

Alliance Theological Seminary

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Racial Reconciliation Research Paper
Systematic Racism

by

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Introduction

On June 16, 2015, Donald Trump officially introduced his candidacy for the 45th president of the United States. Of note, his campaign slogan was the same as his Republican predecessor and 40th American president, Ronald Wilson Reagan (February 6, 1911 – June 5, 2004), “Make America Great Again”. This had great appeal to Evangelicals, and “male, white, blue-collar, working class, and those without college degrees. Many voters in the Rust Belt, who gave Trump the electoral votes needed to win the presidency.”¹ The problem is the word “again.” When asking the question when America was ever great, and no matter the answer, the follow up question would be, was it great for all Americans. The following persons would answer no, it was not. They would be the Indigenous, the enslaved Africans, the Chinese, the Japanese, and women, to name a few. And so, the MAGA statement might inherently be a racist statement since it only views America through the eyes of those in power, White land-owning, men.

This paper looks at the connection between what exists in American Religion, Social affairs and Interactions, Education and Politics today and the Racism that started long ago. It is our response to statements like “Racism no longer exists,” or “We’ve had a Black President,” “Why can’t they just get over it” and many similar ones that would like to believe it is time to forgive and forget. The problem is, it is hard to move on until a wrong is acknowledged and the damage has been corrected.

Those persons who believe that Racism is a thing of the past would need to take a look at just a few horrific incidents that have occurred over the last few years but are yet indicative of the Black experience here in America and offer an explanation of the following that Jemar Tisby lays out in his book, *How to Fight Racism*.

I am a Black man in the United States, I know firsthand that racism still pervades our society. I am neither naive nor optimistic about issues of race in the country. But in the

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Trump_2016_presidential_campaign

Spring of 2020 a sustained movement protests and uprisings began to roll through the United States and around the world. A viral cell phone video showed White police officer kneeling for eight minutes and forty-six seconds on the neck of a prostrate Black man, named George Floyd. The officer killed Floyd and once again a Black human being had become a hashtag. This person made in God's Image and likeness became another victim of racism, anti-Black police brutality and White Supremacy. Floyd's murder was just the latest in a string of similar events leading up to the 2020 protests. Brionna Taylor had been killed in a barrage of bullets in a no-knock raid by police who had the wrong house. Video showing Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man out for a jog in a predominately White neighborhood in Georgia, exposed three White men who pursued, shot, and killed him. They thought he looked suspicious because he had stopped to look at a house that was under construction. They became a law unto themselves and executed Arbery in what many characterized as a modern-day lynching.²

A System

A system is described as a set of things working together as parts of a mechanism or an interconnecting network, and a set of principles or procedures according to which something is done; an organized framework or method.³ When we consider the last sentence in Tisby's quote, and in particular the last three words "modern day lynching", the question to be asked is what if any "set of things working together as parts of a mechanism or interconnecting network are or have been at work to result in this "modern day lynching?" A system must have an origin, especially if one accepts the theory that a design denotes a designer, that in fact, nothing just happens but is usually the result of some origin and often something much larger. The following research may offer some insight into what many believe are the roots of systemic racism here in America.

A Religious System – The Doctrine of Discovery

² (Tisby 2021, Chap 1. Awareness)

³ Oxford Dictionary: https://www.google.com/search?q=system+definition&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS926US926&oq=System+def&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0i433i512j0i512l8.9786j1j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

Marc Charles a Native American activist, public speaker, consultant, and author on Native American issues, in his book, co-authored by Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, recounts a story he had one day at the front of Union Station in Washington, DC. In front of the large statue of Christopher Columbus. Sheerly by accident he stumbles across a line of men dressed like Spanish sailors from the 1490's as they were preparing to put on a public performance honoring Columbus. He noticed there were a few native Americans who were protesting, but by no means loudly or out of control. A year later at the same celebration and as he walked to the end of the line he said in a speaking voice, "you cannot discover lands already inhabited." When he arrived at the front, he noticed a small stage and seats erected for an audience, after walking to the center and turning to the already gathering crowd, he said it again, this time loud enough so all could hear including the authorities, "you cannot discover lands already inhabited, that process is known as stealing, conquering or colonizing, the fact that America calls what Columbus did as discovery reveals the implicit racial bias of the country and that Native Americans are not fully human" (Charles and Rah 2015, Chap 1). At this he was told to "suck it up" and told "he was not welcomed here" threatened to be arrested if he did not leave by one of the White men dressed in a suit, he recounts the Irony "a White man participating in a public ceremony honoring Christopher Columbus as the discoverer of America telling a native man he was not welcomed in that space" (Charles and Rah 2015). While this story is about the Native American experience as you will see others, enslaved persons for Africa for example have experienced similar Ironies and continue to. But what system started this process that has shaped the way America behaves toward non-whites?

