pensions in Detroit), The Church Pension Fund (Episcopal) is fully funded— meaning that it already has enough money to pay all the pensions now if we all retired today.



Whiteness has cash value.

When we were house shopping in preparation for a move to our present community, we contacted a realtor to whom we had been referred. My wife had already been online to look up potential homes. When she called and told the white realtor in advance of our house-buying trip that we wanted him to arrange for us to see several houses that she had found, he *explained* that these were in marginal neighborhoods where it wasn't safe to live. What he meant was that these homes were in "mixed" neighborhoods where real estate would decline in value. And it was true. We bought one of those houses in a mixed neighborhood. We've been perfectly safe for the past 17 years that we've lived in our home. But after the Great Recession with its mortgage and foreclosure crisis, our home today is assessed at only two-thirds of what we paid for it. Property values in predominantly white suburban neighborhoods in our area have recovered and are once again increasing in value. My "mixed" neighborhood lags far behind.

In fact, I recently learned about the 10% rule in real estate. Research shows that homes in majority black neighborhoods do not appreciate as much as homes in overwhelmingly white neighborhoods. This appreciation gap begins whenever a neighborhood is more than 10% black, and it increases right along with the percentage of black homeowners.

If you think this is class and not race, you are wrong. A 2001 Brookings Institution study showed that "wealthy minority neighborhoods had less home value per dollar of income than wealthy white neighborhoods." The same study concluded that "poor white neighborhoods had more home value per income than poor minority neighborhoods."

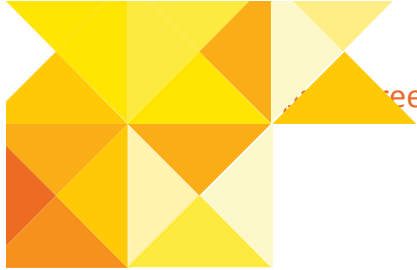
Those conclusions are supported by a large body of research. Put simply, the market penalizes integration: the higher the percentage of blacks in the neighborhood, the less the home is worth, even when researchers control for age, social class, household structure, and geography.

Others writing in this section are exploring education, housing, healthcare, and the criminal justice system. In reality, all of these are tied together in ways that increase the value of whiteness.

### Refelctions Questions and Discussion Topics

1. *Where has the cash value of whiteness paid off in your life and your family?*
  - *Family wealth and inheritance?*
  - *Education?*
  - *Employment?*
  - *Compensation and benefits?*
  - *Mortgage and credit?*
  - *Legal representation?*
  - *Social networking and business connections?*





- *Government policies?*
2. *In your group, explore the question of the pyramid of wealth. Where are you in the pyramid? Who is above you and who is below? How did you get there? What keeps you there?*
  3. *What would 40 acres and a mule look like today?*



# chapter five

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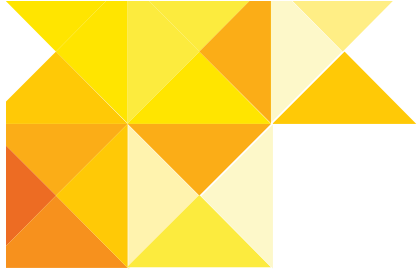
## HOW THE MEDICAL AND HEALTH INDUSTRY ADVANTAGE WHITES

### *Da Vita D. McCallister*

I grew up watching sports. The best way to spend time with my Dad was to place yourself on the family couch in front of the TV during a sporting event. We were blessed to live in a community that had teams for all of the major sports: The Washington Bullets (now the Wizards), the Baltimore Orioles (before we added the Washington Nationals) and the professional football team in Washington, D.C. (I remain a diehard fan of the burgundy and gold but REFUSE to say the team name.)

We watched boxing matches during the time of boxing greats like ‘Sugar Ray Leonard,’ ‘Marvelous Marvin Hagler’ and ‘The Hitman Tommy Hearns.’ The love of sports extended beyond watching TV and into our day-to-day lives. As children we played outside from sun-up until sun-down during the summers. Part of our commitment to sports was connected to my father’s almost obsession with weight. You see, the men in my family are all athletic and they take great pride in their appearance.

I can fill my Facebook page with photos for “Throwback Thursday” for years with photos of my Dad, my uncles and my male cousins’ commitment to the physical form. We have a body-builder, a professional boxer, pee-wee football players and a host of weekend warriors on the basketball court. As a “Tomboy” growing up I took after the men in my family. I played football with my brother and the neighborhood kids as often as I could. I parroted my father, practiced my tennis stance in our carport, challenged him to basketball games on the local court and did my best to outlast every member of my family when we walked the track for laps. I wanted to be like my Dad and my Uncles. They were strong and playful. I always felt safe in my Uncles’ care; they could fix cars, had muscles I could see and seemed to be able to pick up me and my siblings, at the same time, no matter our age. My Dad and my Uncles took pride in the fact that they could give their sons and nephews a run for their money physically.



Yet, for the majority of my life, each of them has almost steadfastly refused traditional medical care. It

has required the women in my family to spend significant amounts of time cajoling, arguing, crying and imploring them to receive medical treatments. Even after my father was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease my Uncles argued that he should not take the medications prescribed by his physician. They were convinced that the medicines

robbed the men in her life of the ability to trust the health care industry in America. And if that were the case how the trauma of that moment might still be claiming victims all these years later.

part three | the cash value of whiteness or whiteness as a tax-exempt

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were poisoned and did more harm than good. One of my Uncles became an expert in alternative medicine. I chalked it up to his lifestyle on the farm. I assumed that he simply believed in all things natural, but something else was happening and it was heartbreaking to contemplate.

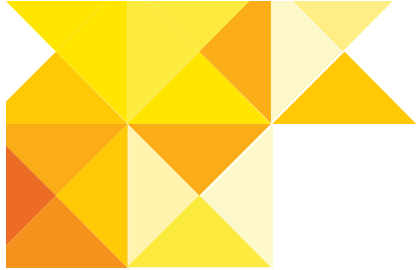
My mother called me with an “Aha” moment, as she too was struggling to make sense of the sharp declines in health among the men in our family and the reticence to seek medical care. She recalled the Tuskegee Experiment: the intentional withholding of medical treatment for Black men with syphilis for over 30 years<sup>1</sup>. My mother, father, step-parents, uncles and aunts were in their twenties when the truth of the study was revealed. They grew up in the South and were well acquainted with the way physicians and health care professionals treated men and women of color in examining rooms. My mother wondered aloud if this event in history had

*My mother wondered aloud if this event in history had robbed the men in her life of the ability to trust the health care industry in America.*

Her realization reminded me of the work of Dr. Joy DeGruy, the author of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*. Dr. DeGruy, a trained Social Worker and Clinical Psychologist with a Ph.D. in Social Work Research<sup>2</sup>, lectures on the lingering psychological impacts of systemic racism on Communities of Color. I had read about the Tuskegee Experiment in my high school classes but never considered the wide range of impacts that a single study could have on an entire population. Imagine having no confidence in the professionals that are supposed to insure your health and offer you medical care. How would that affect your

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website on the “U.S. Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee.” <http://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/timeline.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Joy DeGruy website <http://joydegruy.com/>



quality of life? How sick would you have to be in order to push against your concerns for your safety to risk the possibility of wellness?

