

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

*A discussion guide from the editors of Sojourners magazine*

This series is designed to spark discussion and thought about how to live out God's call for justice in our world. This guide includes four sessions, each with Sojourners articles, questions for discussion, and ideas for further study. We recommend printing out the guide for each person and allowing everyone time to read before the group meets. The resources here are a starting point for a further journey—where will the Spirit lead your group?



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## Christians and Racial Justice

### DISCUSSION GUIDE

**SOJOURNERS/  
CALL TO RENEWAL**

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Racism has been called America's "original sin." Struggles around affirmative action, welfare and immigration reform, and other policies show that the racial divide in the United States wasn't healed in the civil rights era. This guide, a collection of articles from *Sojourners* magazine, is part of a series designed to spark discussion, thought, and action about how to live out God's call for justice for all.

## Christians and Racial Justice

### SESSION 1

#### *Following Jesus, Confronting Racism*

- "Why?" by Jim Wallis
- "Exorcising an American Demon," by Bill Wylie-Kellermann
- "Blocking the Prayers of the Church," by Eugene R. Rivers 3rd

### SESSION 2

#### *Racism Today*

- "Equal Justice?" by Sanho Tree
- "Seeing Green," by Elizabeth Palmberg
- "40 Acres and a Mortgage," by Franklin D. Raines
- "The New 'New South,'" by Jorge Mariscal

### SESSION 3

#### *Racial Reconciliation*

- "Is That Racism on Your Shoe?" by Chris Rice
- "Can We Talk?" by Andrea Ayzvazian and Beverly Daniel Tatum
- "Communities of Reconciliation," by Rodolpho Carrasco

### SESSION 4

#### *Race and the Body of Christ*

- "No Cheap Peace," by Leah Gaskin Fitchue
- "No Longer Strangers," by Lois Ann Lorentzen
- "With Drum and Cup: An interview with George Tinker," by Bob Hulteen

### SESSION I

## *Following Jesus, Confronting Racism*

- “Why?” by Jim Wallis
- “Exorcising an American Demon,” by Bill Wylie-Kellermann
- “Blocking the Prayers of the Church,” by Eugene R. Rivers 3rd

All three of these authors point out that racism in our society is not just a structural and economic problem, but also a spiritual one. In particular, Wylie-Kellermann and Rivers argue that racism is a principality—something both structural and spiritual, something that requires both political action and prayer. Wylie-Kellermann uses the division between Jew and Gentile in Jesus’ day as an example of how God demands that we reach out to “the other side.” Rivers examines the history of “whiteness” in the U.S., and argues that only the church is able to address racism’s corporate sin of pride.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. When you hear the term “racism,” what images come to mind? Do you think of racism as a systemic problem that exists in the institutions of your own community? What would it mean for you to think of racism as idolatry—remembering that idolatry is not just an individual choice, but also a group activity to which people are tempted because the culture around them is doing it?
2. Wylie-Kellermann and Rivers insist that the struggle against racism must include both “institutional reconstruction” and “discernment, prayer, and worship-based action.” On which side of this “two-edged” solution do you lean? How can you adjust your thinking and acting to incorporate both aspects needed for racial justice? Has your church engaged in corporate prayer and worship against racism?
3. What would it mean, and what would it take, for our society to move towards investing less in the idea of “whiteness” (as opposed to ethnic categories such as Irish or German)? In what ways could this be a genuine step towards racial justice, rather than just multicultural window dressing over continuing inequity? What would such a change mean in your daily life?

### RESOURCES

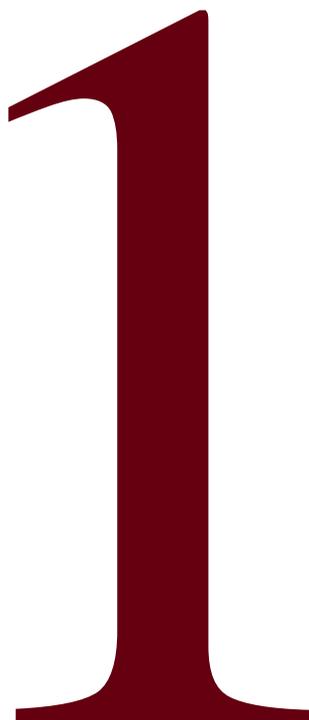
- Damascus Road, an anti-racism process associated with the Mennonite Central Committee, offers in-depth workshops to help institutions achieve long-term change in patterns of systemic racism. ([www.mcc.org/damascusroad](http://www.mcc.org/damascusroad))
- Learn about the theology of the Powers, inspired by the works of William Stringfellow, in Walter Wink’s *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*. (Galilee Trade, 1999)
- *Race—The Power of an Illusion*, a powerful PBS documentary, demonstrates in three hour-long episodes that race is defined by society, not biology; shows the history of the evolution of “whiteness” in the U.S.; and examines the present-day racial wealth gap. (California Newsreel, 2003)

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

- *How the Irish Became White*, by Noel Ignatiev, explores race as a social, rather than biological, construct. (Routledge, 1996)

- The Veterans of Hope Project at the Iliff School of Theology makes available video interviews with people working for social change, including leaders of the civil rights movement who discuss the role of spirituality in their work. ([www.iliff.edu/about\\_iliff/special\\_veterans.htm](http://www.iliff.edu/about_iliff/special_veterans.htm); (303) 765-3194)



### WHY?

by Jim Wallis

One-quarter of black Americans remain in poverty, many seemingly trapped in the social pathologies of the urban underclass. At the same time, while the growing number and profile of other racial minorities dramatically changes the country's demographic landscape, America's increasingly colorful racial picture has become enormously complicated. People of color in America continue to disproportionately experience poverty.

But racism is more than poverty. Today middle-class African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans are all too able to tell personal stories of racial prejudice and discrimination. Still, most white people seem tired of talking about racism, are opposed to affirmative action, and want to believe that their country has become a level playing field for all races. Almost no people of color believe that. Most significant, the United States is still a very segregated society, from residential patterns to cultural associations to church attendance. The number of stable, racially integrated neighborhoods across the country is still pitifully small. People of different races spend precious little non-work time together.

We have made undeniable progress since the end of legal segregation, but we have not come as far in the last few decades as most expected. The hopes and dreams that followed the 1960s civil rights and voting rights legislation have yet to be fulfilled. America is still a racially divided society, where diversity is widely perceived as a greater cause for conflict than for celebration. Again, the question is why?

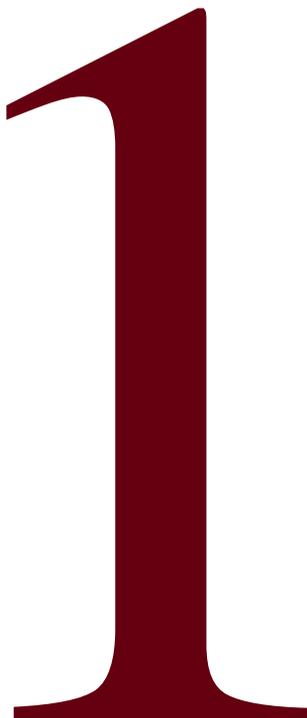
Clearly, we underestimated the problem. Since the 1960s, we have learned that racism goes far deeper than civil rights. Racism goes beyond mere prejudice and personal attitudes, but is rooted in institutional patterns and structural injustices. At the end of his life, Dr. King believed that poverty was the next front in the battle to overcome racism. Especially underestimated has been the impact and enduring legacy of the unique and particular institution of slavery in America.

Perhaps even more important, we have failed to perceive the fundamental spiritual and theological roots of racism in America. These surely include—but go even deeper than—the historical, institutional, cultural, and psychic dimensions of racism.

IN BIBLICAL TERMS, racism is a demon and an idol, a fallen principality and power that enslaves people and nations in its deadly grip. To be even more specific, it is the idolatry of whiteness, the assumption of white privilege and supremacy, that has yet to be spiritually confronted in America and, especially, in the churches. White racism is America's original sin; continuing failure to repent meaningfully of that sin still confounds our efforts to overcome it.

It's true that any initiative on race will fail unless it deals with the fundamental issues of economic inequality. But is there more to do than educating, organizing, advocating, and changing policies? A more spiritual approach would suggest other kinds of action as well. In addition to the hard work of personal relationships, community building, and political and economic change, other responses may be required such as confession, prayer, conversion, forgiveness, preaching, and even revival. We might even inquire into the ancient spiritual practices of exorcising demons when dealing with one so virulent as racism.

Because spiritual and political work should never be set against one another, the question becomes how to go deeply enough with the spiritual struggle to make the political battle more successful. Here is where the churches might make their best



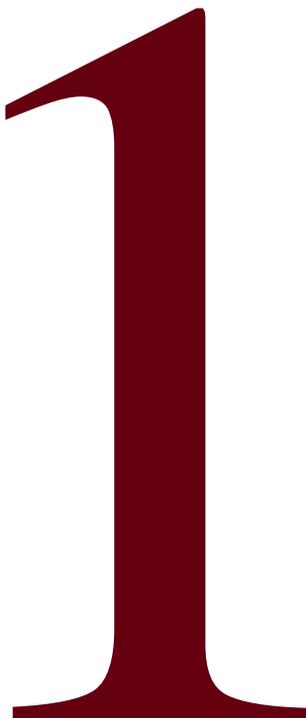
## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **Why? (cont.)**

contribution to current initiatives on race. The surprising new zeal among some white evangelical groups to confront racism with spiritual power is a very welcome and encouraging sign. So is the growing awareness among many people, religious or not, that personal and social problems have spiritual roots.

Confronting the barriers of race, class, culture, and gender was perhaps the major social drama of the New Testament church. Overcoming those divisions was seen as a primary test of spiritual authenticity. If the churches would reclaim the call to spiritual warfare, this time against the principality and power of racism, how might the battle against racism be transformed? We might finally begin to estimate the enemy adequately. ■

*Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners. This article appeared in the March-April 1998 issue.*



### EXORCISING AN AMERICAN DEMON

by Bill Wylie-Kellermann

**R**acism is more than an expression of an individual attitude; it is prejudice with power behind it. But looked upon with a biblical and theological eye, white racism may be recognized to be even more—an active and aggressive principality, a “power” that appears to move, adapt, and grow with a life of its own.

In 1963, William Stringfellow made precisely this point in a brief speech at the first National Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago. Addressed by Martin Luther King, Sargeant Shriver, and Abraham Heschel, the conference, both ecumenical and interfaith, was the first major foray of the mainline denominations into the freedom struggle. Stringfellow’s remarks were controversial for a variety of reasons, including his excoriation that the gathering was “too little, too late, and too lily white.” However, his most provocative and remarkable observation was this:

*From the point of view of either biblical religion, the monstrous American heresy is in thinking that the whole drama of history takes place between God and humanity. But the truth, biblically and theologically and empirically, is quite otherwise: The drama of this history takes place amongst God and humanity and the principalities and powers, the great institutions and ideologies active in the world. It is the corruption and shallowness of humanism which beguiles Jew or Christian into believing that human beings are masters of institution or ideology. Or to put it differently, racism is not an evil in human hearts or minds; racism is a principality, a demonic power, a representative image, an embodiment of death, over which human beings have little or no control, but which works its awful influence in their lives.*

Many at the conference were scandalized because they heard in Stringfellow’s statement an invocation of despair. And yet just such scandalous biblical realism is prerequisite to hope for America.

In such a light, racism must still be regarded as sin, but in a much broader and deeper sense—as individual and collective collusion with established evil. It is willing complicity in our own enslavement to privilege (or limitation). It is giving ourselves over to an animate system of domination. It is thereby distorting our humanity and, as we shall see, submitting ourselves to an idol.

VIEWED BIBLICALLY, a power (and racism is virtually emblematic in this regard) may be identified as both structural and spiritual—having these two aspects in one reality. This is underscored in the creation hymn of Colossians 1:15-20, where the assorted powers and authorities are described as both heavenly and earthly, visible and invisible. Walter Wink (whose analytical work on the powers over the last several decades was seeded by Stringfellow’s scriptural intuition) has concluded that “every Power tends to have a visible pole, an outer form—be it a church, a nation, or an economy—and an invisible pole, an inner spirit or driving force that animates, legitimates, and regulates its physical manifestation in the world.” These are simultaneous aspects of a single reality.

In the struggle for racial justice, the recognition of “institutional racism,” that insidious structural element far beyond personal prejudice, was a huge step toward

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### Exorcising an American Demon (cont.)

seeing racism as a principality. Ironically, however, the liberal preoccupation with its institutional character would prove progressively blind to its overpowering spiritual dimension.

The African-American freedom struggle, founded under the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's early banner "To Heal the Soul of the Nation," tended to become more and more a civil rights movement with a largely legislative agenda. In the several decades since Stringfellow's address, the legal apparatus of American apartheid has been all but dismantled.

And that's the end of racism, right? No. We ignore the spiritual reality of racism at the peril of our national soul. No force in U.S. history has proven more relentless or devastatingly resilient than white racism. It is empirically a demon that again and again rises up transmogrified in ever more predatory and beguiling forms, truly tempting our despair. The frustration we suffer is not unlike that of the disciples who were gently upbraided by Jesus, "This kind can only be cast out by prayer and fasting."

Generally, with respect to powers theology, a twofold effort is necessary. Theological liberals must be convinced that institutional structures have a spiritual dimension that must be taken with equal seriousness. Then theological conservatives must be persuaded that principalities are not airy beings waiting to swoop down on unprepared individuals, but that these principalities invariably have their feet on the ground, being embodied and incarnated in social forms and cultural structures.

With respect to racism and social transformation, the struggle before us remains necessarily two-handed or two-edged, fusing social analysis and institutional reconstruction with discernment, prayer, and worship-based action. These may be held together conscientiously in parallel tracks or welded in a single spiritual-political act.

It's no tactical coincidence that in the best of the freedom movement, the church was "the place to go out from." Prayer, preaching, and knock-down singing were introit to action—and one with it. Under the charge of benediction, people would pour down the aisle and out the doors to march, sit in, or boycott. The powers of racial injustice to be confronted in the street had already been named and met and brought down before the sovereignty of God in worship. Their spiritual claim already shaken.

PRAYER AND WORSHIP are crucial to anti-racism work in large part because racism is fundamentally an idolatry. George Kelsey, one of Martin King's professors at Morehouse, wrote decades ago:

*Although racism did have its beginnings in a particular constellation of political and economic events in the early modern world, it has developed into an independent phenomenon, possessing meaning and value in itself and giving character to all the institutions of some societies. ... When [people] elevate any human or historical factor to so great a height that it has the power to give substance and direction to all cultural institutions, no matter what the *raison d'être*, that human or historical factor has become a god.*

Idolatry is perhaps the primary spiritual mechanism by which a glorious human diversity, created by God for praise and delight, becomes in the Fall a power of division, a device of injustice, a demonic servant of death. This reversal and inversion of God's good gift is predicated on the distortion of misplaced worship.

The idolatry question restated: Racism is an issue of justification. "Moral worth" and meaning are imputed to certain people or communities—on the basis of their "whiteness," for instance.

Here we are on firm New Testament turf. Paul, by way of wrestling with the law, concluded that claims of justification, meaning, and self-worth, located in any ideol-

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **Exorcising an American Demon (cont.)**

ogy or institution (indeed anything but God's grace alone), ultimately prove bondage to sin and death. Consider the frightful energy of pure "righteousness" that fuels racial violence and hate crimes.

Moreover, "whiteness" is itself an ersatz cultural reality, a social artifice without real substance, virtually a fabrication and a falsehood. That a lie should preempt and usurp the truth of God's grace is, well, the work of death's power in this world. Those of us who enjoy privilege on the basis of race, or who seek justification there, are truly pathetic victims, cut off from the rich gifts of our own humanity. We are also cut off, not incidentally, from the richness of our own histories and cultures—all sold for a mess of whiteness.

Of course, this false justification in race is elicited to begin with at cost to others, namely colored peoples, whose justification and moral worth in exact proportion is commonly seen as less. They are dehumanized—unjustified, if you will, before the gods of this world. The assault on their humanity, which this both represents and sanctions, is practically definitive of the demonic.

WHEN THE POWER of racism reigns within the church, it is noticed in several ways—but primarily in the suppression of gifts. The Word of God in the Holy Spirit is forever busy stirring up and calling out boldness in people to exercise their gifts and faculties on behalf of the community and in service to humanity and all creation. Meanwhile, the power of death in the demon of racism is busy intimidating people, or suppressing, refusing, devaluing, and denying those very gifts and faculties, rendering them unknown or inaccessible to community and creation. (The same experience may be recognized with respect to the demons of sexism and homophobia.)

The more visible scandal to the gospel perpetrated by the rule of this principality in the church is division. The body called to witness Christ in and through its visible unity instead replicates the de facto apartheid of our society. It is conformed. Be it by congregation or denomination, the segregation of the white church compromises, nay refutes, the gospel.