The Doctrine of Discovery

One explanation for why non-Whites are treated the way they are may be found in what is called The Doctrine of Discovery. Charles explains that this said doctrine is a set of legal principles that governed the European colonizing power. It was the written rules that governed the way and how European nations could go about colonizing Indigenous lands. They are international laws that were formed in the 15th and 16th centuries. Charles tells us that from a theological perspective the Doctrine of Discovery was formed from an incorrect understanding of Scripture that served to benefit Europeans and was authorized by the Popes. Through a series of Papal Bulls – (Bulletins or edicts sent forth by the Pope) to Heads of State that gave permission to colonize sometimes by any means necessary, the Indigenous. The Doctrine of Discovery came as a direct result of these Papal edicts and was the basis for Christopher Columbus' so-called “discovery” of America. These Papal bulls are “official decrees that carry the full weight of his ecclesial office. On June 18, 1452, Pope Nicholas V issued the Papal Bull *Dum Diversas*” (Charles and Rah 2015, Chap 1).

Dum Diversas (English: Until different) is a papal bull issued on 18 June 1452 by Pope Nicholas V. It authorized Afonso V of Portugal ***to conquer Saracens and pagans and consign them to "perpetual servitude***. Pope Calixtus III ***reiterated the bull in 1456*** with *Inter caetera* (not to be confused with Alexander VI's bull of the same title), ***renewed by*** Pope Sixtus IV in 1481 and Pope Leo X in 1514 with *Praeaele denotionis* (English: Especially the description).[clarification needed] The concept of the consignment of exclusive spheres of influence to certain nation states ***was extended to the Americas*** in 1493 by Pope Alexander VI with *Inter caetera*. (***Emphasis mine***).⁴

This Papal bill initiated the documentation that eventually became the Doctrine of Discovery. It must be understood that the Popes saw these others (Indigenous peoples) as enemies of Christ and that they must be converted by any means necessary. The Popes must have ignored Christ's admonition to James and John after they wanted to call fire down on some Samaritans who did not accept Jesus.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dum_Diversas

and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.⁵

Clearly Jesus' way of relating to humans was quite different from the way the Popes saw things. But second, Jesus was clear that the role and task for his disciples was to make disciples (not converts) by teaching all nations what he taught them and baptizing them. (See Matt. 28:18-20). And finally, Jesus never told the disciples to create a Christian nation, in fact he often said "My kingdom is not of this world" see John 18:36. The Doctrine of Discovery is in stark contrast to the ways in which Christ commanded his people to relate to the world. The Popes on the other had were looking to create a Christian utopia, what is known as "Christendom." Christendom historically refers to the Christian states, Christian empires, Christian-majority countries, and the countries in which Christianity dominates, prevails, or that it is culturally or historically intertwined with. As we unpack the origin and makeup of this Doctrine of Discovery it should begin to make sense that if indigenous peoples outside of Europe were made to bend the knee to Christ and not exercise their free will to a loving God who created them in his image (See Gen. 1:26-28), it must mean that they were not considered on the same level as their colonizers. It is the opinion of this writer that this is one of the main factors that laid the groundwork for what we see today in America. May it not be lost on the reader, this all stated with the religious leaders, which means this Systemic Racism was of religious (Not Christ), origin.

Manifest Destiny

As we stated above the original Papal Bull Dum Diversas (until different), was extended to the Americas. This is why the same tactics employed by the Spanish, the French and the English against Indigenous people were a mirror and an example for the treatment of the

⁵ Luke 9:52-56 NKJV

Indigenous here as well as the enslaved peoples of Africa. But there was one additional piece of information that gave the European Christian settlers reason to believe they were approved by God to take over this new land and kill its inhabitants: Manifest Destiny. “Manifest Destiny, a phrase coined in 1845, is the idea that the United States is destined—by God, its advocates believed—to expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent” (Editors 2019).

American Exceptionalism

The following Slides are based on Chapter 6 of Charles’ book *Unsettling Truths* and will help to paint the picture.

The Chapter Thesis

How American Exceptionalism bought on by the Doctrine of Discovery led to an **internalized and actualized belief of Superiority**. This resulted in the formation of documents that cemented and institutionalized the aforementioned.

Felder

THESIS STATEMENT

6
Chapter

"Everything begins in seed form and grows into an experience"
 Dr. A R Bernard

Exceptionalism (the Seed)

1. The condition of being different from the norm.
2. A theory expounding the exceptionalism especially of a nation or region

Our authors explain that this seed was firmly planted in the minds of the colonists **BEFORE** they arrived on the shores of our indigenous brothers and sisters who also bore the **Image of God**

Exceptionalism shaped the way they viewed other Image Bearers that looked different from them and who were already here.

During the mid **1700's** colonists began to move west, even past the Appalachian mountains. When they saw new open lands, the indigenous be damned, it sparked a desire, a sense of freedom and adventure, **but that was a problem.**



Go West, young man, and grow up with the country.