Dr. DeGruy’s lectures and videos opened my eyes to the invisible trauma that many People of Color endure on a daily basis. The “Strong Black Woman” who appears to be invulnerable to any and all assaults on her personhood, beauty and body. The “Big Black Buck” who is able to withstand bullets and turn in agitation toward a frightened police officer who is forced to use lethal force. I had heard all of the statistics on life expectancy and have seen the graphs on health disparities but I had never considered the psychological health of People of Color and the diminishment of the quality of life due to fear and oppression. The difference in life

health care impacted their overall health into retirement? How many white seniors have had to travel to another town to find a clinician of the same race? How many white seniors have not seen images of themselves on the walls of the doctor’s offices they visited or received the statistics for health risks associated with another race because no comparable studies were done for their community?

Now assign a numeric value to the psychological cost . . . is it 3 years of wellness; 10 years of good blood pressure? Is it an additional million dollars in revenue earned over a lifetime? How do we calculate the true benefit of Whiteness in health care and medical treatment and the real cost of systemic racism for Persons of Color? I count it with the lines of worry on my mother’s face . . .

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expectancy between Black and White people is 4.9 years<sup>3</sup>. Yet, I

can’t help but wonder what the last decade looks like for those two groups.

How many white seniors have benefited from health care provided by individuals who reflected their cultural and ethnic heritage? How has that access to

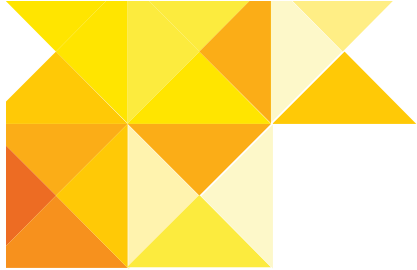
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<sup>3</sup> Disparities in Healthcare Quality Among Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups: Selected Findings From the 2010 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Reports <http://archive.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrd/r/nhqrd10/minority.html>

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### Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics

1. *How many physicians of color are available in your community? How many dentists of color are available in your community? How many surgeons of color are available in your community? (Your answer maybe a rough estimate based on available information.)*
2. *Imagine that you became aware that the hospital in your town knowingly misled patients and withheld treatment for years. Consider that physicians and hospital administrators from other towns knew of this policy and said nothing for over 25 years. Describe your level of trust in the health care industry after this is brought to*



*light. What would you teach your children about traditional medical care and health*

*care providers?*

- 3. How many sick days do you use per year? How would this number change if you did not seek medical care? If you believe this would increase the number of sick days consider the financial and emotional costs of this increase. How might this impact your ability to remain employed and your earning potential?*



# four

ON BECOMING AN

ALLY

## chapter one

DA VITA D. MCCALLISTER


I traveled to Ferguson, Missouri twice in 2014. The first time was at the end of August, just as the protests in the city were beginning to gain national attention. I had learned of the work of a UCC pastor in Florissant, Missouri and I traveled along with a colleague from our Racial Justice Ministry. I serve the Connecticut Conference of the UCC and we were well acquainted with suddenly being caught in the “Gaze” of the nation.

Just two years earlier the nation had shifted its “gaze” to the Sandy Hook elementary school

shooting.<sup>4</sup> Forever linking this bedroom community to a horrific act of violence perpetrated against the most vulnerable among us. As a Conference staff we had learned some hard lessons on the importance of caring for clergy most directly impacted and those in geographic proximity. We knew how difficult it was to recalibrate after the perception you hold of your community is reshaped on the evening news. I, along with my colleague, traveled to Ferguson to offer what little we knew to the Conference staff and to stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Missouri.

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<sup>4</sup> The **Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting** occurred on December 14, 2012, in [Newtown, Connecticut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newtown,_Connecticut), when 20-year-old Adam Lanza fatally shot 20 children aged between 6 and 7 years old, as well as six adult staff members. Prior to driving to the school, Lanza shot and killed his mother at their Newtown home. As first responders arrived at the scene, Lanza committed [suicide](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide) by shooting himself in the head. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy\\_Hook\\_Elementary\\_School\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy_Hook_Elementary_School_shooting)



We met with Conference staff and the staff convened leaders from across the Conference who either had a history of work in Racial Justice or had been involved on the ground in Ferguson. But several of the leaders who were responding to the work on the frontlines did not attend. Others who gathered around the table called our presence into question: “Why had we really come?” “What was the UCC trying to do?” “Why hadn’t we come sooner or brought resources?” I was perplexed, defensive and sad. Our intention was to walk in Covenant with another Conference, but that had not been an established practice. We didn’t know anything about the nature or the relationships within the Conference or the needs of those most directly affected.


We traveled around the city trying to get a sense of the community, drove to the place where Michael Brown’s body lay in the street for over four hours. We noticed the proximity of the windows to the street in the Canfield Apartments and wondered aloud who had peered out of their bedrooms and discovered a body in the street. We feared they were children home during the summer break, who

She had earned their trust and gained their respect through her humility and direct action. She had placed her body in harm’s way, she located alternative housing for those forced from their homes by tear gas that drenched their clothes and polluted their furnishings.

On this August Sunday morning she read cards and letters sent from congregations across the country. Pictures drawn by Sunday School classes were displayed for the congregation to see. An intern had been sent from Old South Church in Massachusetts with the gift of Peace Cranes. These cranes had traveled the country going from church to church at the site of unmitigated violence. The Rev. Nancy Taylor, Senior Pastor of Old South Church, sent a note along with the cranes and the intern to Christ The King.

Rev. Blackmon read the note in its entirety to the congregation. Rev. Taylor’s words rang out through the sanctuary; she linked the Boston Marathon Bombing with the death of Michael Brown. She drew a connecting line between both events as acts of terror and pointed to the insidious nature of the terror that Rev. Blackmon and members of her church faced. Rev. Taylor’s church had been

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would be traumatized by the image of an uncovered bloodied body. Would they have nightmares? Would they be able to un-see that horror? Would they return to the street to play or spend the remaining days of their summer-break in their homes riddled with fear? On Sunday morning we traveled to worship, visiting two of our sister churches. The second church was Christ The King, pastored by the Rev. Traci Blackmon. Her ministry on the frontlines had been noticed by members of the small community in the Canfield Apartments.<sup>16</sup>

surrounded with care and the nation grieved the loss of life that happened just outside their doors, but the nation was NOT grieving this loss.