Read in dynamic analogy, the "wall of hostility" identified in Ephesians (2:14) bears upon us. The hostility referred to there is not racism as such, but the division between Jew and Gentile which the church had finally resolved to overcome in its life and community. The wall, in one sense, was quite literal. There was in the temple a barrier defining and setting off the court of the Gentiles. On it was posted a notice, literally a death threat, a sign forbidding Gentiles entrance into the interior courts of the Jews. Paul, as a matter of fact, was accused of transgressing that very wall with a friend in the Book of Acts (21:27-36). He was arrested and imprisoned, a circumstance that drives the narrative of that book to its conclusion.

The wall, however, was more than a wall. It worked to represent all the boundaries of purity, the social architecture—often invisible—that separated the two communities. The law, in this case the purity code, which once praised God and served human life by preserving community boundaries and resisting the seductions of imperial accommodation in Babylon, had been made an idol now binding people to sin and death, and cutting them off from allies, brothers and sisters, with whom they ought to be in community. The wall had become itself the very spirit of hostility incarnate.

We all know how boundaries are reflected in social geography, how patterns of power get laid out in space. I think about Detroit, where I live. Such geography has been enforced over the years in a variety of ways. Going back to 1827, the "Black Laws" attempted to exclude African Americans altogether from the territories by requiring them to register, showing a freeholders certificate, and posting \$500 to "insure good behavior." As recently as 1953 "restrictive covenants," real estate deed clauses forbidding sale to blacks, were still legally enforceable in the city. When hous-

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### Exorcising an American Demon (cont.)

ing discrimination was made illegal, the real estate industry took to “block busting,” making bundles of cash on white flight by concentrating the market on a narrow, moving boundary line, one block at a time. In a further level of sophistication, “redlining” by banks systematically withheld housing loans from identified neighborhoods.

Even now a more subtle and nearly imperceptible marketing device of real estate “steering” maintains such boundaries. And then there is the palpable spirit of hostility that lets you know you are simply out of place, entering or traversing the wrong neighborhood. In Detroit, as elsewhere, there are certain thoroughfares (and not just expressways) that function as walls between racial communities. The streets themselves possess that palpable spirit that says, for example, “Don’t cross Eight Mile.”

EPHESIANS, WHICH COMES to us as a jail letter from Paul, argues that in Jesus’ death and resurrection the dividing wall of hostility has been broken down, and a new humanity thereby created in the one who is our peace. It continues:

*For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me ... that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

*Of this gospel I was made a minister ... to preach to the Gentiles the unspeakable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in high places (3:1-10).*

Observe how lucid the prisoner has become concerning the principalities. It’s almost as though he sees in the wall a living reality. Taking the good news to the Gentiles requires addressing the powers themselves, putting the wall itself on notice.

The gospel of Mark, as scripture scholar Ched Myers has shown, knows the same experience in a different image. There Jesus is forever sending the disciples over to “the other side” of the “sea.” Mark is the first person ever to call that turbulent Galilean lake a “sea,” thereby invoking not only the power of chaos but the whole history of crossing to liberation.

Among other things, this redundant phrase, “the other side,” is tip-off to the fact that, in Mark’s story and geography, there is a Jewish side of the sea and a Gentile side. (Jesus feeds the people on one perimeter and then the other. He does parallel healings or exorcisms similarly on both sides.) And what should happen when he sends the disciples to cross over? Death threatens. The storm rages. Heavy weather would swamp or drown or blow them off course.

What could be truer to our own experience of trying to build alliances or friendships or communities with sisters and brothers on the “other side”? We hear an invisible whisper that says, “Stay home,” striking fear in our hearts and prompting our despair. It may be a silent storm within, simply awkward and cool, or one raging with hostility. Once again, that storm, that blustering barrier, must be named and rebuked with authority. It’s nothing short of a baptism to set off in faith into those troubled waters.

William Stringfellow’s source of authority and hope at the Chicago conference was tied to baptism:

*[Racism] is the power with which Jesus Christ was confronted and which, at great and sufficient cost, he overcame. In other words, the issue here is not equality among human beings, but unity among human beings. ... The issue is baptism. The issue is*

### Exorcising an American Demon (cont.)

*the unity of all humanity wrought by God in the life and work of Christ. Baptism is the sacrament of that unity.*

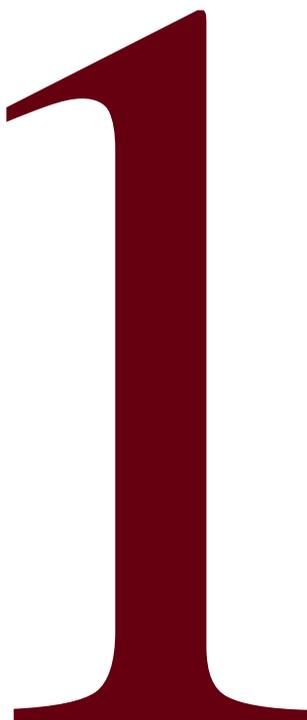
As the Ephesians letter (which itself may be read as a baptismal meditation) puts it: The new humanity in Christ's body breaks down the wall of hostility (2:14-16). In this new humanity that baptism seals and affirms, our relationship to every other human being, every human community, indeed to every creature, is renewed. The wall has no claim upon us. The powers do not rule in our lives and community. We have died, with Christ, out from under their spirit and dominion (2:1-8).

The rite of baptism always has about it an element of exorcism. We vow to "renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of sin." In more ancient language, we "renounce the devil and all his works." That, I believe, is where the struggle against racism needs to be rooted, in the promise and grace of our baptism.

When the community that gathers around the Catholic Worker in Detroit renews individuals' baptismal vows by candlelight in the Easter vigil, the members get scandalously concrete and specific about these promises. They pledge to "renounce racism, nationalism, sexism, and all other barriers to human unity." They reject "the idols of money and property, race and class."

That, of course, is not the end of anti-racism work, but it is the proper place to begin. In worship. Under the sign and hope of resurrection. In freedom from the power of death. Where the principalities are already declared undone. ■

*Bill Wylie-Kellermann was a Sojourners contributing editor, a United Methodist pastor living in Detroit, and director of the masters of divinity program for the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE) in Chicago when this article appeared in the March-April 1998 issue of Sojourners.*



### BLOCKING THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

by Eugene R. Rivers 3rd

I met William Stringfellow in 1973, at Princeton Theological Seminary, at a conference discussing the integration of biblical faith and a new political vision. Then a refugee from a mainline black pentecostal church in North Philadelphia, I jumped at the opportunity to attend. Stringfellow said something there that has stuck with me for the last 25 years, and has been confirmed in my own practical work: Speaking in tongues is a political act of resistance.

At the time, pentecostalism was viewed by the sophisticated, upper-middle-class, elite activists as a religious expression of people who dragged their knuckles on the ground. But beneath the surface, and beyond the eyes of these sophisticates, God was doing something among the pentecostal poor.

Bill Stringfellow moved in politically progressive religious circles—not the stomping ground of the pentecostals. But he was able to discern that something was happening. Without necessarily speaking in tongues, Stringfellow was in a deep sense a pentecostal; he understood the importance of the demonic and the political dimensions of the charismata.

In 1964, Stringfellow wrote an article titled “Race as a Principality in the Church.” He said, “To no principality, unless it be to those of commerce and finance, which are often allied and committed to racism, have the American churches been more notoriously and scandalously and complacently accommodating than to the principality of racism.”

I want to expand this notion to include not simply racism—which today can mean virtually anything—but white supremacy, as the dominant principality of America. White identity splits the country in two and is now poised to generate civil war in the United States. This is also true, with minor historical variations, for Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking whites. Where did this construction come from, and how did it assume the force of an essential biological property?

And what is happening now? This politically and historically constructed ideological concept is no longer delivering the goods to the workers who were fed it 200 years ago. Then, a person was Irish or Welsh or German or Scottish. But at some point in the process of political development, these people were sold a bill of goods that they were not simply Irish but white.

Irish culture, German culture, Scottish culture can be examined and discussed. But there is no white culture. This ideological construction was demonically inspired. It sold out poor whites who are Scottish, Irish, German.

From independence forward, these folks became politically incorporated into the white nation, which was theologically sanctified by Jonathan Edwards and others like him as America became the City on a Hill. This corner of hell for black and brown folk was “defined” as a City on the Hill, where God’s providence is realized as defenseless women and children are murdered in the name of the white warrior God called Jesus.

Today we see rebellion everywhere, because that white-identity ideology has collapsed on itself. The white boys are saying, “You told me if I was white, there would be a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage. Well, there’s no chicken and my car is broken. I’m mad and I’m ready to fight!”

They voice a level of fury that’s scary. But I empathize with them, because

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **Blocking the Prayers of the Church (cont.)**

they've been lied to. They're not wrong, they have a case.

And because they've been told, explicitly and implicitly, that they have one foot—their whiteness—in the camp of the elite, they continue to identify with the ideology of the powers. Even more insidious, others—people of color, who share a similar experience of the principality—become the object of their scorn.

A WHOLE NEW BODY of labor historiography provides an analysis of race that is incredibly radical. This critique clarifies the issues involved in and the interests behind the perpetuation of the ideology of white identity.

Comparative social policy analysts now say that it is precisely because of the racial character of the American experience that we are where we are. White-supremacist ideology retards, at every institutional level, the nation's ability to develop progressive social policies, even when they're more cost effective.

White racism, the concrete expression of the idol of white supremacy, is demonically entrenched. It generates an irrational allegiance to an idolatrous conception of the white race and prevents us from establishing rational policies and programs to alleviate suffering.

However, just by talking about white supremacy as a principality of America, we've grabbed the lion by the tail. We've spent 300 years developing this idolatry, and it is now deeply entrenched in the cultural psychology of the nation and the church. Only a radical conversion to biblical faith frees us from the burden of this demonic spirit that binds us and renders us unable to live as rational human beings.

A deep level of intercessory prayer will be required to confront the idolatry of white supremacy. It is violent and it can only be dealt with in the most discerning way. God gives the church the power to discern how to exorcise a demon, and this is a demon that generates a level of violence and irrationality that is causing this country to cave in on itself.

In terms of Stringfellow's tradition, what is suggested is that we, the people of God, must begin with a project of study, contemplation, and reflection, first, to discern the implication of this demonic spirit, and then to develop wise strategies for communicating to the larger public the source of our dilemma. Average white Americans are getting skewered by institutionalized, demonic forces that have given them an identity that is killing them.

Some labor historians, in trying to figure out the last 15 years of disjunction between race and class, are claiming that the dichotomy is false: Class is mediated through the lens of race, they say. Only when we understand this can we comprehend the contradictions of the labor movement. Why is it that labor would be so motivated to do things that are antithetical to its own interest?

Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, in their book *Chain Reaction* (Norton, 1991), write that they used to apply a leftist class analysis, but now they conclude that every domestic policy issue is rooted in race: Welfare reform, abortion—all issues come down to race. There are also class issues, but they are mediated continually through the lens of white racism, as the identity of poor working-class whites collides against what are perceived to be the intrusions of the other.

Several recent books suggest that 200 years ago, a need arose for some ideological justification to offer the European tribes in order to get them to move west and officially eliminate everybody else. An ideological construction for integrating the European groups was necessary once it was clear that the major obstacle to U.S. expansion was not Europeans. This construct also justified having the non-Europeans build the country.

Girded with what were then new scriptural interpretations identifying America with the New Israel (and often peoples of color as the antagonists to God's chosen),

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### Blocking the Prayers of the Church (cont.)

many poor immigrant church people found their Manifest Destiny in further migration westward, or in the comfort that, no matter how bad their situation, at least they weren't black. The name of God was invoked to justify white idols; the principalities and powers were given religious sanctification.

THE CHURCH IS THUS uniquely positioned to confront this situation. Secular liberals can't do it because they have no cogent ideology to offer in its place. The Right has a political agenda, and they recognize the importance of white supremacy ideology to make their agenda succeed. Those who use the label "religious progressive," or are part of the confessional community of the church, are the only safe space where there can be a dialogue that doesn't cause a race war. There is no other place.

Stringfellow, the Keeper of the Word, understood this. The new labor historiography that I have referred to simply documents and gives the additional details and footnotes for a very deep theological understanding of the principalities and powers. In a period of economic decline, fooling around with identities that are fragile—because people's life circumstances are fragile—requires a high level of discernment. If we are to move forward, white people must make a decision about where their spiritual allegiances are.

The church must be the place in which white supremacy is analyzed and deconstructed. For those of us who love the church, this is redemptive. The church has an opportunity to introduce an analysis that explains the apparent anomalies in American political culture: Why is everything breaking down? What is it about the American experience that makes it so completely crazy? How can a country with such a high level of industrial development have such ugly, aggressive social policies in contrast to Western Europe?

The church has been no less divided about white supremacist ideology than society. The blood of Christ was not heavy enough, not deep enough, to bridge the chasm as the ideology developed.

But now the church is in a unique position to be the church of Jesus Christ for the first time. Church people, especially white church people, are going to have to choose between being the church or being white. If you're going to be apostate, you are going to usher in apartheid America! It's going to be war. Blood's going to run in the streets for real.

Think about the irony. Sin has caught us now. The white militia is coming hard on one side, and Louis Farrakhan is on the other side. Both of these phenomena could be seen as poetic justice: White religiosity is getting what it deserves, an inevitable outcome.

Farrakhan has flipped that Christianity on its head. He's hoisting white Christians with their own petard. Although Farrakhan represents much that is repugnant, one cannot be too hard on him.

When Farrakhan speaks, he highlights the hypocrisy of the church. He says, "They say they got a church in the United States, but those white folks are just as racist as they can be. They're not thinking about God. If you took the total investment portfolio of all these white churches and see what percentage goes to the poor—I rest my case."

Farrakhan can credibly assert, "There is no Christianity in America. It's the old white tribal religion where the white warrior God and the white women and the white men are the same thing. Now, Gadhafi, give me half a million dollars, and I'll evangelize for you." Then he goes to Iran and says, "We can demonstrate the superiority of Islam by demonstrating a level of koinonia on the Islamic side that white racist Christians in America will never perform with their black brothers and sisters."

This creates a dangerous place, an idolatrous place. This white racist ideology is

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### Blocking the Prayers of the Church (cont.)

the most pernicious form of sin because it's based on pride.

God can deal with a thief, with a liar, with David and Bathsheba, but don't get arrogant, proud, and idolatrous. Pride is a sin that comes straight from hell itself. Pride is an ideology and a concept of identity that is against God in its essence. It is atheistic. It is demonic. And so the challenge now is, Will we be white or will we be the church?

To me, Farrakhan exists as a judgment against the sins of the black church. We in the black church have failed to do what God has called us to do and God let a false prophet, in my view, be lifted up to call us out, to embarrass us. So when a million brothers marched in Washington, D.C., in 1995, 600,000 of them were black churchmen.

On the other side of the equation, God has used Farrakhan to chasten the white church. Farrakhan said, "The white church is an apostate institution. It's more committed to whiteness, to a white warrior God who was born in sin and has the innocent blood of the brown people and the slaves dripping from the hand, this very day." This is so indisputably obvious.

This country is split down the middle over the issue of the experience of slavery. We need to discern and exorcise the principality, the demonic spirit, that divides the church. Reading from the 10th chapter of the book of Daniel:

*I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the people with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.*

*A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.*

*Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.*

—Daniel 10:7-14

At Azusa Christian Community, we pray and wrestle with how to discern what the Spirit of God, what this kairos moment, is about. Reading in Daniel, it occurred to us: That's it! In America, the principality of white supremacy is blocking the prayers of the church! That ideology is the demonic prince that keeps Daniel's prayers from getting through. The prayers are being detained by this demonic thing that overshadows the entire national experience—white identity.

God is calling us to be the people of God. We're being called, as Stringfellow argued throughout his entire career, to turn our backs on the idols, to turn our backs on any concept of reality that would elevate the creature over the Creator. If we are to do justice to the theological, spiritual, and political tradition that William Stringfellow represents, we must pray—as he insisted we should—as a political act of resistance and transcendence that God will give us the courage to accept this challenge. ■

*Eugene F. Rivers 3rd was a Sojourners contributing editor, pastor of the Azusa Christian Community in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and co-chair of the National Ten-Point Leadership Foundation when this article appeared in the March-April 1997 issue of Sojourners.*

### SESSION 2

#### *Racism Today*

- “Equal Justice?” by Sanho Tree
- “Seeing Green,” by Elizabeth Palmberg
- “40 Acres and a Mortgage,” by Franklin D. Raines
- “The New ‘New South,’” by Jorge Mariscal

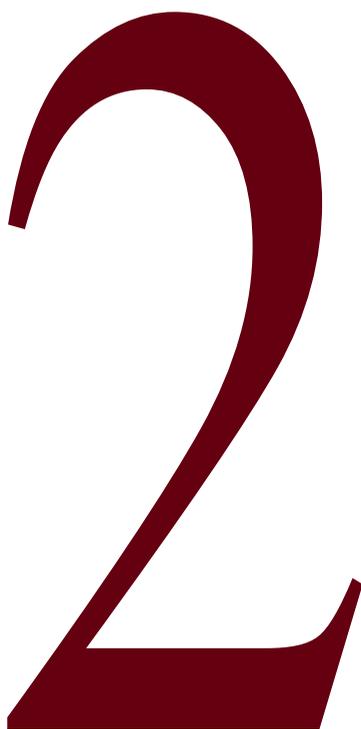
**R**acism isn’t just a personal problem or a fading remnant of the past; in important ways it’s ingrained into the structures of our society, including our economy. Tree and Palmberg discuss racism’s stark effects in the U.S. criminal justice system, while Franklin Raines lays out in detail the ways in which history—including very recent history—has led to a deep racial wealth gap in this country. Mariscal reveals that, in the new millennium, immigrants from Latin America are increasing in number—and are encountering old-fashioned racism from government and neighbors.