-Horace Greeley

The American Constitution

In Congress, July 4, 1776– Declaration of Independence

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The Constitution- 1787

- The three-fifths clause: Three-fifths compromise, compromise agreement between delegates from the Northern and the Southern states at the United States Constitutional Convention (1787) that three-fifths of the slave population would be counted for determining direct taxation and representation in the House of Representatives.

13th Amendment 1863

The 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution provides that "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude **except** as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."



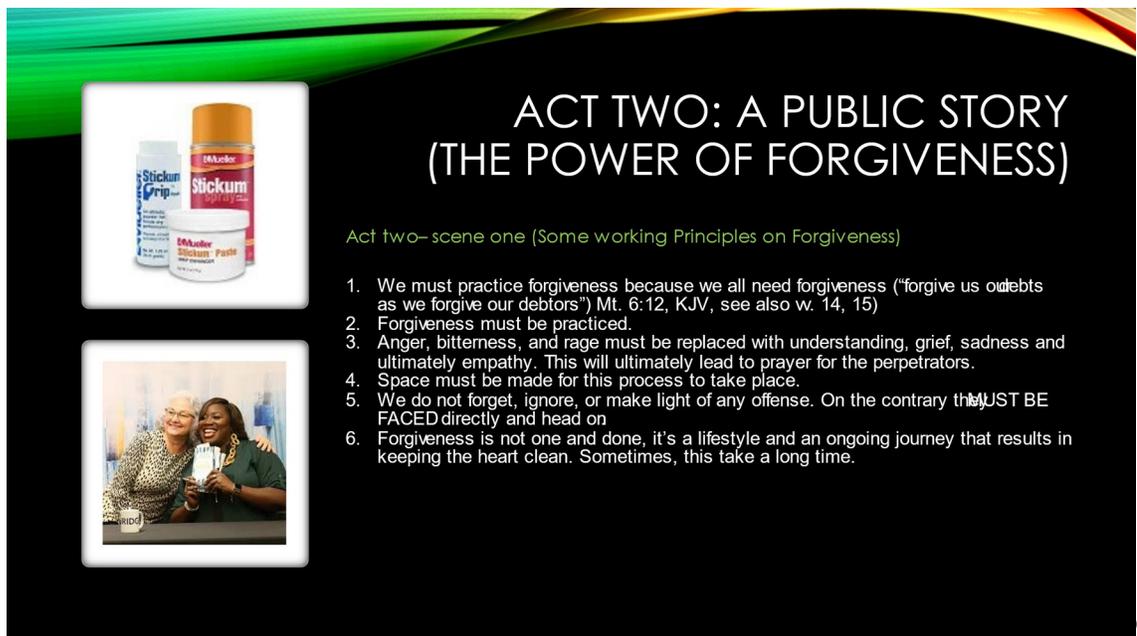

Time does not permit for the Black Codes, Indian Assimilation schools, Jim Crow, and of course the Civil Rights struggle of the mid-sixties. It could be argued that the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 effectively ended apartheid in America, but it did not end Racism, any more than the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 ended slavery, legally yes, but not in function. It is because the White, land-owning men although legally obligated, would not give up his dominance over the Enslaved Africans or the Indigenous. It is the Golden rule, he who has the gold, rules.

Today Racism shows up in America in the following ways, and more.

- Housing / Homeownership
- Healthcare
- Education
- Politics
- The Christian Church
- Employment and Wealth

One solution is for the White Church to repent for its complicity in the racism of America. I suggest a simple rereading of Matthew 5:9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” and repent and ask the Holy Spirit to deal with them until true

repentance comes. This text says we are in our happy place “blessed” when we practice peacemaking. Unfortunately, a lot of people carry ignorance and prejudice and remain in their comfort zones which will not allow them to practice peace. It really takes spiritual deliverance to get to the place I am taking about. But Latasha Morrison says it is possible. She says that those of us on the marginalized side of this demon called racism, are called to forgive “as we have been forgiven.” And again, while it is not easy, the Holy Spirit can help us. One way he does this is by showing us how he has forgiven us and has extended his mercy toward us. We are then supernaturally enabled to forgive. Hurt and pain at the hands of another leave trauma and like Stickum, it does not come off easily. Latasha offers the following advice.



ACT TWO: A PUBLIC STORY (THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS)

Act two- scene one (Some working Principles on Forgiveness)

1. We must practice forgiveness because we all need forgiveness (“forgive us debts as we forgive our debtors”) Mt. 6:12, KJV, see also w. 14, 15)
2. Forgiveness must be practiced.
3. Anger, bitterness, and rage must be replaced with understanding, grief, sadness and ultimately empathy. This will ultimately lead to prayer for the perpetrators.
4. Space must be made for this process to take place.
5. We do not forget, ignore, or make light of any offense. On the contrary they **JUST BE FACED** directly and head on
6. Forgiveness is not one and done, it’s a lifestyle and an ongoing journey that results in keeping the heart clean. Sometimes, this take a long time.

⁶ Felder PPT_ (Morrison, Hill and Allen 2019, Chapter 6)

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