In that moment it became clear who the Ally was in this story. I had rushed in and assumed that I knew what was needed. I had retreated to defense when my motives were questioned. Rev. Taylor wrote a powerful letter expressing her sadness and disappointment, she sent a visible sign of her



sorrow and named the systemic racism as an echo of the voices from the

voiceless people, only those who do not have an audience.” In my attempt to be an Ally I had assumed the Voice of the people and presumed that

streets of Ferguson.

*In my attempt to be an Ally I had assumed the Voice of the people and presumed that I knew the need.*

In her sermon, Rev. Blackmon reminded the assembled congregation that “there are NO

I knew the need. Rev. Blackmon reminded me of the role of an Ally: to use my resources to increase the audience of those often unheard and silenced by racism. When I returned home I did just that, sharing the stories that I had heard and asking Rev. Blackmon what she needed most. I was clumsy in my request and made many more mistakes, but with each mistake I learned something not to do. I vowed to make new mistakes and I continued to press forward.

5 The Canfield Apartments were the site of the shooting of Michael Brown.

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My second visit to Ferguson was much different. I watched with the nation in rapt attention as the announcement was read: “There was no true bill” from the grand jury for Officer Darren Wilson. He would not be charged in the death of Michael Brown. Many had suspected for days that the announcement would come during the Thanksgiving holiday. It is the busiest travel holiday in the year and this would likely reduce the size of the nightly protest. Community members, parents, children, young adults, interested citizens and organizers flooded the streets at night to protest the policing in the Ferguson community. They marched in the sun, the rain and they were prepared to march in the snow. I sat with my partner and discussed our plans for Thanksgiving; we were scheduled to visit my sister’s home. After prayerful deliberation I returned to Ferguson.

would address a crowd huddled around them and whisper the next location or action. The communication was word of mouth and no phones were allowed in the circle. After several protests I began to recognize faces in the crowd. I wore my cleric collar and was invited to pray one evening. As I stood on the street where Michael’s blood had pooled and stained the ground, I was shoulder to shoulder with those most impacted. I was there to go where they asked and to do what they requested. I was one additional body to speak truth to power.

This time I did not meet with the Conference staff, nor did I convene any meetings. I went to the street at night and I marched. Each night a young adult

My oldest daughter learned of my trip and asked if she could come as well. I instructed her to find transportation and promised to house and feed her. She came with several friends in tow. Together we stood beside our brothers and sisters and we followed their lead. We lay in the street to disrupt traffic, sang aloud in the mall that “Black Lives Matter” and watched shoppers join our rallying cry. We learned later that the cost to the economy on Black Friday was significant. It was large enough





to change the tone and discourse of the city leaders to the protestors on the front line.

When I returned home, my partner and I gathered our children and our nieces and nephews. I shared my experience with them and talked about the young people who had led me in Missouri. We visited websites and we talked about policing in Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport, Connecticut. At the end of the conversation we told them of our new commitment. The movement leaders asked for supporters to extend the boycott of Black Friday through the month of December. We created a small red card and placed it inside of our Christmas cards sent to family and friends annually. The card acknowledged the Joy of the Birth of Jesus and the inability to fully celebrate his birth in light of the death and disregard for black and brown bodies. We invited them to use the resources dedicated to our gifts in support of the movement and explained that we would do the same with our resources. We covenanted to provide financial support to the young adults in our lives and the young adults on the frontlines of the struggle.

*There is no neat way to dismantle a system built to dehumanize people. There are no magic words to gain instant credibility and deep trust.*

I was learning to be an Ally. I still make mistakes, sometimes speaking when I should be listening, or failing to acknowledge all of the ways that participating in the struggle may manifest. I offer training in Racial Justice, others stand on the frontlines and protest, some work to change problematic policies, others preach to change hearts and minds. What I know of being an Ally and welcoming other Allies is that it is messy work. There is no neat way to dismantle a system built to dehumanize people. There are no magic words to gain instant credibility and deep trust. There is only a willingness to wade into the water, knowing that it has been troubled . . .

#### **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

1. *Describe the worst mistake you could make as an Ally. After you describe it imagine how you would overcome it.*
2. *What tools do you have to resist the temptation to become defensive?*
3. *Look up the word “microaggression” and examine your behavior through this lens. Are you guilty of inflicting a papercut on a Person*




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*of Color? If so consider that the papercut you inflicted was likely the 1000th papercut on that day and imagine the anger and pain you would*



*feel from so many wounds. Now revisit the tools you have to resist the temptation to*

*become defensive when a Person of Color questions your behavior.*

and television. Tarzan, so the story went, was a white man who grew up in an African jungle and was raised by apes. Tarzan always knew what was best.

He always knew better than everyone else. He knew the jungle better. He knew the animals better. He knew better than the native peoples.

African Americans have suffered deeply and survived in this land. They know what it takes to survive in the American jungle of systemic racism

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# chapter two

JOHN PADDOCK

For me, this is the most difficult part of this study on white privilege. If you will recall my spiritual autobiography in the first section, I went through much of my adult life thinking that I was a really great ally—all the while being largely unconscious of both my race and the privilege it bestowed upon me. So you can imagine my hesitation to think that I know how to be a helpful ally in combatting white power and privilege and joining the struggle for racial justice.

It's hard to be a good ally when you thought you already were, but then found out that you weren't. One of the effects of privilege is that it can blind us and undermine our best efforts, turning them into a form of paternalism—which is to say, another form of power.

So I start this section with some cautions, some considerations about what not to do.

## *Tarzan*

One of my black acquaintances, in reflecting on white allies, speaks about Tarzan. Many folk of a certain age will remember Tarzan from the movies

and white privilege. They also know what they need to continue to survive. There's a kind of *Tarzan Syndrome* in many white churches and social service agencies run by whites that presumes to know the processes and needs of their black neighbors better than the neighbors themselves.

So one of the ways to be helpful is simply to pay attention and to listen. Listen to folk who have lived the struggle of being black in America. There is a wealth of literature that reveals what life is like on the other side of the color line: W.E.B. DuBois, Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, and Ta-Nehisi Coates, to name just a few authors.

Perhaps you have black acquaintances or colleagues with whom you can dialogue. There may be organizations to join, public lectures to attend, seminars or university courses to take. But the critical behavior here is to inquire and to listen. Let go of the need to debate and control and to set the agenda. First, listen and learn.

### ***Cherry-Picking Black Leaders/Black Anger***

I know a white man who is passionate about improving race relations in his community. He supports all sorts of dialogues between blacks and whites in homes and neighborhoods, among congregations and faith communities, schools and colleges, in businesses and non-profit organizations. Periodically, there will be an incident or a rash of clashes involving racial tension, and this gentleman will call clergy together to try to start another round of dialogues. We all show up because he's a kindly, progressive, respected community grandfather.