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. According to Tree, “the main casualty of our war on drugs has been the concept of equal justice under the law.” As a person of faith, how do you feel about the fact that, although different races use drugs at roughly the same rate in this country, arrests and sentences are so racially skewed?
2. The example of prisons shows that some things which are not overtly racist in intent—for example, very stringent drug laws—can have deeply racist effects, such as the wildly disproportionate number of prisoners of color in the U.S. What can we learn from the bad example of drug laws? How can we work to solve this mistake, and to avoid similar mistakes in the future?
3. Think about your own family’s economic history for the past two or three generations. How have racially different opportunities in homeownership, employment, and criminal justice made an impact on your family’s ability to accumulate wealth and pursue education? Given that the racial wealth gap has actually increased in some recent years, what solutions might you suggest for our country’s systemic economic racism?
4. Present-day individual and governmental racism against Latinos, which Mariscal describes, violate the stereotype that racism is a mostly a thing of the past. How can you find out about similar problems in your own community, and what can you do to help solve those problems?

#### RESOURCES

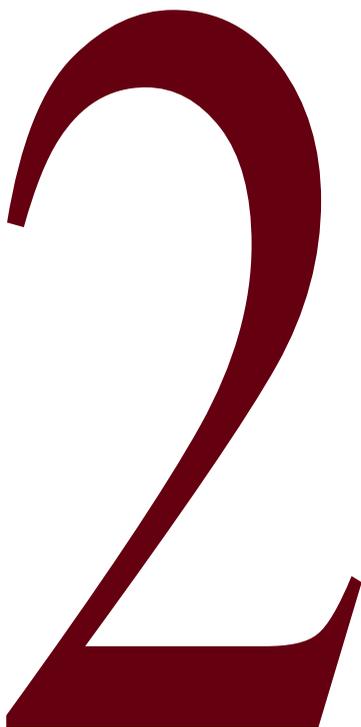
- The Black Commentator offers up-to-date commentary, analysis, and investigations on issues affecting African Americans. ([www.blackcommentator.com](http://www.blackcommentator.com))
- To read more about the racial wealth gap in this country, visit [www.racialwealthdivide.org](http://www.racialwealthdivide.org), a site maintained by United for a Fair Economy.



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

- The Sentencing Project analyzes the social consequences of mass imprisonment. ([www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org))
- To read about how the USDA has denied black farmers payouts from the class-action suit Raines mentions, visit [www.ewg.org/reports/blackfarmers](http://www.ewg.org/reports/blackfarmers).
- *The Bridge over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics* by William Julius Wilson offers practical suggestions, in the face of widening inequality in this country, for a cross-racial alliance for greater social justice. (University of California Press, 1999)
- *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* by Hernando De Soto examines structures of property ownership as a lens for understanding asset creation. (Basic Books, 1993)
- To read about the rising rates of women incarcerated in the U.S., see “The Punitive Report—HARD HIT: the Growth in Imprisonment of Women, 1977-2004” available at [www.wpaonline.org/institute/hardit/index.htm](http://www.wpaonline.org/institute/hardit/index.htm).



### **EQUAL JUSTICE?**

*by Sanho Tree*

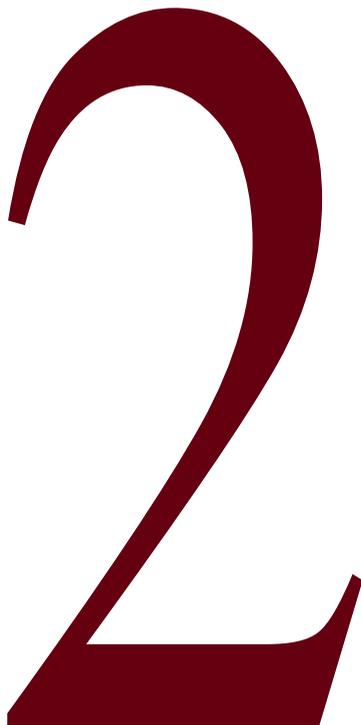
**O**nly 12 percent of the nation's drug users are African American, but blacks constitute almost 35 percent of those arrested for drug violations, more than 45 percent of those in federal prisons for drug violations, and almost 60 percent of those in state prisons for drug felonies.

At every stage of the criminal justice process, minorities bear the brunt of the drug war: Fifty-three percent of African Americans convicted of drug offenses get sentenced to prison vs. 46 percent of whites convicted of the same offenses; 57 percent of African Americans are sentenced to prison for trafficking while 42 percent of whites are sentenced to prison for the same crime. From 1986 to 1996, the number of white youth imprisoned for drug offenses doubled, while the black youth being sent to prison for drug crimes increased sixfold. The main casualty of our war on drugs has been the concept of equal justice under the law.

While our government estimates some 94 million Americans have tried an illicit drug, only a small fraction of those users are arrested, prosecuted, and incarcerated. Not surprising, law enforcement tends to be directed toward the poor and communities of color. Assuming recent incarceration rates remain unchanged, the Department of Justice estimates 1 of every 20 Americans can be expected to serve time in prison during their lifetime—for African-American men, the number is greater than 1 in 4.

In an era when we cannot even find a major political figure who can say they haven't used illegal drugs (Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Newt Gingrich, and George W. Bush to name but a few), we must ask a fundamental question of fairness: Would a good stiff prison sentence have helped them in their lives and careers? If the answer is no, then why is it such a good thing for all the poor people and people of color languishing in prison? ■

*Sanho Tree was a fellow at the Drug Policy Project of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., when this article appeared in the May-June 2003 issue of Sojourners.*



### SEEING GREEN

by Elizabeth Palmberg

A recent University of Maryland study found that African Americans who kill whites are much more likely to get the death penalty than others convicted of the same crime. Nationwide, a black teenager convicted of a drug crime is 48 times more likely to be sentenced to prison than a white one.

It's not news that race matters in our criminal justice system. What doesn't get enough attention, and should, is that for the last two decades the "war on drugs" has helped make racial disparities in our penal system get much worse very quickly. In 1950, a black person was four times as likely as a white one to be in prison; today, that has worsened to more than seven times. Four out of five state drug prisoners are African American or Latino, although these groups comprise only 22 percent of drug users (and 25 percent of the U.S. population). And these disparities permeate every level of the criminal justice system, from policing to parole.

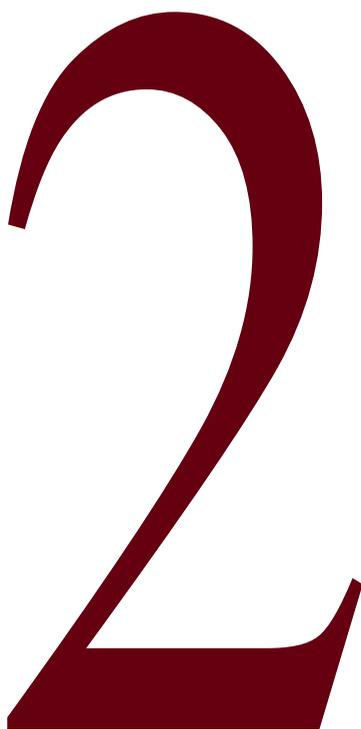
Systemic and individual racism are part of the story here, but they can't explain why prison race ratios have gotten so much worse since 1950, even as many parts of our society have shown improvement. In order to understand why our system is not colorblind, we're going to have to learn to see the color green.

Consider this thought experiment: Imagine if the United States allowed, and even encouraged, public servants to take bribes in exchange for preferential treatment in arrests, charges filed, and plea bargains. Since there is a big wealth gap between whites and minorities in this country—the typical African-American household owned about 8 percent of what a white one did at the end of the 1990s, and black unemployment is double the rate for whites—we wouldn't be surprised to see racial disparities show up in arrests, charges, and convictions.

Of course, we don't live in a system where bribery is common; we just live in an eerie simulation of one. Once a society commits to the numbers game of mass arrests and long incarcerations for petty drug crimes, money is going to play a key role in criminal justice disparities. This is true even when individual officials are acting with the best of intentions. Want to put away as many drug dealers as possible on a limited police budget? Better target dealers in poor neighborhoods, where drug activity happens more on the street and less behind closed doors. You may be motivated entirely by a laudable desire to cut back on the disproportionately high rates of violent crime that these communities suffer, but you'll still wind up arresting many people who only come to police attention because their families can't afford to send them to private drug treatment programs. Need to make the best of your understaffed district attorney's office? It's only pragmatic to cut a plea bargain with that rich guy's lawyers, and take a harder line with the overworked public defender.

We sometimes hear protests, as well we should, about how indigent defendants facing the death penalty are saddled with ludicrously underpaid and underqualified lawyers. But money makes a crucial difference in lower-profile, nonviolent cases too, and it does so by the hundreds of thousands. State courts sentence 71 percent of indigent convicted persons to prison, but only 54 percent of those who can hire their own lawyers. Wealth is the missing link in American penal racism (as it often is in American politics, where any concern for the poor is routinely dismissed as "class warfare").

The good news here is that we don't have to wait for every judge, prosecutor, and cop in America to be free of individual racism (we might be waiting a while). The bad news is that we have to take responsibility for the ways in which our system is sin-



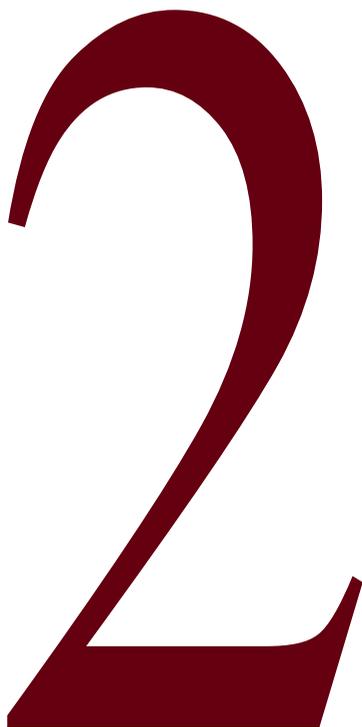
## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **Seeing Green (cont.)**

fully prejudiced against those with low incomes.

To fix this situation, we'll need money and political will. Fortunately, we've already shown that we're willing to spend money—for what we're spending on each prisoner each year, we could put three people through an intensive 20-week inpatient treatment program. To get the political will, though, we must be willing to admit that we have a problem. We'll also need to admit that when politicians spent the last two decades shopping for a "tough on crime" image, they inevitably left the poor—disproportionately people of color—to pay the price. ■

*Elizabeth Palmberg is assistant editor of Sojourners. This article appeared in the May-June 2003 issue.*



### 40 ACRES AND A MORTGAGE

by Franklin D. Raines

In 2002 a newspaper in Washington, D.C., carried a four-part series titled “Black Money.” It said that life for African Americans has never been better, suggesting that the quest for racial equality in America was complete. In fact, that is what most Americans believe. In a major national poll last year, a majority said when it comes to jobs, income, health care, and education, black Americans are doing just as well as whites.

What would life be like if the majority of Americans were right? What if the racial gaps were closed? What would we gain?

If America had racial equality in education and jobs, African Americans would have 2 million more high school degrees, 2 million more college degrees, nearly 2 million more professional and managerial jobs, and nearly \$200 billion more income. If America had racial equality in housing, 3 million more African Americans would own their homes. And if America had racial equality in wealth, African Americans would have \$760 billion more in home equity value, \$200 billion more in the stock market, \$120 billion more in their retirement funds, and \$80 billion more in the bank. That alone would total over \$1 trillion more in wealth.

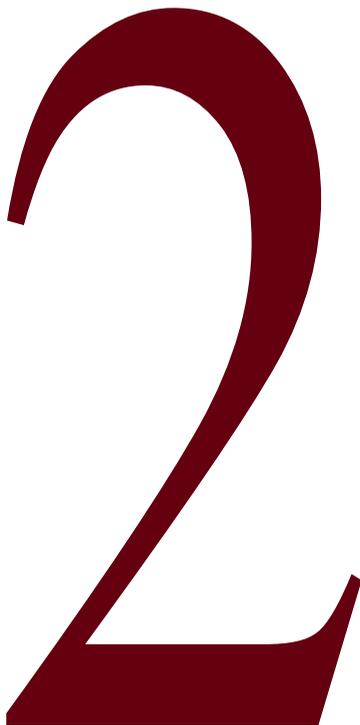
These gaps demonstrate that the long journey of black Americans from an enslaved people to full participants in our society—a journey that began 137 years ago—is far from complete. We have come a long way. We have won the equal right to education, to employment, to housing, and to success. And yet the racial gaps persist. Why is that? How can we close the gaps?

#### The Mystery of Capital

In *The Mystery of Capital*, Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto points out that no matter where you go in the world, people of the most modest means are working hard, producing, trading and selling goods, operating cottage industries, even building and improving homes for their families. Maybe they own assets—tools, machines, equipment, buildings, livestock. Perhaps they are earning a daily living by harnessing those assets. But no matter how hard they work, they are not able to raise capital against those assets to create wealth. Their assets don’t have life beyond their immediate use—they contain “dead capital.”

But in America, de Soto points out, assets have two lives. You can live off them, and you can leverage capital from them, unleashing wealth. When you own a home in America, this asset has daily value as shelter and value as an investment. In 2001, home owners in America withdrew about \$80 billion in equity wealth out of their homes. With that wealth, they paid down credit cards and pumped about \$50 billion back into the economy, which provided a bigger economic stimulus than the tax rebate. Assets in the United States produce capital so well, de Soto explains, because over the past two centuries we have developed one of the most sophisticated systems in the world for recording and protecting the ownership of assets.

We have titles on our homes and cars. Land records. Property registers. Patents. Copyrights. Contracts. Because you can prove ownership, you can more easily buy and sell your assets, insure them against loss, borrow against them, and protect them in court. And you can more easily pass your assets on to your children. Much of the developing world does not have this airtight system of asset protection. Or the system does not recognize everyone’s assets, or guarantee everyone’s legal rights to protect them. As a result, de Soto writes, “at least 80 percent of the population in these coun-



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### 40 Acres and a Mortgage (cont.)

tries cannot inject life into their assets and make them generate capital because the law keeps them out of the formal property system.”

De Soto is talking about 80 percent of the population in developing countries. But what he is saying also applies to 12 percent of the population in our country, the formerly enslaved. As our country was establishing one of the world’s strongest systems of property rights and protections, the formerly enslaved were denied the right to inject life into their assets and make them generate capital. This denial of black capital has been anything but unintentional. The legacy of slavery, segregation, and discrimination—de facto and de jure—systematically kept the formerly enslaved out of the formal property system.

### 40 Acres and a Mule

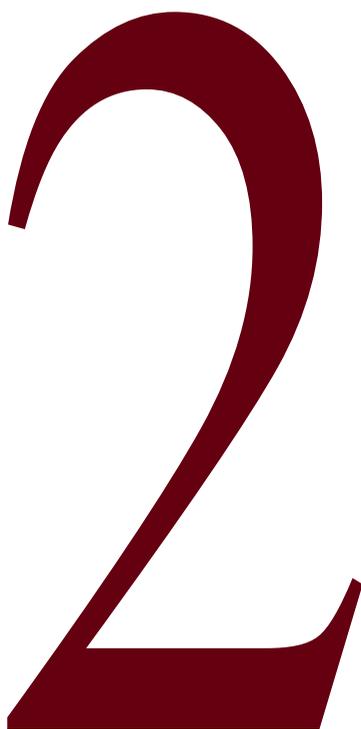
For their first 250 years in America, the majority of African Americans not only had no property rights, they were property. Emancipation was supposed to change all of that. The 14th Amendment said the formerly enslaved could not be deprived of life, liberty, or property. And slaves who fought in the Civil War were promised they would receive “40 acres of land and an army mule to work the land.”

Toward the end of the Civil War, Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman issued Special Field Order Number 15, which said: “The islands from Charleston, south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for 30 miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. John’s River, Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the Negroes now made free by the acts of war and the proclamation of the President of the United States.”

Sherman ordered this abandoned and forfeited land to be distributed in 40-acre parcels to every freed slave that his troops encountered. Each was to be furnished a title of possession. By June 1865, about 40,000 former slaves had settled on the land. Incidentally, this land below Charleston includes what are now the resort islands of Hilton Head and Kiawah and some of the most beautiful and valuable beachfront property on the Eastern seaboard. But of course this plan was never implemented, because President Andrew Johnson caved to political pressure and invalidated Sherman’s order in favor of the previous white landowners. So instead of owning the property, former slaves who wanted to stay there had to work for the former slaveholders.

