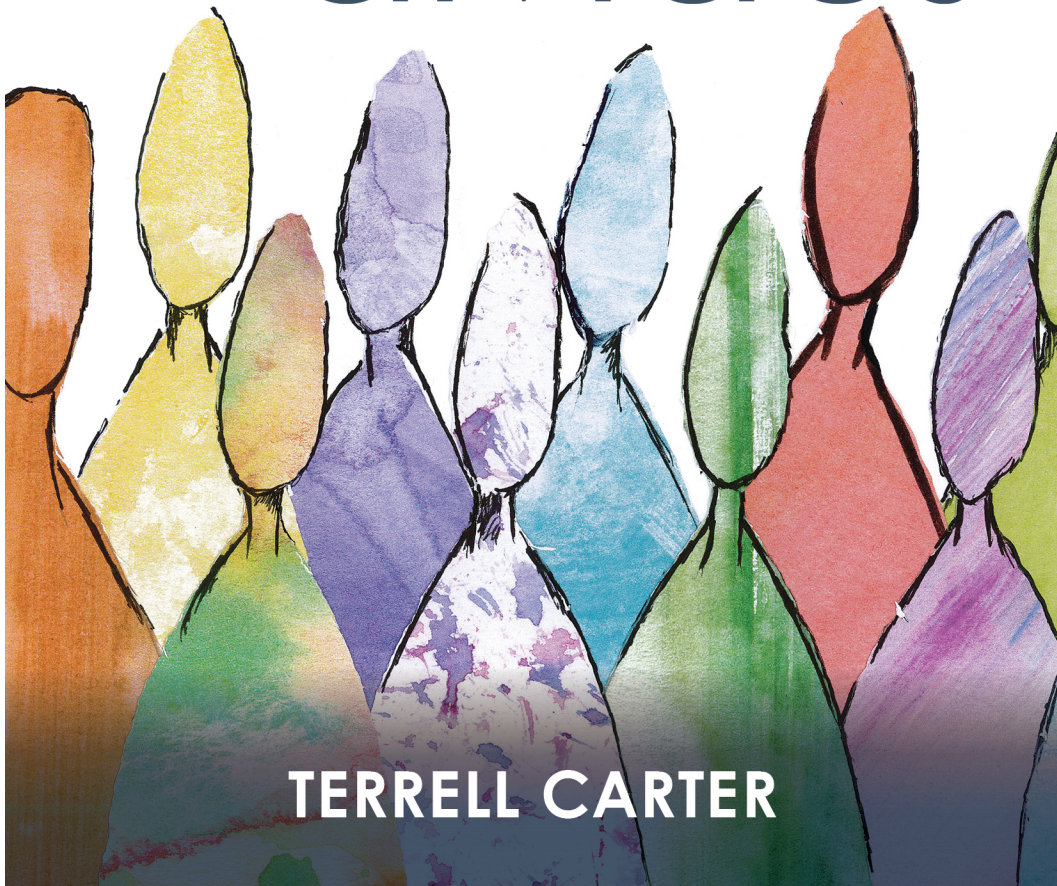


Finding Strength in Our Diversity

healing racial divides



TERRELL CARTER

HEALING RACIAL DIVIDES

HEALING RACIAL DIVIDES

*and Other Stories of
Healing and Resilience*

TERRELL CARTER



CHALICE
P R E S S

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

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This book is dedicated to the many people who supported me throughout the process of completing it.

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To the Carter clan for continual love and patience.

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Introduction

“Racism is particularly alive and well in America. It is America’s original sin and it is institutionalized at all levels of society.”¹

Do we need another book about race? Another book about how divided our nation is? Can we not talk about something else, like *how to get along*?

Some would say that racism no longer exists because our nation finally elected its first African American president. Yet, in one of the more shocking developments during Obama’s tenure as president, polls showed that 55 percent of adults believe that race relations within our nation, especially those between blacks and whites, worsened during his eight years in office.

Some might say that one of the biggest legacies left behind by the Obama administration is widespread racial division. When asked how serious a problem people thought racial discrimination against blacks was in the U.S., three out of four blacks said it was a problem, while two out of three whites said it was *not* a problem.² When asked if people thought that the country’s criminal justice system treats whites and blacks equally, most white respondents said it did, but most black respondents said it did not. When asked about their feelings toward the Black Lives Matter movement and whether it was a good thing, 78 percent of African Americans thought the movement was a good thing that held a legitimate purpose, while 62 percent of whites said that it was *not* a good thing and did *not* have a legitimate purpose.