*We have MLK Day, but no holiday for Malcolm.*

In those gatherings, there are always one or more black clergy who are outspoken and overtly angry. A few years ago, I began to notice a pattern developing. At each subsequent meeting, there were a few new black clergy, but the angry voices were not invited back. This admired, grandfatherly community leader was cherry-picking the black clergy—attempting to ordain the ones he would select as leaders and be in relationship with.

Recognize that there are people who aren't going to embrace us easily or ever. The pain caused by centuries of slavery, Jim Crow, systemic racism, and white privilege is deep and formidable.

Choosing which black leaders we whites will work with is another form of control. We are afraid of angry black men. We liked Martin Luther King, Jr.

and the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Council) a whole lot more than we did Malcolm X or the Black Panthers. We have MLK Day, but no holiday for Malcolm.

Consider the outrage directed at President Obama when he expressed anger over the arrest of Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Gates was arrested as he was letting himself into his own home in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the summer of 2009. When asked about it at a press conference, Obama said:

I don't know, not having been there and not seeing all the facts, what role race played in that. But I think it's fair to say, number one, any of us would be pretty angry; number two, that the Cambridge police acted stupidly in arresting somebody when there was already proof that they were in their own home, and, number three, what I think we know separate and apart from this incident is that there's a long history in this country of African Americans and Latinos being stopped by law enforcement disproportionately.

The outcry from law enforcement agencies and others from across the country caused the president to apologize and to invite Gates and his arresting officer to share a beer with him on the White House lawn as a show of peace and calm. Note that Obama's anger was considered inappropriate while the anger of the white voices raised in protest was thought to be justified.

To be effective allies, white folk must give up control of the agenda and selection of which leaders we are willing to work with—shedding the need to control the players and the outcomes. We must steel ourselves to hear the anger and the pain endured over the centuries. I want to close my ears to it. I want to avoid the guilt and the grief I feel. I don't want to experience fear and anxiety. But I finally realize that only white privilege allows me to escape what my black sisters and brothers face every day of their lives.

### ***Deconstructing Integration***

Take some time to deconstruct integration. The great hope of many in the Civil Rights movement of the last century was that ending segregated schools, lunch counters, and neighborhoods would be the solution to the racial divide.

*The truth is that whites put the race card into play many centuries ago and have never taken it off the table.*

In practice, integration was too often a one-way street where whites insisted on blacks adopting white values, behavior, and culture, while whites didn't have to make any moves at all other than welcoming blacks into the white world. This was too often the subtle and unspoken work of white privilege which assumed that standard (normal) white English would be spoken, black hair would be straightened, white fashion would be worn, and so on.

True integration involves being open to the other. In a healthy relationship, your story impacts my story and vice versa. We embrace and are changed by each other, and what emerges is something new.

### ***Work with Whites***

Use this curriculum or join other anti-racism efforts to help fellow whites to understand their power and privilege. Too many of us, unaware of our race and its effects, believe that “race” belongs to someone else. Therefore, when a race problem occurs, it is someone else's problem. Raising consciousness is an excellent way to help whites take ownership of our whiteness and to realize that we are deeply implicated in the structures of racism.

Another caution: bringing up the subject of race can uncover powerful emotions. I learned this early on in trying to do this work. Speaking about prejudice, racism, white power, and privilege may stir up deep wells of denial, guilt, grief, and anger. Do not be judgmental, and try to help others to understand that we are all—black and white—caught up in systemic racism that is much larger than and far beyond individual choices. It is among those “principalities and powers” of which St. Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12.

So do not be surprised if powerful emotions are expressed. You may be charged with “playing the race card,” which is another way of charging you with creating racial tension by even bringing the subject up. Don't be put off. The truth is that whites

put the race card into play many centuries ago and have never taken it off the table.

### ***Implicit Bias***

All people have biases and preferences in almost every aspect of life: sexuality, religion, body weight, gender, etc. Bias can be explicit or implicit. The bias of a KKK member carrying a sign expressing hate is explicit. But an implicit bias in favor of whitesounding names on the part of a human resources officer can have significant impact on employment decisions. These subconscious and unexamined biases can and do turn deadly when they impact split-second decisions by police officers on when to use lethal force.

Significant research has been conducted into the subject of implicit bias. You can learn more about your own implicit biases by taking the Implicit Association Test on race at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>.

Use the following guidelines and questions to reflect on and improve your own capacity to be an ally:

### ***General Behaviors that are Helpful for Allies***


- *Listen without making judgments.*
- *Use appropriate language, and if you are uncertain about what is appropriate, then ask.*
- *Speak out when inappropriate language is used or racist ideas are expressed. Do not keep silent. “Silence is the face of evil is itself evil.*

*God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”*

- *Strive to build relationships with black and brown people. Real relationships break down stereotypes and open people to one another.*
- *Be willing to be corrected and even criticized without defensiveness and with humility.*
- *Show up without thinking that you have to help (which puts you in a superior position).*

### ***Positive Actions to Consider***

- *Volunteer with voter registration and voter turnout in minority communities.*
- *Support the Black Lives Matter movement and other black-led movements and organizations as they may exist or arise in the future.*
- *Support education reforms like free, quality public preschools and extended school days, especially in poor communities. There is a school to prison pipeline. In many states, prison authorities use third grade reading scores to predict the number of jail cells and prisons that will be needed in the future.*
- *Volunteer to tutor and/or assist young elementary students to read.*
- *Study the inequalities in our prisons and work for criminal justice reform.*
- *Join efforts to repeal the 13th Amendment’s exception clause. Ostensibly, the 13th Amendment, passed in 1865, banned slavery. But the exception clause still allows it. The amendment reads: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly*



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*convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."*

- *Support local efforts at community development through micro-loans and other forms of community investment.*

### **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

1. *What unspoken standards and expectations do you hold about integration? Would you be willing to be changed? What are you unwilling to give up?*
2. *Where do you see the Tarzan Syndrome at work?*
3. *What would you add to the list of helpful behaviors for allies?*
4. *Take the Implicit Bias test and discuss the findings. (No one should be forced to disclose his or her results.) Were you surprised by the results? Do you agree or disagree with them and why?*
5. *Can you think of ways in your community where whites are trying to select black leaders or to impact leadership and agenda in the black community?*
6. *What positive actions exist or might be created for allies in your local church and community?*



# chapter

## three

TRACI BLACKMON

### *Being An Ally in Anti-Racism Work*

1. Learn before you Leap. It is impossible to act in solidarity with those we are not willing to hear. Do not assume you understand another's pain. Do not compare areas where you have experienced discrimination with racism. The manifestations of oppression differ and each must be acknowledged in it's own right. There is no hierarchy (Audre Lorde).
2. Do your own work for your own sake. Understand the cost of privilege, the toll of racism and why the dismantling of racism is necessary for your liberation.
3. Be a Servant, not a Savior. Liberation must be led by those being oppressed. Their pain AND their power must be at the center of the work. (Talk about this.)
4. In anti-racism work, "ally" is a verb, not a noun. It is only relevant when describing one's current act(s) of solidarity. Those you stand with are the sole determinant of whether or not you are their ally.
5. Commit to doing white people's work. This includes establishing allyship (solidarity) with other white folk who are committed to this work. Establish "whiteness accountability cohorts." This is hard work.
6. Continue to show up. Even when you would rather not. Even when your presence is misunderstood. Define your lane and commit to

riding in it. Don't over promise and try not to under deliver.