This was just the beginning of the century-long process that denied former slaves access to property and its power to create wealth. The black codes and Jim Crow laws made a mockery of the 14th Amendment’s protection of property rights for the freed slaves. Many states began to limit the types of property blacks could own. In Texas, the homestead law explicitly prohibited the distribution of public land to blacks. Even when former slaves were allowed to settle open land or purchase property, it wasn’t easy to keep it. For example, the Jim Crow oral history project at the Studio Museum in Harlem contains the story of a freedman who was encouraged by his white employer to purchase a coveted piece of real estate. The employer even helped negotiate a federal loan. But the employer’s sons disagreed, and somehow the freedman’s house was burned to the ground, killing his younger brother and sister. All over the South, terrorists in white robes systematically drove black families from their land and businesses.

Furthermore, it is a bitter irony that for much of the 20th century this country’s system of property rights was used to deny black Americans their property rights. Levittown, on Long Island, was the first major planned suburb in America, developed in 1947 to help house the GIs returning from World War II and their families. That is, except for the 1.2 million black Americans who served in the war, because each



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **40 Acres and a Mortgage (cont.)**

Levittown home came with a restrictive covenant that said, “The tenant agrees not to permit the premises to be used or occupied by any person other than members of the Caucasian race.” Even in Washington, D.C., African Americans had trouble closing the purchase of a home because some of the deeds included language that said, “It is covenanted and agreed that the above described property and no part thereof, shall ever be sold, transferred, leased, rented to, nor occupied by any Negro or person of African blood.” Such racial covenants were even written into the Federal Housing Administration underwriting manual and weren’t outlawed by the Supreme Court until 1948.

Property ownership among African Americans receded throughout the 20th century. In 1920, blacks owned about 15 million acres of land. Today, they hold only 1.1 million acres. This shocking loss of property, one observer said, represents “a massive wealth transfer out of the black community.”

How did this happen? According to an investigation by the Associated Press, many black families have been driven from or swindled out of their property. Many lost their farmland, business property, and even homes because they did not have wills. Or family land was partitioned, auctioned, and sold out from under them. But even those African Americans who could obtain and protect their property could not always get full use of it because they could not capitalize it to build wealth.

### **The Denial of Capital**

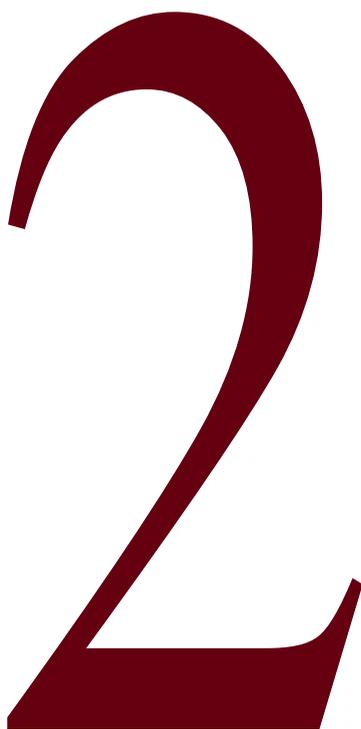
This brings us back to our Peruvian economist, Hernando de Soto, and his concept that assets have a second life because they generate capital. With “40 acres and a mule,” the freedmen not only could raise crops to support their families, they could raise capital to support their futures. But here again, African Americans have been denied the ability to raise capital against their property.

In 1999, black farmers won a class-action suit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture for years of discrimination in farm-lending practices. Each farmer won damages of \$50,000. A similar problem has persisted in home lending. For years, banks refused to make loans in certain neighborhoods. They literally drew a red line on a map around certain areas, and if you lived inside the red line you were automatically rejected. Redlining was outlawed in 1968. But in 1992, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston published a landmark study that showed why black mortgage applicants were rejected more often than white applicants: If two loan applications needed a little extra work, the white family would get help while the black family would be rejected.

Today, most mortgage applications are processed by automated underwriting systems, which are colorblind because the borrower’s race is not even entered into the computer. This technology has helped to lift African-American mortgage approvals and home ownership. But a different kind of redlining goes on today. Black Americans are much more likely than whites to fall into the subprime mortgage market. About 22 percent of the subprime market is African-American borrowers.

Subprime loans have the highest interest rates in the entire market—they can cost a borrower up to \$200,000 more in interest than a Fannie Mae loan. Many subprime borrowers could qualify for lower-cost loans, but they’re being steered or seduced into the high-cost loan. Worse than that, inner-city neighborhoods are prime targets for predatory lenders, who charge hidden and abusive rates, fees, and rules. When the borrower gets behind, the predatory lender can seize and sell their homes.

When black Americans who can afford the least are paying the most for housing capital, it is not only a denial of consumer rights. It is a denial of capital rights. And when African Americans cannot obtain capital, or must pay abusive rates for it, it is impossible to leverage their assets to generate wealth. The wealth gap, in fact, has remained about the same for the last 20 years. We have seen no progress at all. And



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### 40 Acres and a Mortgage (cont.)

this lack of wealth in black America helps to explain why the gaps persist in education, jobs, and property ownership.

Without wealth, it's hard to send your kids to college. Without college, it's hard to get a good job. Without a good job, it's hard to earn a good income. Without a good income, it's hard to obtain property. And without property and the capital to leverage it, it's hard to create wealth to send your kids to college. Many do not understand this chain of denial. They say, "Discrimination is illegal. Everyone has equal rights. What's the problem?"

The problem is that only 137 years and four generations have passed since African Americans were even permitted to learn, earn an income, and own assets. We have great-grandparents who were slaves. We have grandparents who were property-less sharecroppers. We have parents who lived under Jim Crow. We have people all around us who have suffered the de facto denial of equal education, equal employment, and fair lending.

African Americans came from 400 years and 13 generations of subjugation, humiliation, segregation, and discrimination, de facto and de jure. You cannot reverse the impact in 30 years and one generation. African Americans have been denied the miracle of compound interest. One dollar in 1865 at only 3 percent interest would be worth almost 60 times as much today. Imagine only how much wealth has been denied to the formerly enslaved as they were denied access to the formal property system. Imagine merely how much wealth was lost when Gen. Oliver Otis Howard, founder of Howard University, was halted from fulfilling the promise of "40 acres and a mule." On Kiawah Island today, a four-bedroom beach house on one acre of land alone is listed for \$3 million.

We know that the long journey of African Americans from an enslaved people to full participants in our society cannot be completed in a single step. We cannot overcome the loss of 137 years of compound interest very easily. Short of that, what can be done?

### Asset-Building Strategies

Today, most public policies to help underserved families succeed focus on education, employment, and income-building strategies, and that's good. But perhaps in addition they could also focus on asset-building strategies. That way, everyone—regardless of education or income—could harness their human capital, their willingness to work, into appreciable assets and thereby harness the "mystery of capital" to build wealth security.

Studies tell us that home ownership leads to stronger families and safer, more close-knit communities with better schools and services. Children go farther and do better in school. So home ownership can help to close the gaps in education—and thus jobs and income. Home ownership is absolutely critical to closing the wealth gap. Owning a home is the working man and woman's capital engine, the democratization of capital. Owning a home is the most important investment—and the only leveraged investment—available to most Americans. It is a powerful way to transmit wealth from generation to generation. For African Americans—the formerly enslaved—home ownership has the power to help to mend the broken promise of "40 acres and a mule." ■

*Franklin D. Raines was chair and CEO of Fannie Mae, a private company operating under congressional charter to make home ownership more affordable to low- and moderate-income borrowers, when this article appeared in the September-October 2002 issue of Sojourners. This article is adapted from remarks he delivered in March 2002 at the Howard University Charter Day Convocation in Washington, D.C.*

### **THE NEW ‘NEW SOUTH’**

*by Jorge Mariscal*

**I**n the land of Jim Crow and the civil rights movement’s most dramatic struggles, a black-white universe of race relations is slowly giving way to a more complex terrain that will determine all future U.S. cultural and political projects. Throughout the Deep South, or what Strom Thurmond used to call the Old Confederacy, immigrants from Latin America are changing the face of large urban centers, small towns, and rural settings.

The increase in Latinos between 1990 and 2000 in North Carolina was 393.9 percent, in Arkansas 337 percent, in Georgia 299.6 percent, and in Tennessee 278.2 percent. In Mississippi, the number of Latinos more than doubled during the 1990s. And these numbers are probably too low given the Census Bureau’s track record of undercounting Latinos.

Demographic transformations in the Southern states are the most dramatic. But large communities of indigenous people from Latin America also can be found in Brooklyn, Hartford, Chicago, and Boston. In the region traditionally associated with ethnic Mexican people—the Southwest—the “latinoization” of the cultural landscape continues its natural course.

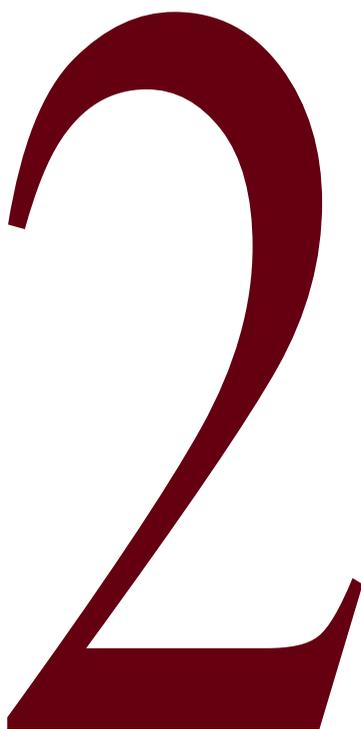
In some urban spaces, Southeast Asians, Central Americans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans live side by side with other working-class families. Recently, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington gave an Ivy League imprimatur to a resurgent nativist backlash by singling out Latinos as “the most significant threat to American culture.”

According to the 2000 census, more legal immigrants arrived in the United States in the 1990s than in any previous decade in U.S. history. The economic boom of the Clinton years attracted large numbers of people from around the world. The majority of these legal immigrants came from Latin America (approximately 51 percent, with 26 percent from Asian countries).

Given the stunning demographic changes, the electoral landscape is slowly shifting, but it will be some time before we can fully understand the consequences. Many Latinos, especially first generation immigrants, do not vote and have yet to fully experience the effects of long-standing institutional racism in education, employment, and housing. Many of the children of these new arrivals will beat the odds and become successful, but many more will be tracked into the service sector, the lowest ranks of the military, or prison.

A SERIES OF lawsuits in 2003 suggests that in those communities where the influx of new immigrants has been highest, law enforcement agencies have increased their use of racial profiling. Tensions between white youth and youth of color are on the rise in areas such as San Diego and Riverside counties in California, where “White Power” groups recruit from among disgruntled working-class youth. In September 2000, white students at Elsinore High School in Riverside County confronted Latino students with racial insults and flags bearing iron crosses and swastikas. By the end of the school year, administrators at several other schools were grappling with similar incidents. In many areas, the Latino population continues to grow as white numbers decrease. These changes—coupled with structural racism, shrinking state budgets, and a Pentagon-driven economy that strips away the social safety net—bode ill for the future.

And yet, as in previous periods of rapid change, the conditions for progressive social movements are gradually taking shape. The struggle for economic justice,

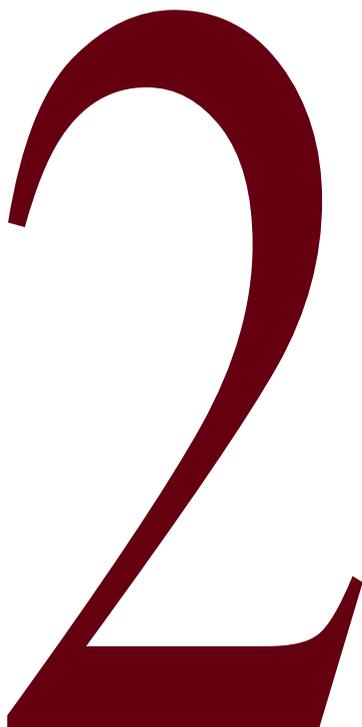


## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **The New 'New South' (cont.)**

racial equality, and international peace and cooperation will be led by young people who can imagine a better world than the one they have inherited. Perhaps at this very moment, somewhere in a schoolhouse in Georgia or Michigan or Illinois, the next César Chávez or Dolores Huerta is preparing for that struggle. ■

*Jorge Mariscal was director of the Chicano/a-Latinola Arts and Humanities Program at the University of California, San Diego, when this article appeared in the August 2004 issue of Sojourners.*



### SESSION 3

## Racial Reconciliation

- “Is That Racism on Your Shoe?” by Chris Rice
- “Can We Talk?” by Andrea Ayvazian and Beverly Daniel Tatum
- “Communities of Reconciliation” by Rodolpho Carrasco

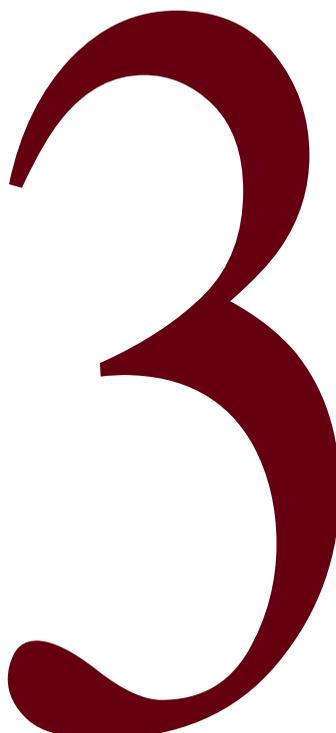
Using a memorable metaphor, Chris Rice points out that people today are often afraid to talk about race—in part because the word “racist” is currently too blunt an instrument to helpfully describe the problems that persist in our society. Andrea Ayvazian and Beverly Daniel Tatum talk about how careful planning can help communities have genuine dialogues about race—and can help white participants move beyond thinking of racism as “a virulent form of individual prejudice.” Carrasco uses his own experience, as a Latino man working for a primarily white and African-American church, as a model for how to go beyond “old-school guilt politics.”

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. These three articles argue, in different ways, that racism must be fought by careful listening and patient, personal relationships. What opportunities could you find or make for such relationships? (Remember that, as Tatum and Ayvazian point out, it is important to respect individuals who choose not to engage in dialogue.) In what ways might you be challenged by this time-consuming, personal model of change?
2. Many white people, Ayvazian and Tatum write, are “oblivious to the reality of privilege given automatically and invisibly to white people every single day.” In what ways might you, or your faith community, fight this obliviousness? In what situations are you tempted to “judge, debate, defend, solve, or critique,” rather than listen to others of different ethnicities?
3. Carrasco’s community includes concentric circles of growth, support, and respect. Are there comparable situations within your worship community? How have they affected you? Spend some time brainstorming how you might build and participate in community where you are.

### RESOURCES

- Beverly Daniel Tatum helps provide a perspective on self-segregation and other racial facts of life in *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together In The Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race: A Psychologist Explains the Development of Racial Identity*, Revised ed. (Basic Books, 2003)
- Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein, two pastors sharing a ministry in downtown Chicago, share practical suggestions for racial reconciliation in church in *Breaking Down Walls: A Model for Reconciliation in an Age of Racial Strife*. (Moody Publishers, 1993)
- *The Color of Fear* is a wonderful documentary about eight North American men of different ethnicities brought together for a frank, personal, and dramatic discussion of race. The 90-minute video is excellent, although not inexpensive. (Stir-Fry Productions, 1983)



### IS THAT RACISM ON YOUR SHOE?

by Chris Rice

A straight-shooting white friend once commented that whenever blacks and whites are together it's like there's a "big pile of poop in the middle of the room" that everybody sees and smells but pretends isn't there. "Let's stop tip-toein' around it," he said, "get us some shovels, and start digging."

Parts of that still-stinking national pile get plenty of air time, and deservedly so: racial profiling, the explosion of hate groups, 25 percent of African Americans still entrenched in poverty, and persistent corporate discrimination symbolized by Texaco's \$150 million settlement to black employees, to name a few. But other parts of the black-white pile are rarely faced. I'll step right into my own list.

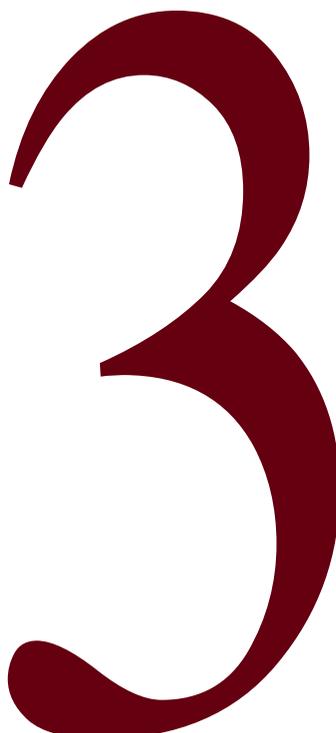
Don't start with failure. The reason the civil rights movement and affirmative action have inspired every liberation struggle after them—from women's equality to ending apartheid in South Africa—is because they have been successful. Black married families now earn 87 percent of white married families' income. Black women with a college degree or higher earn more than white women with the same education. In his book *The Ordeal of Integration*, black Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson flatly states, "There does not exist a single case in modern or earlier history that comes anywhere near the record of America in changing majority attitudes; in guaranteeing legal and political rights; and in expanding socioeconomic opportunities for its disadvantaged minorities."