This division was quantified even more clearly by the general presidential election of 2016. For example, 88 percent

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of African Americans voted for Clinton, while only 8 percent voted for Trump. One thing became very evident—issues of race played a key role in how people viewed the presidential candidates and what they hoped for from the next President. One thing the election results show is that, in general, blacks and whites see what is important for our communities, and the future of our country, *very differently*. We trust and distrust very different people.

This discussion relates to more than just black and white. But the historic relationship between blacks and whites serves as the primary example and the foundation for the discussion we must engage in. We must try to understand why we live in divided communities, cities, states, and nations. We must try to understand why police shootings of black men, whether armed or unarmed, continue to represent what black people believe is most wrong with the United States. We must try to understand why images of black people in criminal activity continue to be the ones primarily highlighted and pushed through various media platforms. This practice will be addressed in a subsequent chapter.

We must first discuss the different forms racism can take. Although it may not look like it did in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when people regularly and openly walked or rode around communities in white hoods while carrying torches, it still exists. We were reminded of this by the multiple white supremacists who proudly walked unhooded through the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 wearing white supremacist regalia and carrying torches in protest of the removal of Confederate monuments.

We must discuss what we really think about black and brown people and the value they hold within our communities and organizations. And we must look at the way our nation perceives them as opposed to white people in similar circumstances.

It would seem there's a clear disparity in how most people feel about whites as opposed to minorities.

- While at a local zoo, a first-grader from Wichita, Kansas, was mauled by a leopard after the boy scaled

the four-foot railing that surrounded the leopard exhibit, crossed an eight-foot gap and approached the animal's cage. The child received lacerations to his head and neck after the leopard stuck its paw through the cage and grabbed the boy by the side of the head.³

- While at a Pittsburgh zoo, a two-year-old boy was mauled to death after he lunged from his mother's grasp and fell over a 10-foot wooden railing into the enclosed wild African dog exhibit. The child's family subsequently settled out of court with the zoo for an undisclosed sum.⁴
- While at Arkansas's Little Rock Zoo with his father and grandfather, a three-year-old boy slipped through the railings surrounding a jaguar exhibition and sustained multiple injuries after he fell 15 feet into the cat pit. The family's request to keep the child's name private was granted by the hospital, zoo, and multiple media outlets.⁵
- A two-year-old boy, while at a Cleveland zoo, suffered injuries to his legs after he experienced a 10-foot fall into a cheetah exhibit after his mother dangled him over the exhibit's railing.⁶

Outside of the fact that these incidents were heartbreakingly tragic, and they all occurred at zoos, the common factor was that neither the race of the child nor the race or criminal history of their parents ever became a point of emphasis by media outlets or the press after the circumstances were reported in the news. The children and families of the above stories were white.

An African American child fell into a gorilla exhibit at the Cincinnati Zoo in 2016. The three-year-old boy, like some of the children in the prior stories, managed to get away from his mother and enter what was supposed to be a secure enclosure that would keep humans and animals separated. Unfortunately, this child made it past the initial security measures, which included a three-foot-tall fence and four feet of bushes, eventually falling 15 feet into a shallow moat in the gorilla enclosure. Harambe, a 17-year old gorilla, grabbed

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the boy and began to drag him. Zoo personnel, fearing for the boy's safety, shot and killed Harambe.⁷

Within hours of Harambe's death, most of the protests related to the incident were about the animal's death and not how the restricted area failed to keep the child out. The boy's mother was summarily vilified. People immediately questioned her fitness as a parent. Within days of the incident, the personal history and other information of the boy's father were being shared by media outlets on the internet. He was described as a thug and unfit to have children. One of the ironies of this was that the father was not at the zoo when his son tumbled into the enclosure. After finding out that the child and his parents were black, multiple outlets began to point to their race as a contributing factor for why the boy ended up in the predicament. In addition to their race, multiple pundits commented on the physical weight of the parents and the number of children in their family as additional contributing factors that likely played a part in why the child could slip away from his mother while at the zoo.

This is not the only time in recent history that white and black parents were portrayed differently in the media when their children were involved in similar unfortunate circumstances. "What passes as news for some (white) readers is simply lived experience for (black) others."⁸

For example, in St. Louis, a white infant died from heat exposure after her parents forgot that she was in the backseat of the family vehicle. The parents, who both worked for a prominent medical facility, drove to work that fateful day with their daughter in the back seat. Both parents exited the car thinking that the other had unbuckled their daughter and removed her from her car seat.⁹

Tragically, they were both wrong. In the end, the parents were not charged with a crime related to her death. Instead, the public was encouraged to show that family sympathy. Both parents were white and well-to-do. Less than a week later, a single black mother was arrested after she left her adolescent children in an air-conditioned car while she ran

into a store to grab a few items. This woman was summarily vilified in the media. Emphasis was placed on the fact that she had “too many” children and should have made other arrangements to keep her children safe.