7. Use your privilege to make space for others to tell their own story: not you telling it. Just because you know another's story does not mean ownership has been transferred.
8. Do not appropriate the pain of others. Defer to those being targeted.
9. Read. Watch. Listen.
10. Give yourself space for Grace.

...and remember

When I call out your white privilege.  
I am not dismissing your presence in this struggle.  
Nor am I questioning your sincerity.

When I call out your white privilege.  
I am not accusing you of the evil.  
Nor am I separating you from its effects.

When I call out your white privilege.  
I am not shrouding you in its shame.  
Nor am I excusing you from its responsibility or accountability.



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When I call out your white privilege.  
I am naming the target that is on your back. I am acknowledging the ill effect of racism on your being.  
I am joining you to the struggle in the only way that leads to liberation.

When I call out your white privilege.  
I am acknowledging this privilege as being as unearned, unwarranted and incapacitating as the



racist systems and structures  
that collude to oppress people  
of color all over this world.

When I call out your white privilege.  
I sound the alarm of the danger that lurks in not being  
fully aware of the toxic waters in which we swim.  
Waters that make you feel as though you are breathing,  
so that you never come up for air.

When I call out your white privilege.  
It is not because I believe you can remove it alone. Not  
because I believe you can choose to use it or refuse it.  
If these things were true . . . it would be privilege  
indeed.

But it is not.  
It is a tool of the enemy designed to create an illusion  
of God divided against God's self. Crafted so that some  
might assume the idolatrous position of believing  
somehow that anyone created in the image of God  
could ever be inherently flawed.

When I call it out.

White Privilege.  
It is not because I hate you.  
It is not to separate you.  
It is to remind you . . . and myself . . . that we are one.

*A Message to White Accomplices*

Pastor                      Traci                      Blackmon





# chapter four

JOHN DORHAUER

## The White Audit

In this chapter, we will introduce a tool that local churches can use to assess the degree to which they consciously or unconsciously reflect a commitment to White Privilege: a White Audit.

Before we do that, let's take some time to reflect on something very important about this work. When whites commit to working on their privilege, there can exist a subtle, unspoken, yet very powerful assumption about that work which is another manifestation of privilege. The assumption is that by doing this work, whites are engaged in saving, rescuing, or freeing people of color. Whites can begin to see themselves as saviors of a sort.

It is important to identify this tendency, and to come to some new understandings about the work that whites are doing when confronting the manifestation and impact of privilege—and then work to dismantle the systems that distribute that privilege based on skin color.


It is not the role and responsibility of whites to find the pathway to racial equity. Working to identify privilege, and to open one's heart to letting go of it in order to participate in a more racially equitable society is very important work—but it is one step in a larger system of changes that must come before true equity is possible.

Far more valuable to this work will be hearing from those who have suffered the most and the longest from this ongoing commitment to whiteness as the construct through which wealth has been distributed. White solutions to white privilege are almost always filtered through lenses of experience that don't include what people of color endure

every day, and therefore never go far enough to fully dismantle the privilege.

Working on recognizing privilege is the work of white communities. Making firm commitments to participate in dismantling the current system is also the work of white communities. However, imagining what makes for equity, establishing power structures to redistribute wealth and access, assessing the overall impact of those commitments, and determining the extent to which true equity has been established belong to the communities who are now disadvantaged by the current system from which whites benefit.

In this chapter about what it means to be an ally, it is important to recognize that for whites, the work that we are called to is recognizing white privilege and committing in concrete ways to dismantle structures



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that ensure we continue to receive it. That is a very important step in being an ally.

It is just as important a step to cede power and authority to disadvantaged communities and leaders as we seek a pathway to racial equity. Even if whites discover the will to participate in creating fully active solutions, whites will never have the requisite life experience to know what living under unfair, unjust, and often oppressive systems does to one's heart, soul, mind, and body. That insight, those experiences—accumulated now over centuries for communities of color—cannot be replicated by the white experience. There are, however, important and active steps that white allies can take to participate in helping to create racial equity.

In this chapter, we will introduce the White Audit.

A White Audit is a tool that any community can develop to help perform an objective assessment of their commitment to white privilege. Although the concept is a relatively simple one to understand and to implement, it is subject to a variety of applications and can be expanded upon in various ways in different settings.

The idea is to count things that matter. Each number that is recorded can give new insight into your community's attachment to certain manifestations of privilege. Even the act of counting, regardless of the data that it produces, is important in and of itself since it engages the community in actively choosing

to see something that heretofore would have gone unnoticed.

We start with a simple example of what a white audit looks like. This is something that any church or ministry setting can do regardless of their ethnicity, race, or culture.

Walk through your building and register every picture of Jesus. These could be in the sanctuary, in stained glass, in paintings, in Sunday school books, in library books, in pew Bibles, in the Pastor's office, in the hallway or fellowship hall, etc. Once you have a total number of the pictures of Jesus, count how many within that total number portray him as white.

*There are, however, important and active steps that white allies can take to participate in helping to create racial equity.*

You have now begun your white audit. The number says something important about your church and its commitment to white privilege. We know that Jesus was not white. That is a fact of history. When your church hangs a picture of a white Jesus, it is saying something—whether you realize it or not. It would be important to reflect with each other what it is you think you are saying when you portray Jesus as

white. We do this over and over again in America—portray Jesus as white—but we rarely talk about why we do that. This is an opportunity to explore that. An important question is this: what are we teaching our children to absorb and assume when they grow up never seeing anything but a white Jesus?

Hanging a picture of a white Jesus is often, for whites, not a conscious act. Whites don't hang a picture and think, "This is a lovely picture of a WHITE Jesus. We can't have our children thinking Jesus is BLACK, BROWN, RED..." It gets hung because the notion that Jesus is white is so ingrained in our culture. What is the cost of establishing Jesus as white to the point that it no longer interrupts our senses to notice that it does not reflect the truth, and then what effect does that have on our emerging consciousness of race during our childhood?