While the enormous progress continues to be a great ordeal, Patterson argues that lack of friction would be "the surest sign that no meaningful change has taken place," and that the viciousness and trauma of change are "side effects of progress, not signs of failure."

**Overhaul language on white racism.** "Racist" is applied so universally and recklessly that the category has become almost meaningless. This makes it too easy to believe that either nothing is racist or redemption is impossible. We need post-civil rights movement language that is fresh, persuasive, and more discriminating. For example, some scholars estimate that as many as 25 percent of whites are still hardcore racists who favor housing segregation and laws against interracial marriage. That means 75 percent of whites don't fit the label. What are those in this vast white majority who are allies of racial progress doing right, and how can that be impressed upon others? And what are the non-hardcore racists who hold back progress still doing wrong? We especially need to more effectively challenge whites to critique their role in institutional practices.

**Black self-critique.** Many truth-seeking voices believe that African Americans now suffer as much harm from materialism, individualism, and a crisis in gender relations as from racism. Most of the black affluent in Jackson, Mississippi, were no better allies for the black poor of our neighborhood than wealthy whites. I have witnessed just as much resistance among blacks to bridge-building with whites as vice versa. "Growth for us black folks," said Spencer Perkins, my African-American ministry partner, "means no longer being obsessed with the blinders of our white brothers and sisters at the expense of tolerating our own."

**Racial intimacy.** After an in-depth series on "How Race is Lived in America," *The New York Times* concluded that "the easy work is done"—building racial trust in daily

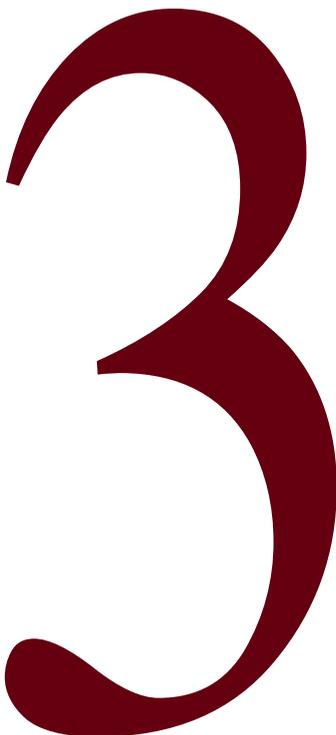


### **Is That Racism on Your Shoe? (cont.)**

experience still lies ahead. Our family's recent move to Durham, North Carolina, and the difficulty of finding deep interracial contact in neighborhood, church, workplace, and social settings has reminded me that racial intimacy is hardly even an option in America except for relentless pioneers.

**Embracing interracial marriage.** Something deep in the American psyche remains unhealed as long as interracial marriage is not as valid as "marrying one's own." These unions are a profound gift to racial progress: Black spouses learn to patiently embrace and educate whites; white spouses encounter racism first-hand and become powerful allies for racial justice; the social capital of centuries of white privilege extends over racial lines. Interracial marriages bring into the world the most passionate voices for racial healing: bicultural children not willing to choose between two beloved heritages. These children will play a crucial bridge-building role in bringing transcendent ideals into America's racial future. ■

*Chris Rice, co-author of More Than Equals: Racial Healing for the Sake of the Gospel, was a student at Duke Divinity School when this article appeared in the November-December 2000 issue of Sojourners.*



### CAN WE TALK?

by Andrea Ayvazian and Beverly Daniel Tatum

*An African-American woman notices that as she enters a room full of friends and colleagues—all white—the conversation stops when she walks through the door. An African-American man is routinely followed by the local police as he drives through a suburban community on his way to work. When he tells his white colleagues at work, his story is met with disbelief.*

**T**hese vignettes are representative of the many stories we have heard as a biracial team that has provided hundreds of anti-racism training seminars and consultations nationwide. We ask people—white and of color—to talk about a subject that folks are usually careful to avoid: race relations and racism in the United States today.

We have noticed in our travels that while people are reticent to discuss issues of race and racism in public, they pull us aside and ask us in whispered tones what we really think, or they explain their own theories to us behind closed doors. Even in these guarded conversations, we have been struck by a discernible change in tone. Suddenly, it seems, white people are seeing the racial divide as looming larger than before. Race, so often dismissed by white people as an insignificant factor in contemporary U.S. society, has acquired meaning—meaning that they were working hard to ignore. There seems to be a veiled sense of panic in their conversation.

THE NATION IS RAW and divided—the racial wound is now more visible than it has been at any time since the civil rights movement and the urban riots of the 1960s. Just as we are hearing expressions of a quiet panic coming from whites in this country, the people of color we talk to are angry, and very cynical about white America's commitment to effecting significant change.

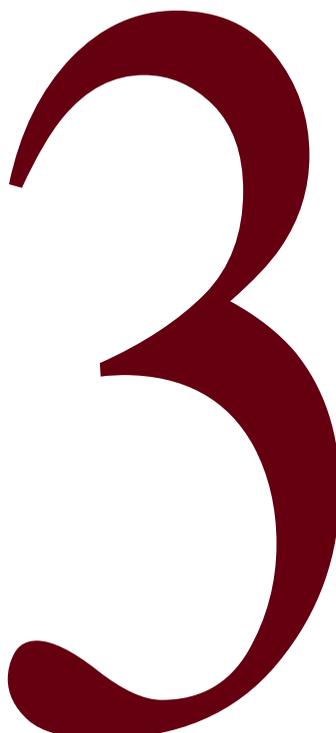
And yet, even against this backdrop of fear, anger, and cynicism, the fact that racism has now surfaced so visibly once again gives us the opportunity to confront it directly, and to move forward in new and constructive ways.

Are we on the verge of a second wave of the civil rights movement? Maybe. We are unsure. What we are sure about is that we are hearing a level of concern, agitation, empowerment, and fear—along with a desire for dialogue—surrounding the issue of racism that we have not heard in the last 20 years.

If we are indeed at one of those rare *kairos* moments when there exists the possibility for a significant paradigm shift, what can we do to seize this moment and move toward race equity in this country?

We believe the greatest need exists on the community level: the need for deep, honest, and ongoing public dialogue on race and racism between white people and people of color conducted in safe settings and in a structured fashion. Due to the level of segregation in our society, most white adults only interact with people of color at their workplace (if at all); their neighborhoods, houses of worship, and social circles remain predominantly white.

When we say that we need public dialogue on the community level about issues of race, we do not mean social events that encourage friendly mixing and polite conversation (although those may be useful as well). The public gatherings we are referring to would be specifically for the purpose of discussing race and racism. They would, moreover, have clearly stated goals, such as: an enhanced understanding of the manifestations of cultural and institutional racism and their impact in one's own com-



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### Can We Talk? (cont.)

munity; the creation of mutually beneficial coalitions across racial lines; and the empowerment of people of color and white allies to effect serious change.

We believe that these organized community dialogues need to be carefully structured, with a clear agenda hammered out in advance by white folks and people of color, and skillfully facilitated to create a level of safety that allows participants to speak openly—on the emotional as well as cognitive levels—without fear of reprisal.

WHEN PLANNING a public forum to discuss racism in one's community, organizers must recognize that people of color and white people do not usually enter the dialogue with the same level of awareness or sophistication about these issues. People of color know a great deal about white America—they must, to function in this country. They also know a great deal about racism. In contrast, much of white America remains remarkably unaware of the lives, feelings, and hardships of people of color.

Many people of color understand the power differential inherent in the three manifestations of racism: personal, cultural, and institutional. They view racism not as an individual issue but as a systemic problem. However, many white people still characterize racism as a virulent form of individual prejudice—they reduce the problem to what Peggy McIntosh calls “individual acts of meanness.” They are unschooled in the systematic ways that racism has been institutionalized and are oblivious to the reality of privilege given automatically and invisibly to white people every single day.

Because it is almost inevitable that white people and people of color will begin any discussion of racism with vastly different perceptions of the problem, a public dialogue needs to begin with white people doing something for which they may have little practice: listening intently to people of color. Whites need to listen to the stories and the struggles of people of color in their own or surrounding communities. Not judge, debate, defend, solve, or critique—but listen. Through the simple act of listening, the subtle and pervasive nature of “neoracism”—the racism of today—may become evident.

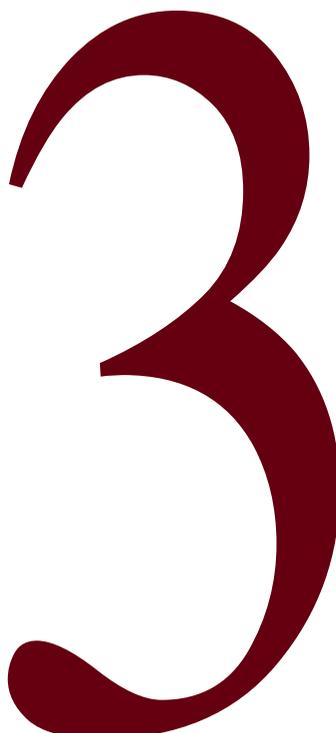
However, listening itself will not reach hearts or change minds unless white people are encouraged to take another step that contradicts countless messages from their growing years, that is: to believe people of color. Although simple, this combination of listening and believing makes for a radical prescription.

Asking white people to listen to and believe people of color sounds like an easy request. But, in our experience, whites almost invariably resist the idea, and deny that they don't believe people of color. Genuinely believing people of color requires that white people examine some of the messages, images, and cues received as children that taught them otherwise.

Most white people were not given overt messages in their growing years to doubt people of color, they simply absorbed the prevailing bias in society of white superiority. Consequently, whites learned to “second guess” people of color, to assume they were smarter, and to dismiss information that they heard from people of color that contradicted their own experience in the world. But, with modeling, guidance, and support, whites can be helped to listen with an open mind and an undefended and believing heart. Imagine the difference in our communities if white people started listening intently to people of color and believing that what they were hearing was actually true.

Unfortunately, most people have had few opportunities to witness the kind of open, honest, and mutually respectful dialogue that we envision. They do not know how to begin, are uncertain of how to challenge old behaviors and assumptions, and are afraid to let down their defenses.

We have found that both white people and people of color benefit when community dialogues on racism are co-facilitated by a biracial team willing to engage in



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **Can We Talk? (cont.)**

frank dialogue between themselves as a model for the group. This modeling provides a concrete example of the level of trust and openness expected in the dialogue, and helps develop a sense of safety in the room.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE of this nature seems to work best when people speak from their own experiences about their own lives. If participants make a commitment to an ongoing series of meetings, it is both effective and useful—for the reasons outlined above—to have the people of color speak first about their struggles and tell their stories. We have facilitated gatherings where people of color voluntarily responded to a set of questions presented by the facilitators. This structure gives the discussion a starting point and a sense of boundaries, and brings the dialogue to the personal and community level immediately.

Many people of color are weary of educating white people about racism, and may not want to participate in such forums. People of color should be given full support if they decide that a public community dialogue where they would be speaking about their lives and struggles is not an event they choose to participate in for whatever reasons. The community dialogue should only include those people of color who feel they have something to gain as well as something to give, and who willingly choose to participate.

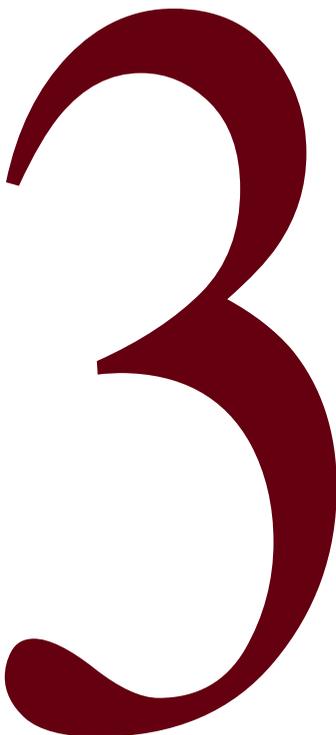
A helpful exercise that speaks directly to the twin issues of people of color continuously having to educate white folks and white folks often being less informed about race issues is meeting in caucus groups. This exercise involves subdividing by race and having the people of color meet separately with the facilitator of color and the white people meet with the white facilitator.

Caucuses provide folks with a safe place to explore difficult issues with members of their own group. The people of color may focus on empowerment issues and building a strong sense of group solidarity; the white people often struggle with their understanding of racism and how to be effective allies. We have found that, in this arrangement, people raise difficult questions that were previously unasked, members push one another, and confrontation is less threatening than in a racially mixed group. With skillful facilitation, caucus groups can accelerate the changes—greater openness, an ability truly to hear one another, and feelings of empathy—that are necessary for the community dialogue to be effective.

AS IS EVIDENT from our comments thus far, we believe in the power of modeling as a way to guide people into new behaviors. We feel that more public dialogues are needed that focus on black-white relations, or more generally, whites and people of color. As a biracial team, we have taken part in just such an endeavor, engaging in an exchange we call “Women, Race, and Racism: A Dialogue in Black and White.” People have expressed tremendous gratitude that we are able to talk about racism openly from our different perspectives and view this sort of an exchange as a concrete step in the journey toward justice. We encourage other biracial pairs to consider modeling for others a public dialogue about these issues; in our experience, it is an effective way to demonstrate the dialogue we hope to create on the community level.

We need to create public dialogues to move beyond polite and empty words, beyond slogans and accusations, and beyond the fears and hurts that close us off one from another. We must remember, however, that community dialogue is not an end in itself. Our goal is to move people along the continuum from uninformed to informed, from informed to concerned, and from concerned to active.

As a nation, we suffer from what Cornel West has called a “weak will to justice.” In our experience, effective community dialogue can be a way both to demonstrate and to strengthen our will to become active in the task of dismantling racism. If we



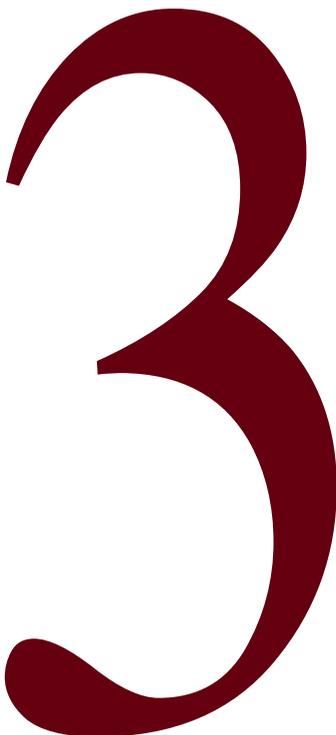
# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **Can We Talk? (cont.)**

choose to invest the care and the time to organize the dialogue well, and if we decide to speak and to listen in a spirit of openness and trust, we can find avenues to join with one another to confront and dismantle racism in our own communities. ■

*Andrea Ayvazian was an anti-racism educator and the Protestant chaplain at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, and Beverly Daniel Tatum, author of Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race, was an associate professor of psychology and education at Mount Holyoke College when this article appeared in the January-February 1996 issue of Sojourners.*



### COMMUNITIES OF RECONCILIATION

*by Rodolpho Carrasco*

I was at a meeting of pastors and lay Christian leaders, strategizing for community outreach, when an African-American activist stood up and denounced our weak efforts at meeting the needs of the community. The activist had been invited by a pastor in the group, and I didn't know if he was a Christian, but I do know that what he said smacked of an old-school guilt politics that isn't going down anymore.

It was odd to sit with a group of pastors, most of whom are black, and hear this man give a speech right out of another decade. We need jobs! We need a voice in city hall! The politicians aren't doing anything! Racism! Discrimination! Redlining! It was practically a history course in urban politics. It also fell on deaf ears, my own included. It's not that he was saying something far out. In fact, much of what he said was true then and remains true today. But what bugged everybody was the way he said it. Our clergy group is a mixed-race gathering of people who decided that our road to racial reconciliation would pass through personal relationships first, not through common agenda.

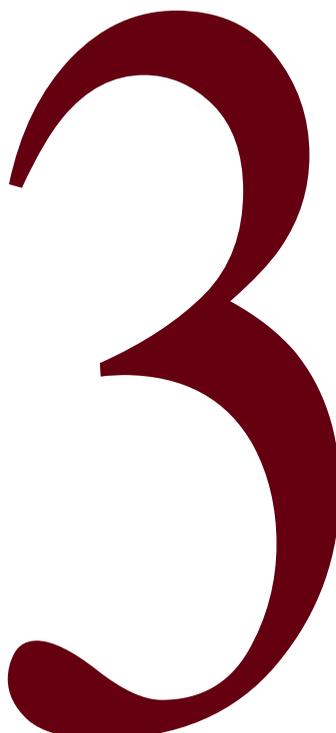
This man's first mistake was not thinking that we already knew and agreed with the issues he was raising. His second mistake was thinking that anger and blaming politics would motivate us. What it did was turn us off.