These incidents must be discussed. Why do black people and other minorities not receive the benefit of the doubt in incidents like this, while white people do? I agree with Gayraud Wilmore’s suggestion that racism may not be intentional. He says, “It exists with or without sophisticated theories and systematic rationalizations. It can be conscious or unconscious, continuous or sporadic.”¹⁰ Yet I can’t help but think it’s also intentional and systematic.

Many times, your side in this argument is based on your race. How do we who seek justice and equality for all people, regardless of race, help to change this?

This is a reason I am writing another book on race: because, the issue in our country has not gotten much better. Things have gotten better in some areas for blacks, but more needs to occur for us to know we are fully equal. Historian David Katzman said there is “a tragic sameness in the lives of black people today and in the past. In spite of all the changes in American society—the weakened proscription, the increased influence, the improved education—so much of the quality of black life remains dependent upon the rest of society and is disturbingly inferior to that of white people.”¹¹ Yes, we may have elected our first black President, but he was still treated like a second-class citizen by some, had his very citizenship ridiculously denied by some, and his ethnicity was regularly a point of contention, especially within white evangelical Christian culture.

I write this book to participate in bridging the divide in our nation. Although we have been dealing with this subject for centuries, no clear solution has been identified. That should not preclude us from continuing the conversation. We must work through old and current ideas for us to find common ground.

There are other reasons:

Our churches are still divided.

I don't set out to see life through race-colored glasses, but sometimes it's hard not to. At a recent meeting for our denomination, a white woman asked, "Why don't more black men attend our churches?" Although the denomination loves people of all races and has made concerted efforts to increase the diversity of people groups attending its meetings, minority representation at the event I was attending was scant. This has been true of all the events that I have attended for the group in the past.

"We can't get black men, or many black people in general, to come to our church or participate in our events," she explained. "Can you help me understand why?" There are multiple reasons—there may be a black church already in the community, but there's another big reason too. The answer I offered was based on my experience of being the lone minority, or one of the few attending a predominantly white service or event.

I told her I know that when I enter any space comprised primarily of white people, I am viewed as a suspect. As soon as I walk through the door, people wonder who I am and what I'm doing there. The uneasy looks I receive, the half-hearted handshakes, the roundabout questions to gauge my intentions, this only ends when I introduce myself as Dr. Carter, a seminary professor and pastor.

Second, typically when white churches and leaders communicate, it is *at* me, and not *with* me. The white pastor or leader is the expert and I am the learner, regardless of the subject. This is also reflected in how some whites view black church experiences. They describe black church life in emotional terms, while white church life is described in intellectual terms. Black church is where people sing, shout, and "feel" the Lord, while white church is where a person's intellect is challenged, as if any of these things are exclusive of one another.

Third, my experience has been that black people are asked to "come to whites," while whites do not necessarily come to us. When a white congregation wants to build a relationship

with a black person or church, we are asked to meet them at their facilities or their place of choice. “White pastors always invite me to meet them at a Starbucks,” a pastor friend told me. “I understand it’s where they feel comfortable, but I don’t drink coffee and I don’t live or serve in the suburbs.” His experiences are not unique. These types of things happen when any church or group attempts to interact with or build relationships with millennials, gays and lesbians, or any other group different from them.

We all need to learn about people different from us.

The need to learn how to interact with many people has always been an important way to live the gospel. Jesus built his reputation upon the fact that he was willing to not only interact with, but also embrace, people who were considered outcast and other. In the gospels, Jesus had to regularly contend with what people thought of him and those he regularly surrounded himself with. Whether fishermen, tax collectors, or the sick, these were the “wrong” kind of people. In Luke 7:36–50, he answers the religious elites’ question head-on during a meal at the home of Simon the Pharisee.

One of the customs of the day was when an influential leader or teacher came to your home, you left the door open and allowed people to come in and hear what that person was saying. People did come to hear Jesus, including a woman who is described only as “a sinner.” In Jesus’ day, you could be classified as a sinner even if there was evidence to the contrary. If your life circumstances were less than perfect or something especially bad happened to you, people would attribute your misfortune to a hidden sin in your life.

After entering Simon’s residence, the woman uses her hair, her tears, and a bottle of expensive perfume to clean Jesus’ dusty feet. It was a humiliating and scandalous act that any righteous person could not overlook. Simon, the most righteous person present, is appalled at the woman and at Jesus for letting her touch him. Jesus asks, “Who do you think appreciates it more when their sin is forgiven, someone who has been forgiven for a little or a lot?” Simon says, “The one

forgiven for a lot.”