This is, in part, what a white audit can do. It can interrupt established assumptions and create an openness to questions that have too long gone unasked, as well as open up on the other side of those questions new commitments to creating, to participating in, and to establishing racial equity.

Let's continue then with our white audit.

After you count the pictures of Jesus, do the same thing with pictures, paintings, portrayals of God. Unlike Jesus, we have no idea what race or even gender God is—and yet almost every portrayal will

show God to be white and male. Find out if that is true in your church, and raise the same questions.

As you are doing that, conduct a separate tally. This time, go through and look at every picture on every wall. Those pictures are all chosen—they tell a story. When was the last time you asked what story is being told? Now that we are auditing our stories through the lens of race, look at every picture, count how many are white and how many are not, and ask yourself what story is being told about race in your church.

Let's now take the audit in a different direction. Move from the pictures on the walls to the books on the shelves. Conduct two separate audits here: in one, count the books on the pastor's bookshelf; in the other, count the books in the library. The question here is, "Who wrote the books?" How many of the total books in either the pastor's study or the library are written by white authors? Once you have a figure for this, note it. Ask yourself whether or not that figure reveals a hidden commitment to whiteness as a preference. Discuss what difference that makes in shaping a consciousness about race. If, in fact, it does reveal a race bias, talk about what new commitments your church is willing to make to rectify that.

I want to pause here and reflect on something about the pieces of this white audit that we have already mentioned. When talking about white privilege, one thing that white leaders in largely white communities say is that it is hard for them to make

significant changes because they live in a largely white community.

Before we move into another arena of data gathering, have your church look at one more aspect of its life. If you do any advertising or marketing, whether in print or on social media, what are you portraying in your marketing campaign? Are you choosing images that reflect a commitment to racial equity? If not, why not – and what are you willing to do differently? None of what you have been asked to do to this point in the white audit is either dependent on or conditioned by living in a predominantly white community. Photos and books are decisions conditioned by something other than population rates.

For this part of the audit, go through the step of finding out some demographic information about your city, town, zip code, community, or neighborhood. Use those figures as a baseline for interpreting the data in your audit. For the sake of example only, let us assume that you discover that 80% of your community is white; 12% is black; 4% is Hispanic, 2% is Asian/Pacific Island, and 2% is Native American.

Next, go through the current membership list, through the pastor's records, and through any and all historic or archived material your church has that records membership information. Begin to, as best you are able, determine the following (this is not a comprehensive list, and please feel free to add to it):

- What percentage of the current membership is white? How does that compare to the demographics of your area?
- What percentage of baptisms, confirmations, and weddings performed by the pastor are to/for white members?
- What percentage of new member calls or visits are to white families?
- What percentage of pastors called throughout the life of the Church are white?
- What percentage of Council members are white?
- What percentage of past Moderators or Board Presidents are white?
- What percentage of Sunday school teachers are white?

If your church is largely, or perhaps entirely, white, these numbers are going to be very consistent. What will be most revealing in this audit is how that percentage compares to the demographic data in your area. If there is a clear discrepancy between those numbers, begin to ask your community what that says about commitments to racial equity. Go even further, though, and ask what new commitments you can make to racial equity that would effect a different outcome.

The final category of auditing material we ask you to look at has to do with the finances and investments of the church's capital resources. This is where we can talk about making deep impact, depending on the size of your church's budget.

Even small churches in either rural or urban communities, though, can have a deep impact both by the decisions they make in spending or investing their money, and in the collective impact of an entire denomination acting in one accord.

Try to make a list of all the vendors you use to either spend or invest the money stewarded by the church. What we are asking about here is how many of the vendors that you use, for whatever reason, are managed or owned by whites? Most white leaders of largely white churches don't ever ask this question— but it is a very important question. To conduct this part of the audit, find out which of the following businesses used by your church are white owned, operated, and managed (you can also try to find out from larger companies, like cell phone contractors or banks, what their own discrimination or hiring practices are):

- Where do you do your banking?
- If you have had any construction or repair work done on the property, find out what you can about the construction firm you hired to do the work; or about the architectural firm; or about any of the subcontractors used.
- Where do you buy your office supplies—things like toner, paper, pens, bulletins, copiers, phones, etc.?
- What catering businesses do you use?
- Whom do you employ to do maintenance or cleaning in the building?
- Whom do you hire to work in your nursery?
- What firm do you use to invest your money?

- Whom do you hire to mow the lawn or do landscaping?

Choosing to use your own money to affect racial equity can have a profound impact. It begins with the discipline of asking questions that often are not asked—which is the point and purpose of this audit.

This is only a beginning. If you choose to act as an ally, please take the time to begin the process of conducting a white audit. Publish the results, and always accompany the information with shared conversation about what the data suggest about commitments to white privilege, and about what your community of faith is willing to do to participate in change that matters.

### Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics

1. *With whom do you need to speak, and with whom do you need to partner, to start a white audit in your church?*
2. *Name two or three things that you might discover as evidence of your church's privilege, and suggest a couple of ways to address it.*
3. *Discover at least one minority owned business that you can choose to utilize, and talk to your governing board or Trustees about doing business with them.*



# chapter five

STEPHEN G. RAY, JR.

## Two Rules for Being an Ally While White

Throughout this curriculum, we have attempted to draw the reader into a multiple-dimension discussion with the aim of understanding and engaging white privilege. The idea was that if we came at this matter from several vantage points, it might illumine in new ways how people of faith and goodwill might make sense of the concept of white privilege. In what follows, I will suggest two “rules” for white people of goodwill which are drawn from my frustrations through the years of sincerely good people becoming likewise frustrated in their attempts to be allies. Too often, these frustrations have led to folks walking away at crucial moments, leaving all disillusioned.

In what follows, I will offer two rules followed by some theological reflection that suggests they are superbly Christian, and thus warrant our attention.

### *The Ubiquity of Anti-Black Animus*

To begin, the struggle against racism is something waged every day of the lives of Black people. The ubiquity of anti-Black animus is due largely to its being daily recycled into the mainstream of our society through radio, cable news, local news, and unmediated media coverage of candidates and

political movements who openly espouse racist diatribes, making anti-Black animus an ever-present reality. (For more information on these factors, see Philomena Essed’s book, *Understanding Everyday*

Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory, and the following websites: <https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2015/04/09/racial-bias-and-mediacoverage-of-violent-crime/> and <http://raciststereotypes.com/>)

From micro-aggressions to the weekly diet of police brutality visited upon Black people and seen via Facebook and other social media, there is no escape, no final victory—only ways of surviving with dignity and finding joy in the mundane lives of Black people and our communities. It has been my experience that this dimension of the workings of racism—its ubiquitous permanence—is what both discourages and disillusion those who would be our allies. It is discouraging not just because it is tiring, and disillusioning not simply because of its persistence. It is disillusioning because it requires white allies be disenchanted with the idea of the basic goodness of other white people, at least in regard to their conduct toward Black people. A term that I have come to use to describe this enchantment is “white moral selfregard.”