What turned me off the most was how out of touch this guy was with the multi-ethnic nature of Los Angeles. He talked about blacks and whites—a bold and incredible thing to do, given the racial demographics of the city. Even those who only give lip-service to multiethnicity know that there is something beyond black and white in LA, even if they don't know what to call it. It is also well-known that the solutions for Los Angeles will be the solutions that benefit Angelenos of all races.

The members of my coalition listened to this gentleman and spoke with him about his issues over lunch. In a gentle manner, we shared with him the values of our group and explained why we believe a foundation of cross-racial, reconciled relationships is our best hope for dealing with the problems in our civic areas. We were gentle, but we were firm. When this man concluded the meeting by reiterating his stance that churches weren't really going to do anything, the members of the coalition invited him to see for himself by attending the church. We received him with open arms, and were seeking to convert him, in more ways than one.

THIS STORY IS an example of the type of old-school vs. new-school thinking that is going on regarding racial reconciliation. The questions asked by the "new school" are: What is there beyond blame and guilt? What is there beyond building one-on-one relationships with people of another race? What is there beyond history lessons, visiting other cultures, and pulpit exchanges?

The way my coalition responded to this gentleman made me feel hopeful about racial reconciliation and privileged to be involved with a group of black, white, and Latino pastors who are very forward thinking. They look at me as a brother in Christ and as a Latino, and they have the patience to get to know me as an individual and be concerned about the things that concern me; just as I have been making an effort to understand black and white issues. Now what I have is incredible: Pastoral colleagues who want to be reconciled to me, who want to know Latino history and culture, who



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### Communities of Reconciliation (cont.)

are willing to let their culture be changed so that they can be united with me.

It is because of the experiences we have had forging community that I feel hopeful about racial reconciliation. Community for me takes the form of three concentric circles. The outermost circle is Harambee Christian Family Center. For 15 years, Harambee has employed a vision of racial reconciliation and community development. The next circle is Northwest Fellowship. Four years ago, a group within Harambee created a worshiping body for neighborhood people and those ministering in the neighborhood. My inmost circle is Bethel Esperanza. Three years ago, a group of four from Northwest Fellowship chose to live together as an intentional community, with a fifth person joining in the following year. “Bethel Esperanza” means there is hope in the house of God.

All three groups are community-based and their members all live in the community we serve. As the racial components of all three community circles develop, it is interesting to see us enter a new round of changes together.

#### Harambee Christian Family Center

Historically, Harambee has been identified as an outreach program to blacks in our community and as a place to learn about reconciliation between blacks and whites—as were the other two ministries John Perkins started in Mississippi. In 1998, our community is half black and half Latino. But reshaping our ministry doesn’t necessarily mean printing everything in Spanish and English and holding joint classes.

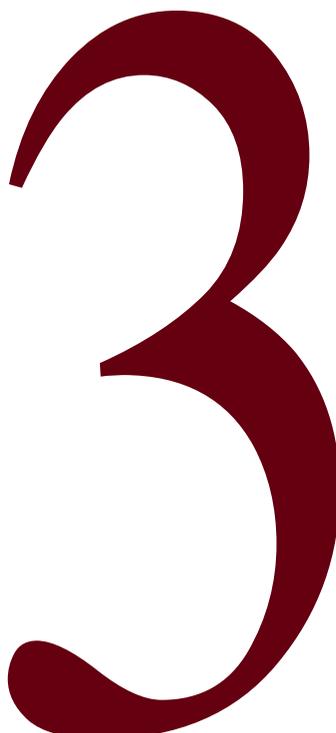
We have seen in many community and youth centers throughout Los Angeles that Latinos and blacks do not tend to co-exist. If one group starts attending the center, the other is likely to leave. Because of linguistic and cultural issues, there are perceptions that a center is either “black” or “Latino.” Our goal is to build a center that fosters reconciled Christians who are working for the good of all races and cognizant of racial complexities.

Once, with a group of mostly African-American people from my church, I attended a service in Compton. All rap songs and videos to the contrary, the population of Compton is actually half Latino. After the service, our teen-agers were milling around the church parking lot when two Latino teen-agers across the street began cursing them and calling them the N-word. Our black youth were hurt and frustrated, but spoke little about the incident.

Two days later I talked to one black youth about what happened. I told him that since he is a Christian, I am for him and his family first, and that I would side with someone based on whether or not they are Christian, not whether or not they are Mexican. That short speech was pro-active peacemaking because of what was unsaid: The youth I spoke to was known for his own subtle hostility toward Mexicans. My prayer, and my investment, is that the encouragement of one Mexican will help this young person believe that Christianity is stronger than race, and strong enough to heal his hurt and keep him from turning around in revenge and hurting others.

At Harambee, we have some basic requirements. First, you will learn the Bible. We will get to know your parents. And growing as a Christian means you must love and build partnerships with people of other races. This strategy tends to keep our numbers down. What we have is a ministry where the participants and followers are learning from the Bible about God’s heart for reconciled relationships.

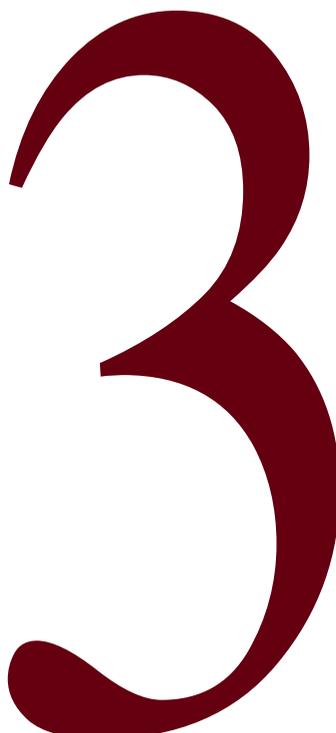
Also, at Harambee we have adapted a unique type of affirmative action that draws in the friends and family members of children we serve. Even though our program is full at 85 percent black and 15 percent Latino, if a Latino child and his or her parents want to register, and they are close friends or related to an existing Harambee student, we will let them in. We do this because our influence toward reconciliation is much



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **Communities of Reconciliation (cont.)**



greater with people who are closely connected, and because it is the Latino youth who are actually doing the greatest amount of the teaching.

#### **Northwest Fellowship**

One of the odd things about our church is that, despite the number of interracial marriages, a strong mix of poor and middle-class people, and the predominance of younger (Gen X) folks, for years, I was the only Latino member. It was difficult for me, because our ministry was focused on issues between blacks and whites and reaching out to the black community.

But I am not white. I am Latino, and I could see tremendous needs in our community among Latino families. Why couldn't anybody else? So many times I wanted to stand up in church and say we needed to reach Latinos. But I didn't, because I was concerned that people would reach out to Latinos only after I had made them feel guilty, not once they sensed God's Spirit moving in their hearts.

This has gone on for seven years. When I first arrived at Harambee, the emphasis and historical understanding was about blacks. The consciousness of Latino needs and issues wasn't there. Some said that I was brought on as a Latino to minister to Latinos—but I reject that thought. The church is in a certain place to minister to that place. Yes, I may be best equipped to do Latino ministry because I am one—but then again, maybe I'm not the best one. Maybe another person will be better able to do it.

The bottom line is that it is the responsibility of the entire church to reach the people in their neighborhood—not just the responsibility of “the Latino department” to reach Latinos. So I rejected the Latino ministry label, waiting instead for the day the entire church of Northwest Fellowship and the ministry of Harambee would have its heart turned to the entire community.

Slowly, layer by layer, God has done something; not just for me, but for my various concentric circles of community. For me personally, God gave me a beautiful black wife, Kafi, who is simultaneously black and burdened for Latinos—and proud of both. She understood from day one my self-identity as a Christian and as a Latino, and that both were acceptable and not mutually exclusive.

It's an interesting position to be in, to be concerned for blacks and also to have a strong concern for Latinos. Most whites I know have a thought about how they can help the “other,” which for them means black people. I see this happen in the city of Los Angeles, where the black population is one million, but the Latino population is four million. Still, I've hated to toot the horn of Latino need.

What God has done in my community is to cause people to grow into love for Latinos. I have spent a good portion of my life serving the black Christian community and black people. Perhaps in return, God is sending a wave of people who are reaching Latinos. Even more, God is sending partners who share the concern for reaching both blacks and Latinos. Now, I think it's been good that I have labored in the black community. There is a foundation of trust for Mexicans, because I, a Mexican, have by God's Spirit demonstrated love to blacks.

#### **Bethel Esperanza**

I have tightly bonded with four other people: my wife, Kafi; Anne Berry; and Derek Perkins and Karyn Farrar-Perkins. It's something to see the heavy influx of Latinos into the area where we live, and we wonder how it is going to work out. Both Anne and I came out of college in 1990 and went to work for John Perkins, me in Pasadena and Anne in Mississippi. We had known all along that our outreach was not just directed toward blacks, but that we were in a black cultural milieu. I rarely like to muscle in a concern or try to make people feel guilty, but I did wonder how Latino

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

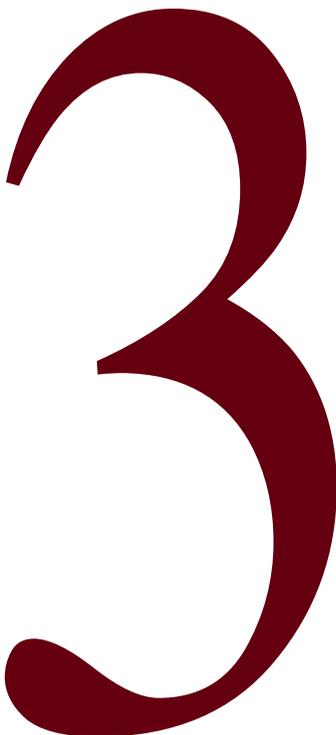
## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **Communities of Reconciliation (cont.)**

concerns would play out.

The other members of Bethel Esperanza, as my yokefellows, have decided to be concerned with the things that I am concerned about. They chose to bear my burden. There has been growth in the way they think about and support Latino ministry, and that has made me feel cared for. Together, we have grown to think about all of the issues of our community, and we have found that there is much more going on than just black and white. ■

*Rodolpho Carrasco was associate director of Harambee Christian Family Center in Pasadena, California, when this article appeared in the Sojourners resource Crossing the Racial Divide.*



### SESSION 4

## *Race and the Body of Christ*

- “No Cheap Peace,” by Leah Gaskin Fitchue
- “No Longer Strangers,” by Lois Ann Lorentzen
- “With Drum and Cup: An interview with George Tinker,” by Bob Hulteen

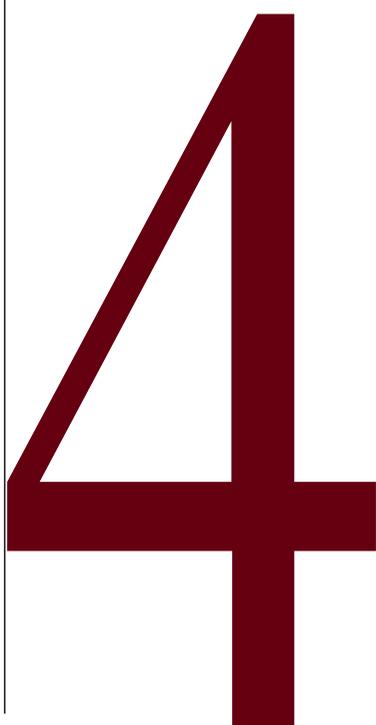
**R**acial reconciliation in the church, Fitchue points out, will not be cheap, quick, or convenient. And, as Lorentzen argues, the church in the U.S. is becoming ever more diverse, with the participation of millions of immigrants—but, while many ethnic churches form focal points for cultural identity, they can also be treated as second-class citizens by other U.S. Christians. As Osage Lutheran minister George Tinker discusses, the only non-immigrant group in the U.S., American Indians, faces similar problems—plus a legacy of genocide and perversion of the Gospel.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Fitchue argues that followers of Jesus are going to have to give up things that seem like a part of themselves—including power, privilege, wealth, and sexism. As a start, white Christians must listen to the African-American church and community—and this includes visiting people in prison—before trying to make policy or plan ministries intended to help African Americans. Can you think of examples from your own life, church, or experience in which well-meaning people tried to help people without listening to them?
2. According to Lorentzen, “Christians have no option but to provide sanctuary for the uprooted, learn from border-crossers, and fight for those who are in new, often unwelcoming homes.” In what ways might you put this principle into action in your own community?
3. George Tinker forcefully portrays the racial injustice upon which the United States is based, and criticizes white Americans who want reconciliation on their own terms. In what ways may you (whatever your ethnic background) still share in the church’s historical problem of mixing up Christianity with European culture? How could you learn from the examples of Indian spirituality without trying to turn it into a feel-good, individualistic practice?
4. In what ways do you feel challenged by these articles? What practical steps might your faith community take to meet the challenge to respect, understand, listen to, and work with other members of the body of Christ?

### RESOURCES

- *A Native American Theology*, by Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. Tinker, offers readings of the Bible grounded in Native American experience, responding to and differing from traditional European systematic theology. (Orbis Books, 2001)
- Find out more about how missionaries in North America have mistaken European



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

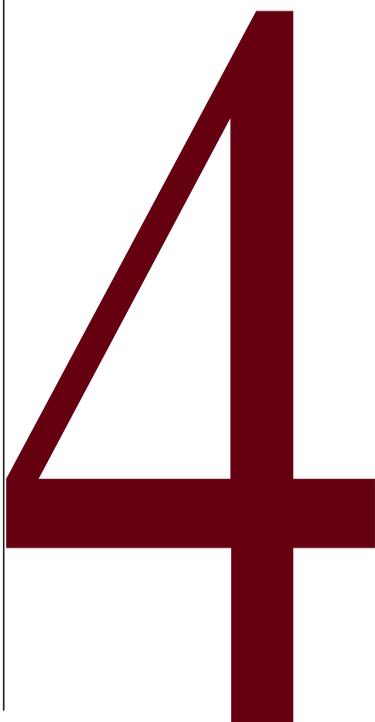
culture for Christianity in George Tinker's *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*, which draws on four historical case studies. (Augsburg Fortress, 1993)

- *Religions/Globalizations: Theories and Cases*, by Lois Ann Lorentzen and others, examines the ways in which globalization—the accelerating breakdown of traditional borders—can both power religious nationalism and powerfully inspire liberating alternative visions. (Duke University Press, 2001)

- In *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, the sociologist authors argue that a too-exclusive focus on individual repentance hampers many Christians from perceiving and addressing systemic racism. (Oxford University Press, 2001)

- *Caucasia* by Danzy Senna recounts the experience of a biracial girl whose identity gets lost between races. (Riverhead Books, 1999)

- *The Color of Water* by James McBride, is the moving real-life story of the author's Jewish mother, her marriage to an African-American Christian preacher, and their struggles against poverty and racism as they raised 12 children. The book is also the story of one of their children and his journey of faith. (Riverhead Books, 1997)



### NO CHEAP PEACE

by Leah Gaskin Fitchue

**T**hose of us Christians who seek to be at peace with each other must honestly believe that peace not orchestrated by God will be dominated by principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness in high places. Even the church impedes the reconciliation it preaches. We claim to be followers of Jesus, and yet we find no contradiction in openly and sometimes not so openly treating women as if they were inferior to men, treating people of color as if they were inferior to people who do not have that color, and treating poor people as if they were inferior to rich people.

What we understand from this behavior is that wearing the label “Christian” does not protect us from bias, ignorance, or ugly stereotypical behavior. Some of us Christians believe that some folks are more human than other folks. We make policies and create Christian cultures that reflect that mindset.

Lasting peace must be relational. The white Christian community and the black Christian community are still struggling to understand how they will be in relationship. How can white Christians achieve reconciliation with black Christians if we pursue a process of having white Christians make policy for black Christians? Are white Christians really sure they know what black Christians want?

We know white Christians want reconciliation. Black Christians want reconciliation too. But is it on the same agenda for black folks as it is for white folks? There are those in the black community that say that black people are not yet free. They don’t mind a discussion of reconciliation, but they would prefer freedom first.

I have seen so many well-intentioned Christians—white folks—planning for black children as if they didn’t come from a black mama and a black papa. How do you plan for black children without a dialogue with black adults? And if you’re that serious about a dialogue with black adults and a significant number of the black fathers happen to be in jail, take your Christian self right up to the jail door, open it, and demand a dialogue. Be the liaison between the inside world and the outside world.