White moral self-regard is the idea that those white people who not only hold anti-Black views but act upon them are a minority. In this view, the majority of whites are at worst indifferent to the fortunes of Black people and our communities, with most actually being in favor of policies to help us. While this view is common wisdom, it is also false. In

fact, there have been several studies which demonstrate that a majority of white people not only hold antiBlack views, but also act upon them in their everyday lives.

One upshot of this mis-assessment is that it creates a constant struggle for Black people, because this reality inclines white folks to think that we overstate the ubiquity of racism. An example: when a Black person is shot by a policeman, asking what did the person do vs. asking why did the policeman shoot. The first question presumes wrongdoing on the part of the now-deceased; the second presumes that the situation is ambiguous until we know more. How often have you, your friends, or your family asked the first question without thought? What does it mean that the first response is to assume that the Black person committed a crime immediately worthy of lethal response?

This mis-assessment of matters has several consequences, not the least of which is that it contributes to the operation of systems, here legal, which routinely devalue Black life. There is a reason that many prosecutors try to ensure that Blacks are excluded from juries (for example, see the case involving Timothy Foster: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/02/opinion/excluding-blacks-fromjuries.html>): not because they can't be objective, but rather whites are more likely to believe the worst of Black defendants. This distorted view of racial reality might be attributable to the general posture of those privileged by a system believing themselves to be in the best

position to describe how it disadvantages others—a clear fallacy.

***Rule 1:** Being a white ally is understanding the ubiquity of anti-Black animus held by a majority of white people, and therefore being inclined to believe Black people about the presence of racism in everyday life.*

### ***The World in Which We Live: Created By Racism***

Beyond the recognition of the ubiquity of anti-Black animus is the further realization that the material, psychic, and emotional world in which we live was created by this bias. I use the word “created” here quite intentionally. Put another way, most white people live in a physical world in which Black people are largely absent because of the operation of this animus. There are vast swaths of the nation which, by virtue of the racial cleansings of much of “middle America” during the first half of the 20th century and the red-lining of the rest during the last half, provide scant opportunities for generative relations and contact between white communities and any appreciable number of Black people and families.

The upshot of this is that local anti-racist activism will likely be sporadic and on behalf of instead of with Black people. This may seem a small difference, but it is actually not. Many of the most harmful aspects of public policy that affect Black communities result from legislation enacted by local and national legislators who have little or no Black presence in their districts. Here, I want to

draw attention to the sort of legislation that is not simply about selfishness, but more about punishing those who are deemed non-contributors to the commonweal—a position inhabited, in the imagination of many, disproportionately by Black people.

### *What sort of white person will you be?*

Being clear about this geography brings to our attention another dimension of the ubiquity of racism: namely, a logic attendant to survival in this landscape. Here, I mean to point to the reality that white privilege creates a self-reinforcing loop in which it re-inscribes itself on each successive generation. It does this by distributing the best of every social good to white communities. Social goods are educational facilities and resources, newer and better-maintained housing stock, policing interpreted as public service, best environmental impact, and so on. This distribution creates a logic because the simple human impulse to want to provide the “best” for our families means that white people choose neighborhoods with the best schools and services they can afford—which generally means white areas. Given the ways that Black people have been excluded from these spaces, our absence is a part of their logic.

Perhaps the most difficult realization for white allies is that your likely implication in the system, because of decisions you have made and decisions that have been made for you, is inescapable. The first dimension of this inescapable implication is the reality that you do not choose to be white—it is

imputed to you. Because of the way your body presents itself to the world, you are deemed white and accorded all that comes with that, most of which are privileges and perks denied to Blacks.

As we have shown throughout this curriculum, these privileges are social, economic, legal, and in every case existential. The important thing to note here is that it is a matter of social assessment and not personal choice. What is possible is to choose how you will inhabit this socially imputed status. What sort of white person will you be? Of which logics of whiteness will you avail yourself and your family? What privileges will you exercise and on whose behalf? In your sphere of effective agency, how will you exercise your gifts, talents, and powers to moderate to provisionally undermine the forces of white supremacy which are bringing immediate harm to Black persons and communities?

*Rule 2. Being a white ally is not denying the power and privilege that your whiteness brings you, but rather asking how you can use it in the struggles to ameliorate the effects of white supremacy on Black persons and communities.*

#### ***A Theological Resource for Allies***

The preceding has been an explanation of being a white ally through an Augustinian theological interpretation of reality. Specifically, whiteness was interpreted as one of the enduring features of existence in our time and in our society; it is a part of the inescapable ecology of a racialized world. It may well be that at some point in human history,



this will not be the case, but for now whiteness endures.

*Use that privilege to the Glory of God by exercising it on behalf of our neighbors disadvantaged by it. Get up tomorrow morning and do the same thing. That is being an ally.*

More than simply having a presence, whiteness works in ways that bring harm to Black people. Most significantly, its operation does not involve the consent of those privileged by its operation. Rather, it seduces people into simply living by its logic and thereby becoming existentially implicated in its materialization. To those acquainted with the Western tradition of theology, it should be clear I am identifying whiteness with something like original sin, at least in its operation. Often disparaged, yet rarely proven wrong—the genius of Augustine’s notion is that it gives us a theological way to understand, and therefore respond to, systems which implicate us in sin without our consent and which seduce us with its comforts.

The response is simple. Accept its ubiquity. Become aware of the privilege it gives us. Use that privilege to the Glory of God by exercising it on behalf of our neighbors disadvantaged by it. Get up tomorrow morning and do the same thing. That is being an ally. **Reflection Questions and Discussion Topics**

1. *For whites in the group, share a story about a time when you found it hard to believe or accept a claim by a person of color that they were being discriminated against.*
2. *Talk about what it means to have privilege, and name two or three ways that you can utilize that privilege as an ally. Have someone in the group write down each of the commitments discussed. If you are able to, report back to the group at a later time and reflect on the outcomes you experienced when engaging as an ally in this way.*
3. *Go to [www.ucc.org/privilege](http://www.ucc.org/privilege) and add your commitments to the ones posted by others across the country who have promised to become an ally.*

# BIBLIOGRAPHY OF USEFUL RESOURCES

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What follows is a list of the top ten most useful or favorite resources of each of the five authors for this curriculum. It is not intended to be comprehensive, but to give you a way to re-engage the subject beyond the use of this curriculum. **Traci Blackmon**

Feagin, Joe R. *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London: Routledge, 2013.