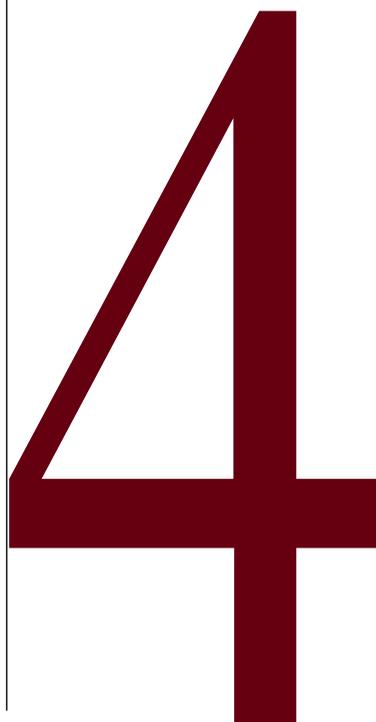
It’s a lot safer to talk about children than it is to talk about prisoners. But those men and women in the jails are as responsible for those children as anybody else. Until we are able to understand that our attempt to save black children can’t happen in isolation from being concerned about all black people, those efforts will probably not be effective.

THE DIALOGUE STARTS with people with whom we want to journey on the path toward greater justice. Any discussion about the African-American community cannot be understood if the church is not involved. The church of the black community is the only institution that community totally owns. Any strategy for the black community that does not intimately involve the black church will fail.

What must we do to be truly reconciled? To truly be in relationship?

We must enter into this process realizing that it is going to be both painful and costly. As author Curtiss Paul DeYoung says, “What has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.” Neither can it be too quick, too convenient, too politically related, or too denominationally controlled. Therefore, how much of ourselves are we willing to die to? How much power, privilege, wealth, and sexism are we willing to give up so that God can use the death in us for a new and resurrected life—without which reconciliation cannot take place?

Only if we know the story of Jesus can we tell the story of Jesus. What is this story



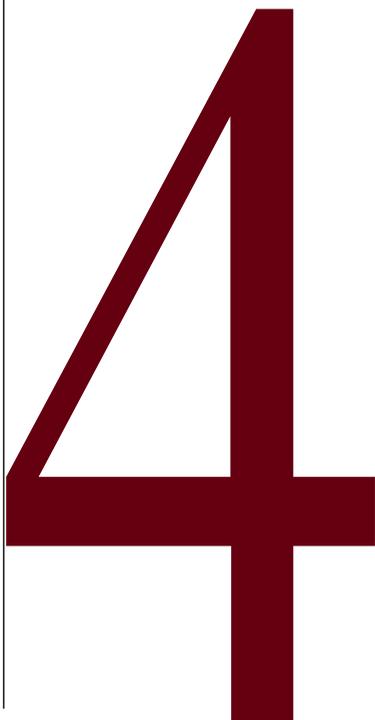
# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **No Cheap Peace (cont.)**

for us today? It is that in Jesus we have equality. Equal sinners, then in Jesus, equal partners. In Jesus we have equal need. It is only in Jesus that the significant cost of reconciliation can be made real. ■

*Leah Gaskin Fitchue was director of urban ministry studies at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, when this article appeared in the Sojourners resource Crossing the Racial Divide. It was adapted from a sermon she preached at the October 1997 Call to Renewal conference in Arlington, Virginia.*



### NO LONGER STRANGERS

by Lois Ann Lorentzen

**W**alking around my hometown of San Francisco, I am always struck by a remarkable cultural vibrancy that translates into religious dynamism. In Chinatown, the Gold Mountain Monastery serves vegetarian meals daily, Chinese-speaking nuns minister to both longtime residents and recent arrivals, and people escape bustling streets to worship in the peaceful temple. In the Mission District, a predominantly Latino area of the city, St. Peter's Catholic Church houses a refugee center, health services, a homeless shelter, and legal services for immigrants and offers Mass in Spanish.

Templo de la Fe, a storefront charismatic church, works with youth trying to leave the gangs that congregate on the streets of the Mission District. Mosques, Hindu temples, Buddhist monasteries, Vietnamese Catholic churches, Santeria stores, Sikh gurdwaras, Russian Orthodox spires, and storefront churches all shape the landscape of my town.

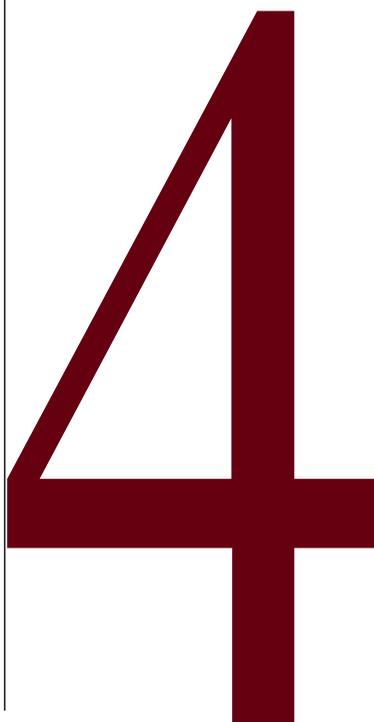
According to Harvard religion scholar Diana L. Eck, the United States—which has more American Muslims than Episcopalians—is the most religiously diverse nation in the world. This is mainly due to the largest wave of migration in U.S. history, which is having a profound impact on the ethnic and racial composition of the country. Since the early 1990s, almost a million legal immigrants were admitted to the United States each year, plus perhaps 150,000 undocumented persons. These new migrants are racially, ethnically, and religiously more diverse than earlier groups. In 1960, seven of the top 10 sending countries were European; by 1996, six of the top 10 were Asian, one of them was Mexico, and only one of them was European.

Daly City, California, boasts the largest concentration of Filipinos outside Manila. Long Beach claims more Cambodians than Phnom Penh. Los Angeles has the third largest population of people of Mexican descent (following Mexico City and Guadalajara). Are these “American” cities? Mexican, Filipino, and Cambodian cities? Cosmopolitan world cities? With a population that is 10.4 percent foreign-born, and with more than 30 million immigrants, the United States has a new face.

#### The New Hues of U.S. Christianity

The new United States is evident in U.S. Christianity, which includes Latino, Filipino, and Vietnamese Catholics; Chinese, Haitian, and Korean evangelicals; and pentecostals of all ethnicities. Churches must negotiate multiple identities—cultural/ethnic, Christian, American—and this occurs in creative ways. University of Southern Maine sociologist Fenggang Yang writes of the “sinicization of Christianity,” referring to the growth of Chinese Protestant churches in which occurs the integration of evangelical beliefs with Chinese (mainly Confucian) values. Chinese Catholic churches frequently incorporate traditional Chinese symbols and practices—such as the venerating of ancestors—into Catholic services. Chinese Catholic New Year's celebrations may include red pockets for small children and offerings of fruit and pigs' heads for ancestors.

Church services in San Francisco, as in most major urban areas, are offered in many languages, including Tagalog, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Korean, Polish, Mandarin, and Cantonese. Days honoring Salvador del Mundo, Guadalupe, the Virgin of Levang, and other national or cultural saints occur in most U.S. cities. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops 2000 letter, “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity,” celebrates these cultural celebrations and devotions from around



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### No Longer Strangers (cont.)

the world as “gifts given to the church.”

Church historian Timothy Smith has called immigration a “theologizing experience.” Migrants bring countless gifts to the church, including new ways of thinking about and practicing our faith. The theology articulated by some migrant groups expresses exile and oppression in terms similar to that of the Exodus of Hebrew scripture. Filipino Catholics at a parish in one of San Francisco’s poorest areas note that theirs is a faith that strongly identifies with suffering, and that congregants hold a perspective about poverty that is less “mean-spirited” than the mainstream American view. Perhaps related: In 1995, the Catholic bishops conference of the Philippines wrote “Comfort My People, Comfort Them: A Pastoral Letter on Filipino Migrant Workers,” articulating a theology from the perspective of displaced peoples.

One in three U.S. Catholics are Latinos, and the growth of Latino theologies, often influenced by Latin American liberation theologies, continues at an impressive pace. Peter Phan, the first non-Caucasian president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, writes theology influenced by the Vietnamese refugee experience.

### What Ethnic Churches Have to Offer

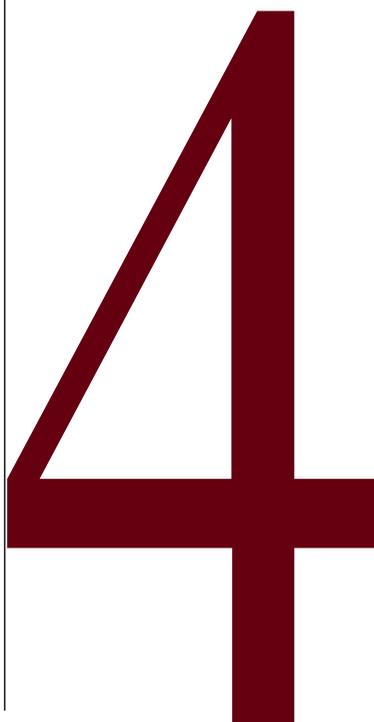
In official statements, the Catholic Church and mainstream Protestant denominations unequivocally champion the rights of the world’s migrants. They also experience an influx of new ethnic groups that they have assisted in resettling. And Christian theology and religious practice in the United States benefit from the varied contributions of newcomers.

But issues of race and difference continue to divide people. Immigrants face a new identity and the experience of being a racial or cultural minority in the United States. They often leave traumatic situations in their homelands only to face discrimination in their new country. In spite of its diversity, the United States remains in many ways what sociologist Robert Bellah terms an “overwhelming monocultural society.”

Tension and miscommunication are not uncommon between ethnic minority and Euro-American pastors and parishioners. For example, a 1999 study by the U.S. Catholic bishops’ Hispanic Affairs committee found that Latino Catholics—including both immigrants and long-term residents and citizens—remain second-class citizens in most parishes. Latino Catholics were twice as likely to worship in “separate and ... unequal settings,” often required to “rent” the church to which they belong.

Given the reality of discrimination and the desire to maintain ethnic identity, it is not surprising that immigrants often prefer ethnic churches to multiethnic or mainstream congregations. Currently there are 3,500 Catholic parishes where Mass is performed in Spanish; 7,000 Latino congregations, most of them pentecostal or evangelical; 2,500 Korean Christian churches; and 1,000 Chinese churches, most of them Protestant. Ethnic churches become focal points for cultural celebrations, ethnic gatherings, and the re-creation of customs—usually in native languages. An ethnic church may provide social belonging, psychological comfort, and religious meaning. In a country often experienced as hostile, an immigrant church provides a buffer against unwelcome aspects of U.S. ways, values, and prejudices while enabling migrants to adapt to others.

And, unlike early mission churches, most of these new churches, with a variety of theological positions, are founded by immigrants themselves. Iglesia ni Cristo, a church founded in the Philippines in 1914, continues to expand dramatically worldwide, following the growth and distribution of the Filipino diaspora. The nondenominational Chinese Christian Church of Greater Washington, D.C., emerged from a



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

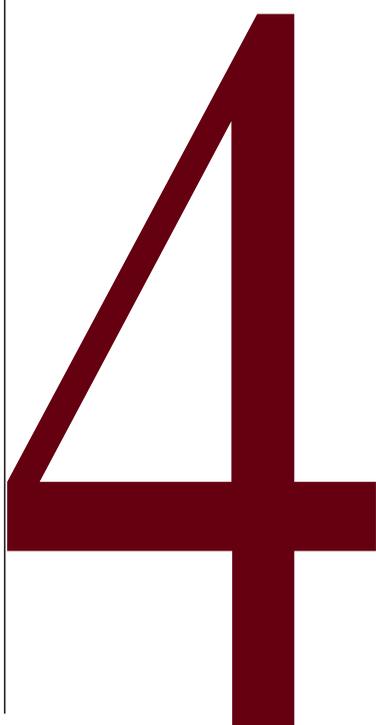
### **No Longer Strangers (cont.)**

Chinese students' Bible study and remains an important church for Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking migrants. Luz del Mundo was founded in Guadalajara, Mexico, and now boasts congregations wherever there are Mexican migrants.

Many aid and advocacy groups are also immigrant-based. The Central American Refugee Center of San Francisco is one of numerous self-help groups founded by and for immigrants. California's Interfaith Coalition on Immigrant Rights brings together ethnic groups from a wide variety of religious traditions to actively lobby for migrant rights. The Tepeyac Association in New York City is probably one of the nation's most famous immigrant self-help groups. The real action related to immigrant issues often comes not from mainstream denominations but from the growth and vitality of such ethnic churches and organizations.

Will churches of Western industrialized nations embrace the "strangers among us"? In effect Christians have no option but to provide sanctuary for the uprooted, learn from border-crossers, and fight for those who are in new, often unwelcoming homes that seem so far removed from heaven. Enriched by the insights and theologies formed by the experiences of exile and diaspora, migrant Christians possess an incredible dynamism that—together with the native-born—gives hope for a powerful reinvigoration of the American church. ■

*Lois Ann Lorentzen was professor of social ethics at the University of San Francisco and director of the Religion and Immigration Project ([www.usfca.edu/TRIP](http://www.usfca.edu/TRIP)) when this article appeared in the March-April 2003 issue of Sojourners.*



### WITH DRUM AND CUP

An interview with George Tinker.

by **Bob Hulteen**

*He is, as he describes it, of mixed blood: “Osage is my tribe of enrollment on my father’s side; my mother was a Lutheran.” These days both lines of his heritage interact to define just who he is.*

*In the mid-1970s, George Tinker spent several years in Berkeley, California, first studying for ordination at Pacific Lutheran Seminary and then for a doctorate in Bible at Graduate Theological Union. While in the Bay area, which has the largest concentration of American Indians in the United States, Tinker organized a ministry to work as an agent of healing with Native American people in San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose.*

*Tinker believes that the church, which has historically been part of the oppressive authority over the Indian community, must participate in healing—“self-healing”—with Indian people. After years of organizing at the local level, Tinker made the difficult transition into the academic world by accepting a position at Iliff School of Theology in Denver teaching multicultural ministries. As associate pastor of Living Waters, a joint Episcopal-Lutheran parish, he brings together his faith and heritage into a common tapestry, and at Iliff he shares that vision with a new generation of pastors-to-be.*

*In 1990 George Tinker was interviewed by Bob Hulteen at the Sojourners magazine office in Washington, D.C., while he was in town to participate in planning an alternative response to the 500th anniversary of Columbus’ arrival. He discussed the need to address historical inaccuracies in American mythology, the seductive allure of assimilation for Indian people, the appropriate response for the church in reconciliation, and the effects of New Age spirituality on Native Americans. —The Editors*

**Sojourners:** You are here planning for what will be the “celebration of Columbus’ discovery of America” 500 years ago. You have said about the anniversary that white people should be thinking differently, that we misunderstand the event. How would you say it should be characterized?

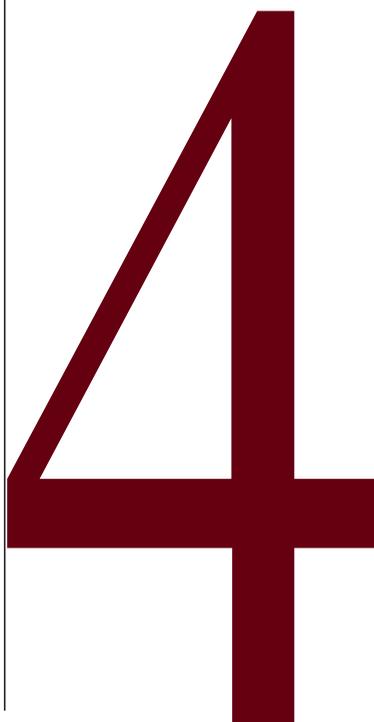
**George Tinker:** I think the whole notion of celebrating Columbus Day is part of the American foundational mythology. It is an illusion that people on this continent live with. My argument would be that living that illusion is not healthy for white Americans, that it is in fact living a lie.

You have to understand that from an American Indian perspective, celebrating the Columbus quincentenary is in fact celebrating Indian genocide. Indian people like to remind white Americans that the only thing Columbus discovered was that he was lost. About half a world lost.

Actually Columbus didn’t even discover that he was lost. He died thinking that he had found Asia.

Another example of that mythology is the myth that George Armstrong Custer was a general, when in fact he was a mere lieutenant colonel, and not a very bright one at that. People believe he died a heroic death in a massacre, when in fact it was not a massacre. It was a fair fight in which Custer pulled off a surprise attack on the Indians. It just turns out that the Indians were stronger.

The mythology of Columbus begins with the notion that he was a scientific adventurer who was trying to prove that the Earth was round. But flat-Earth notions



# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### With Drum and Cup (cont.)

were only held at the uneducated popular level in Europe. The academicians all knew the world was round. In fact, notions of a round Earth go back to Greek philosophy in the West. Many American Indian tribes already knew that the world was round.

So for more than half a century before Columbus sailed, people had been playing with the notion of making that trip; they had plotted it and planned it. The only question was, How long before you landed? There was no notion of falling off the Earth.

Another aspect of the Columbus mythology that needs to be shattered is that he was an esoteric scientist trying to make a point. In fact, that voyage was engaged in for one purpose only—to become wealthy. Columbus expected to become wealthy. He had promised his bankers, and the king and queen of Spain, Isabel and Ferdinand, that they would become more wealthy. And in the long run they did exactly that.