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## John Paddock

Books:

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Coates, Ta-Nehisi, *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015. Winner of a National Book Award for Non-fiction. In a profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates offers a powerful new framework for understanding our nation's history and current crisis. Americans have built an empire on the idea of "race," a falsehood that damages us all but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men—bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and, today, threatened, locked up, and murdered out of all proportion. What is it like to inhabit a black body and

find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?

Cone, James H. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, New York: Orbis Books, 2011.

Two symbols that dominate the spiritual world and the every day life of African Americans. Explores the terror of violent racism and the hope that rises from a deep wrestling with faith.

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Penguin Press, 1996. The book was first published a century ago in 1903. It lays out the problem of the color line. It is a classic! In it, DuBois describes the experience of being black in America. It also provides very good history of

Jim

Crow.

Irving, Debby, *Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race*. Cambridge, Mass., 2014. Irving tells her often cring-worthy story with such openness that readers will turn every page rooting for her—and ultimately for all of us. For 25 years, Debby Irving sensed inexplicable racial tensions in her personal and professional relationships. As a colleague and neighbor, she worried about offending people she dearly wanted to befriend. As an arts administrator, she didn't understand why her diversity efforts lacked traction. As a teacher, she found her best efforts to reach out to students and families of color left her wondering what was missing. Then, in 2009, one “aha!” moment launched an adventure of discovery and insight that drastically shifted her worldview and upended her life plan.

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West.

Videos:

*Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*. Production information is at <http://www.tracesofthetrade.org>. Producer/Director Katrina Browne tells the story of her forefathers, the DeWolf's, the largest slavetrading family in U.S. history. Given the myth that the South is solely responsible for slavery, viewers will be surprised to learn that Browne's ancestors were Northerners. The film follows Browne and nine fellow family members on a remarkable journey which brings them face-to-face with the history and legacy of New England's hidden enterprise.

The film follows ten DeWolf descendants (ages 32-71, ranging from sisters to seventh cousins) as they retrace the steps of the Triangle Trade, visiting the DeWolf hometown of Bristol, Rhode Island, slave forts on the coast of Ghana, and the ruins of a family plantation in Cuba. Back home, the family confronts the thorny topic of what to do now. In the context of growing calls for reparations for slavery, family members struggle with the question of how to think about and contribute to “repair.” Meanwhile, Browne and her family come closer to the core: their love/hate relationship with their own Yankee culture and privileges; the healing and transformation needed not only “out there,” but inside themselves.

*White Like Me: Race, Racism & Privilege in America* featuring Tim Wise: Media Education Foundation, Northampton, MA. Tim Wise explores race and racism in the U.S. through the lens of whiteness and white privilege. In a stunning reassessment of the American ideal of meritocracy and claims that we've entered a post-racial society, Wise offers a fascinating look back at the race-based white entitlement programs that built the American middle class, and argues that our failure as a society to come to terms with this legacy of white privilege continues to perpetuate racial inequality and race driven political resentments today.

*Web Resource:*

We all have implicit biases (largely unconscious or sub-conscious) on a wide range of topics and issues. One important resource for understanding our own implicit biases is the Harvard University web-based Implicit Attitudes Test on race. If you follow the link below, then you will be taken to a "Preliminary Information" page. Click on the "I wish to proceed" button. Then select the "Race IAT" button and take the test (10-15 minutes). At the end you can print out your result.

Researchers have discovered that most Americans have an automatic preference for white over black. This includes many blacks, which just proves how systemic is the racism that pervades our society and messaging to such an extent that it implicates us all. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

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### **Traci Blackmon**

The Rev. Traci D. Blackmon is Acting Executive Minister of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries. She is also the first female pastor of the 156-year-old Christ The King United Church of Christ in Ferguson, MO. She became nationally recognized as a prominent voice for social change when Michael Brown was shot in Ferguson, just miles from her church. She immediately worked to help organize the Black Lives Matter movement, effectively assisting and collaborating with people in the community working for justice.

### **John Dorhauer**

The Rev. John C. Dorhauer is the ninth General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ. He has also served as the Conference Minister of the UCC's Southwest Conference, as Associate Conference Minister in the Missouri Mid-South Conference, and as a local church pastor in churches in rural Missouri. He earned his M.Div. from Eden Theological Seminary and D.Min. from United Theological Seminary, where he studied white privilege and its effects on the church. He is passionate about justice. Two statements that shape his theology are: "God is love. God is just."

### **Da Vita D. McCallister**

The Rev. Da Vita D. McCallister is Associate Conference Minister for Leadership and Vitality in the UCC's Connecticut Conference. She is a mother, ordained minister, entrepreneur, philanthropist, writer and advocate for youth and young adults. She has shared her love, passion, and wisdom in youth and young adult ministries for over 25 years, in a number of settings including the Fund for Theological Education, the National Setting of the United Church of Christ, and The United Methodist Church. McCallister teaches and speaks nationally about the church's role in racial justice work, faith based civil disobedience, and faithful responses in the face of injustice.

### **John Paddock**

The Rev. John Paddock is Rector of Christ Episcopal Church in Dayton, OH. He earned his M.Div. from The Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia, and D.Min. from United Theological Seminary in Dayton. Paddock has two consuming passions. The first is to seek ways to reframe Christianity in ways that speak to contemporary people. This entails being open to new knowledge and discoveries in every area of human endeavor. And it requires openness to God's Spirit as she leads us into God's future. His second passion is to reach out to the poor, the disenfranchised, the weak, and the victims of the powers that be: racism, empire, sexism, homophobia, and all other forms of discrimination and injustice.

### **Stephen G. Ray, Jr.**

The Rev. Dr. Stephen G. Ray is the Neal F. and Ila A. Fisher Professor of Systematic Theology at Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL. Previously, he was associate professor of African-American studies and director of the Urban Theological Institute at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia; associate professor of theology and philosophy at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; and lecturer at Yale Divinity School and Hartford Seminary. He is an ordained UCC minister and has served as pastor of churches in Hartford and New Haven, CT, and in Louisville, KY. Ray earned his PhD from Yale

University and M.Div. from Yale Divinity School. He is the author of two books: *A Struggle from the Start: The Black Community of Hartford, 1639-1960* and *Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility*. He is co-author of a third book: *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*.

white privilege: let's talk

## CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

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As you and your group work with this curriculum, you are invited and encouraged to participate in the online *WHITE PRIVILEGE: LET'S TALK USERS DISCUSSION* forum [www.ucc.org/privilege](http://www.ucc.org/privilege). The forum is a place where we invite you to share your experiences and reflections, ideas and insights generated as you use the curriculum.

The forum is a place where we invite you to:

- 1) Share your experiences of using the curriculum with others;
- 2) Commit to being an ally in the struggle for racial equity, and share in this forum how you are living out this commitment.