The other side of it for Indians is the result of Columbus' misadventures: 10 years after Columbus' arrival on the island of San Salvador, the entire population, estimated to be 100,000 people, perished. Within 30 years, nearly the entire population on the island of Hispaniola perished. Bartolome de Las Casas [famous 16th-century priest and historian] says there were three million people on Hispaniola alone.

Within 58 years—by mid-century in the 1500s—the population of Mexico was reduced by 80 percent, from 25 million to five million. That's the kind of genocide we are talking about.

For American Indian people, it's not a matter of being anti-Hispanic or anti-Italian. But Columbus becomes the symbol of the continuing genocide of Indian people, because of what happened in the Caribbean, and then in Mexico, and then in South America.

It happened under the aegis of the British in Virginia and the English Puritans in the Northeast. And it has simply continued, usually with some pretense of wanting to take care of the Indians, civilize them, Christianize them. That's especially true when people want to deprive Indians of their land.

Part of the problem today is that Indians are such a small minority of the population on this continent. What may have been 25, or 30, or even 40 million people in 1492 has been reduced in the United States to one-and-a-half million. Unlike black people, who are a political factor because they approach 20 percent of the population, Indians are not a political factor.

**Sojourners:** There's a clear line through history, both here in the United States and in countries around the world, of the ongoing genocide of indigenous people. Is there any multinational effort to bring together the peoples who are being killed, primarily at the hands of historically European people?

**Tinker:** For centuries, Indians in the jungles of Peru, Brazil, and other Central and South American countries were left largely undisturbed, because the jungles were uninhabitable by the European immigrants and economically unfeasible. Now, as the population has grown and technologies have been developed to clear the jungle, Indians' lands are being taken away from them.

We in North America seem to have an ecological interest in saving the rain forests. But we are also complicitous in causing their demise, because we control the economic system that has generated such a horrendous Third World debt that the Third World countries can only satisfy the debt by using up the resources they have. One way of doing that is clearing rain forests and creating cattle ranges to provide Burger King and McDonalds with ground beef.

What happens to the people living in these areas when such change occurs? The reports we get, repeatedly, continually these days, especially from Brazil, state that Indians are simply being massacred in order to deprive them of their land. They are

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### With Drum and Cup (cont.)

being massacred by private armies of entrepreneurs and big ranchers who are laying claim to the land, homesteading it.

A number of Indian organizations are struggling to make their voices heard. I suppose that's the hope for the future—some sort of coalition among “Fourth World” peoples around the globe, including aboriginal Australians and Pacific Islanders. The Maoris in the Pacific are particularly strong on some of these issues. Indigenous people include many Africans, many Asians, and many oppressed groups in India.

**Sojourners:** What would you say to the environmental movement that focuses its attention on the rain forests, with little concern for the people whose entire subsistence is being destroyed? Is there a difference between the ecological concern and the justice concern?

**Tinker:** At one level you'll find Indian people in general support of the environmental movement for religious and theological reasons, not just for survival reasons. To treat the Earth with respect is an Indian way of existing.

On the other hand, the justice concerns of people, and not just Indian people but all people, have to exceed issues of peace and ecology. The World Council of Churches, since Nairobi in 1975, has consistently talked of justice and peace, not peace and justice. Justice must precede peace.

The WCC tried to get it right with “Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation.” Some of us think they were just playing pin the tail on the donkey and that maybe there's a religious concern, a spiritual concern, for creation that needs to come first as the foundation for justice. But that is not solely an ecological concern.

There's been criticism from a lot of poor people—marginalized people—that the ecology movement has detracted from justice issues. I think that's a legitimate concern.

**Sojourners:** Could you say a little more about the importance of the land and the sense of creation preceding justice? It is very hard for most white Americans to comprehend an Indian's perspective on land and its ownership.

**Tinker:** Indian people look at the land as generative. It is where we come from. It's not something we possess or own. Land ownership is a Western European philosophical notion that's become rooted in political and economic systems.

When the Europeans first came to this country, they created legal and theological fictions that allowed them to take over Indian land. They said the Indians didn't really occupy the land, because they just roamed the land. Doctrines of vacant dominion developed. And if Indians died in a plague, the Puritans considered it an act of God to open it up to them because then there weren't enough Indians to occupy it.

There were consistent efforts in the 19th century to teach Indians private ownership of property because it was considered the civilized way of existing. Of course, what it did was destroy the structure of Indian society and culture and meant that Indians were reduced to levels of existence that forced codependent relationships upon the U.S. government.

As Indians were no longer able to take care of themselves, they had to rely on government subsidies and handouts. That codependency continues to this day—in the relationship of Indian people to the church as well as to U.S. government agencies such as Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service.

Indians believe that the Creator put them in a specific place and that is their place. To move to another place is a very hard thing to do, and people die when they move. The Osages did not thrive when we were moved out of Missouri and into Kansas. And

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### With Drum and Cup (cont.)

when we were moved out of Kansas and into Oklahoma it became even worse. That's the story of many, many tribes that were relocated in Indian territory, where they had to learn to live in relationship to a new land.

The relationship to a land is not only a spiritual relationship; it's one of physical economy as well. You know the land; you know the sacred sites; you know the medicines, the herbs, the foods that grow there and where they grow.

When you are moved to a new place, you suddenly don't have access to those things anymore, so that many of your patterns for religious ceremonies and observances are broken. How can you have a ceremony if you don't have access to the various things of the land that you need to conduct that ceremony?

And I guess I should say straight out that the gospel was not liberating for Indian people but was a form of bondage. It's not the gospel that's not liberating, though; it's the proclamation of the gospel that puts Indians in bondage. Consistently the missionaries of the European churches in all of our denominations confused gospel with European culture. The gospel they proclaimed was the gospel of "civilization," of a "superior culture." Steven R. Riggs, a 19th-century Presbyterian missionary in South Dakota, literally called it the "gospel of soap."

One wonders if we have to give up our Old Testament in order to leap into the New Testament—the new covenant in Jesus. Yet Indian people were forced to disassociate themselves from their old ways—from their religion and their culture.

In order to do that, they have to engage in an act of self-hatred and self-denial. They have to look at what they were and say, "All of that was evil." The Puritans said it straight forwardly: "The Indians are the legions of Satan."

**Sojourners:** Are they still doing that today?

**Tinker:** Of course. I think there are white missionaries who are trying to be much more sensitive. And some are extremely good and extremely faithful. But we have two problems. One is that we have a lot of white missionaries in all of our denominations who buy into that colonial mentality and are about the business of whipping Indians into shape culturally. It happens.

The other problem is that the institutional structures of church, just like the institutional structures of government, continue to impose themselves on Indian people. It may be on a subconscious level, but they nevertheless forcefully, powerfully, require a cultural shift toward assimilation. I suspect that most people in our North American churches believe in their heart of hearts that the solution to the "Indian problem" is assimilation.

**Sojourners:** And they become so angry when efforts toward assimilation aren't welcomed. They condemn Indians' desire for self-sufficiency, and they do it in pious language.

**Tinker:** That's right. It's, "How dare you Indians be that way when we offered you what we never offered black people, in order to make you white?"

You see, white America wants change to happen on its own terms. White people want reconciliation. They can't understand that their insistence on reconciliation is an insistence that it happen on their terms. My colleague [at Iliff] Vincent Harding has an interesting analogy. He's a black historian of enormous repute. He says that for years white America was busy building this house, and then had people from different cultural groups living in the yards or the shanties around the house.

The liberal contribution since the civil rights activity of the '60s has been to say, "We have to open our house and invite these people to come in and stay." But the

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### With Drum and Cup (cont.)

problem, as Vincent says, is, “It’s still their house. We’re still guests.” We need to think about building a new house where everybody gets equal say in its design and has equal ownership. Then we need to tear that old house down.

**Sojourners:** Liberation theology as it’s been given to us by Central Americans, South Africans, and others has helped people who are oppressed to find their place in the gospel story. You are a New Testament scholar. Do American Indian people find themselves in the Bible story?

**Tinker:** I think the gospel can speak forcefully to Indian people. There’s no doubt about that. But I think Indian people have to be free finally to determine what the gospel is themselves instead of being told what the gospel is.

The problem is that too many missionaries seem to be under the impression that Indian people are incapable of having a spiritual thought without pastoral coaching. I think liberation theology can eventually have an impact on Indian people. It hasn’t yet.

We haven’t figured out liberation modes for interpreting the gospel. We are consumers of the denominational theologies of our churches, period. That’s what has to change.

The problem with Latin American liberation theology, first of all, is that it is given over to Marxist thought. For American Indians that is wholly inadequate and inappropriate. It is replacing one Western philosophical economic system with another. Marxist thought does not pay attention to the realities of indigenous cultures. It can’t. It is a social and political movement that lumps people together into some amorphous, cultural whole called “the people.”

What’s happened in Latin America is that Indian people have consistently been oppressed—and not only by Third World governments that are rightist, but by leftist governments as well. The Sandinista experiment came crashing down, according to *Pravda*—and I would tend to agree with their editorial assessment—because Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas had alienated Indian people and lost the Indian vote.

I’m sure at some point the Sandinistas tried to correct the situation, but they were never able to. There was a consistent Indian resistance movement that was not contra. It rarely got written about in the American press. It was not anti-American particularly, but it certainly wasn’t pro-American either.

I’m talking about Brooklyn Rivera, the appointed leader of the Miskito Indians, who, by the way, was given a cabinet-level position in the Violeta Chamorro government. Well, it hasn’t been reported in this country, because it ain’t important, right?

Let me say one other thing about Marxism not fitting Indian people. Sometimes in the debate that goes on, one is led to believe that there are only two options—capitalism and Marxism. Indian people by and large would stand opposed to both because of their cultural, economic, and social impact on Indian people.

Indian people would far quicker say, “We should simply be allowed to have our own way of doing things.” And since 1492 that has not been the case. Things have been imposed upon us by an outside, militarily superior force. And of course Europeans confuse military superiority with cultural superiority.

**Sojourners:** It seems to me that Indian people have much to evangelize white America about in terms of finding some of those things that white America has lost.

**Tinker:** I’d go a step further and say that Indian people may have an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ that is more authentic than white Americans’ understanding of the gospel.

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### With Drum and Cup (cont.)

It seems to me that much of the gospel has been interpreted throughout history by Europeans and Americans. Before long it is not the gospel that is being interpreted but an interpretation of the gospel. Some things become so commonplace that you can't think of understanding them differently.

The kingdom of God has consistently been understood in temporal terms by Europeans, primarily Lutheran New Testament scholars, beginning a century ago. The kingdom of God was dealt with as a question of when it is going to happen. The question of where it is was consistently disallowed. That's not at stake.

It's a question of eschatology: When will it happen? And you get all these jargonized responses of realized eschatology, actualized eschatology, imminent eschatology.

I would argue that the European intellectual tradition is fundamentally temporal, with spatial aspects being subordinate to this primary category of time. But Indian people are just the opposite. We're spatial, rooted in the land. And when we read about the kingdom of God, the first and only thought to come naturally to Indian people is, "Well, we don't know much about kings and kingdoms, but it must be someplace. It must be somewhere."

As Indian people we wrestle with that, and I've wrestled with it out loud with numerous Indian groups and Indian people: The kingdom of God has got to be right here. In other words, it becomes a metaphor for creation.

Jesus' call to repent, to return to the kingdom, is a call to come into a proper relationship with the rest of creation, and with the Creator. A proper relationship recognizes that I am simply a part of the creation, one of God's creatures along with the other two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, the wingeds, and the other living, moving things—including the trees, the grass, the rocks, the mountains.

All those things are relative. That's the universal Indian notion of the interrelationship of all things in creation. Human beings are a part of creation—not apart from it and somehow free to use it up or abuse it.

This is a whole different slant on the kingdom of God and, immediately and implicitly, on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Sojourners:** The New Age movement claims to have adopted what its leaders say is a native spirituality or outlook on creation. How do you feel about that?

**Tinker:** I think it is misguided, for a number of reasons. One is that there is a great romanticizing of Indian people and Indian spirituality.

There is also a great dearth of spiritual rootedness in white America, so people are really searching. And that's real, that's legitimate. But they're searching in the wrong places. They are searching to appropriate somebody else's spirituality instead of working within their own culture to uncover what is there.

When people come to the Indian world and try to appropriate Indian spirituality in that New Age fashion, a number of things happen. People such as Lynn Andrews [author of *Medicine Woman* and *Crystal Woman: The Sisters of the Dream Time*] make a lot of money at it. They also make up information.

We now know from public press revelations, for instance, that Lynn Andrews never was in conversation with Indian women elders in Canada. The whole thing was a fabrication. But it's worth \$10,000 per lecture. Real Indian spiritual leaders don't earn that kind of money.

New Age thinking quite often is economically motivated. A lot of New Age people out there are ripping off Indian things and making money at it.

For some people it is just a way of enhancing their own private spirituality. In fact, for most New Agers, Native American beliefs provide a way of enhancing private

# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## Christians and Racial Justice

### With Drum and Cup (cont.)

spirituality. That is as unIndian as you can get.

White people come out to dance a sun dance in order to accumulate some sense of spiritual self-worth, when in fact one doesn't dance the sun dance for that reason. We dance the sun dance so that the people in that place might live. Why would somebody drive all the way from Texas to South Dakota to dance the sun dance so that the people in Rosebud might live? Well, they don't. They drive that far to prove themselves.

And in the process those lies creep into Indian thinking. I find it horribly destructive of Indian people for whites to be involved in Indian things that are that intense, that private, that intimate.

I don't think that Indian people ought to try to make Indians out of white Americans. We can model our spirituality in ways that enable our white brothers and sisters to reclaim their own spirituality. That is part of evangelism because, you see, there is no doubt in the Indian mind that white Americans are brothers and sisters, relatives, just as much as the others of the four nations of the Earth—the black nation, the red nation, the yellow nation, and the white nation.

The white American church needs to hear this, especially since it has been a part of the problem, not the solution. In my opinion, part of the churches' own spiritual need is to engage in acts of confession and repentance, of reconciliation and healing.

But still I draw inspiration and energy from my church more than anything else, and from the people. I am the associate pastor of an Indian church in a very poor community. My church is a community of people who are really struggling to affirm both their commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ and their Indianness at the level of culture, ideas, spirituality. We are struggling to understand the gospel from an Indian perspective.

It's very clear that we will no longer have an interpretation of the gospel imposed on us by anyone. We will even resist having the structure of the congregation imposed on us by judicatory authorities.

We've tried to say consistently, "No, we'll decide what we ought to be doing, and what will be healing to the Indian community." The vision is one of healing and wholeness for the Indian community, so that my congregation is extremely active in the urban Indian community, and many are active still in their connections back home on the reservation.

When we are together in prayer several things happen. First of all, we bring our Indian identity into the liturgy. Second, we show respect always to the traditional religion of our tribes, to the traditional spiritual leaders; and in conversation with them we have brought some of that with us into our liturgy. We might quite naturally have a medicine man in church on Sunday, and we would have that medicine man pray for us. Usually those people would also come to Communion.

Third, we affirm our Indian identity and we bring those things from the tradition into our service. We use a drum and we sing traditional ceremony songs, prayer songs, not Christian, as the proper preface to our Holy Communion.

When we celebrate Communion, our people are very, very clear that Christ is present on the altar. More clear I think than white Episcopal and Lutheran churches. The power of Christ is present in body and blood and spirit.

The fourth item is that our people speak for themselves. They don't need pastoral leadership to tell them what it is they are about.

When we go to conferences, Indian ministry conferences, it is invariably the case that as we go around the room it is the pastor or ministry director who gets up to report. When it comes around to Living Waters, somebody will reach over and touch me on the shoulder and say, "It's all right, we'll take care of it."

Last summer we had eight people in the congregation who danced in four differ-

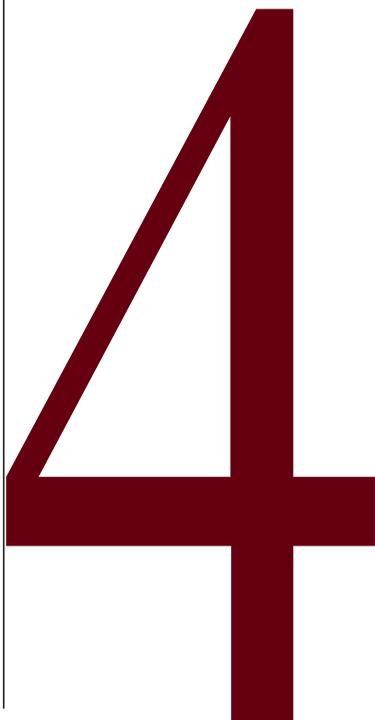
# SOJOURNERS on the issues

## *Christians and Racial Justice*

### **With Drum and Cup (cont.)**

ent sun dances. Of course the missionaries have said all along that those ceremonies are pagan and we can't do that. Our people insist that they are free in the gospel, free in Christ Jesus, to participate in Indian religious forms and ceremonies. We intend to live in that freedom. ■

*Bob Hulteen was a Sojourners associate editor and George Tinker was assistant professor of cross-cultural ministries at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado, when this interview appeared in the January 1991 issue of Sojourners.*



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