Jesus agrees and reminds him that he forgot to engage in the simplest graces typically exhibited by a dinner host: offering to wash a guest’s feet. “This woman not only cleaned my feet,” he says. “She hasn’t stopped kissing them since she arrived. The true embarrassment is not in her actions but in the attitude you have toward her and toward me.” The passage ends with Jesus pronouncing the unilateral forgiveness of her sins, whatever they may be.

I must acknowledge I see some of Simon in me. I imagine you do too. We are sometimes quick to pass judgment on others whose life circumstances are not like ours. Episcopal priest David Sellery says, “For all of us, there is a certain, secret satisfaction knowing that there is a bigger sinner somewhere...down the street, around the corner or at the next desk.”¹² I forget that God even calls them beloved.

“The sinner” is usually the person we think is different. That person is not as “righteous” as we are or doesn’t exhibit the same qualities or accomplishments. But, no matter how worthy we consider ourselves, God sees all of us as we are, as people forgiven for *a lot*, and with a lot to be thankful for. One of the hardest things for righteous people to do is invite those different from us into our world. However, this is what Jesus did, regardless of what it did to his reputation.

Like Simon, I can be judgmental of people I consider sinful or “other.” But, I also recognize myself in the sinful woman. I have been an outsider among judgmental people. I know how it feels to walk into a room and feel judged because of my skin color, or the neighborhood where I grew up, or my family circumstances. I was raised by my paternal grandparents. They had my father when they were 16 years old. Neither of them went to high school. In turn, my parents became pregnant with me and my twin brother when they were 17 years old, and neither of them graduated high school.

We grew up in a predominantly African American neighborhood called the Ville in North St. Louis City. “What good can come from Nazareth?” What good can come from the Ville? The Ville is a neighborhood some people would

consider unacceptable, one of those neighborhoods in which my white friends might ask, "Is it safe?" When a white person hears about my life, they say, "You turned out well despite your beginning." It may be unintentional, but it reveals the same kind of attitude Simon held toward the sinful woman.

Theological educator John Martens says, "It is we who define ourselves as 'worthy' by creating distinctions between those whom we consider 'real' sinners and those whom we judge basically 'righteous,' which generally includes me and those like me."¹³ The sinner, the other, the person unworthy to be in my presence is the one different from me, whether they mean to be different or not. I am thankful my personal value is not eternally determined by others' perceptions of me, the family I was born into, where I grew up, or the challenges I have experienced. My value is based on something greater: God's love for me through Jesus' sacrificial life, death, and resurrection. My value comes from God's affirmation of me as a child of the King. And, the same applies to you.

Our struggles are spiritual and racial.

Have you ever played tug-of-war? Romans 7 speaks of a spiritual tug-of-war in our relationship to God, and others. One of Paul's goals was to help readers understand how these relationships form Christ's body on the earth. He argues that, **although we've become part of Christ's body, we still face** the ghosts of law and sin that previously controlled our lives. God's commands and any disobedience of them would lead to consequences we'd all have to face one day. However, the good news is that Jesus changed the trajectory of history and freed us from condemnation to be restored to full relationship with God, despite our being unable to fulfill the law or live sinless. Through Christ, we are no longer condemned by the law.

Yet Paul said there would still be this spiritual tug-of-war, going back and forth between what God wants versus what we want. He said we know what God wants, and even when we want to do it, the flesh fights against it. We want to please God, but our hearts and minds somehow work against us.

That is one of the things I most appreciate about Paul's writings. He doesn't try to sugarcoat the challenges we will face in life. He doesn't say once you have accepted Christ, life becomes perfect. He says the opposite. *Because* we have accepted Christ as Savior, life will in some ways get harder because we're attempting to live up to a higher standard of love. Proper faith or proper relationship with God recognizes you will sometimes fail; however, even in those times, you can still get life right when you know you can't do it by yourself. You must seek God's face for assistance.

This is not a cop out or a less-godly standard. It's acknowledging people are still human and, as Paul said, the fact that the things we know we should do, we don't always do. Thank God our story doesn't end there. I find joy in Paul's final words: our hope is not in ourselves, but in Jesus, who will ultimately cause us to be victorious in this spiritual tug-of-war. I write this book to have yet another conversation about race, in the hope that we can be honest about ourselves and our views of others, and realize that the sin of racism is one sign we are failing to live up to the standard Jesus set. I hope to remind people we all play a part in either keeping the sin of racism going, or ending it.

"The central social and hence theological issue of our time is the crisis of racial and cultural alienation and no appeal exclusively to the standards of our faith and witness will meet that social obligation."¹⁴ If we all would be honest about the part we play, we could do a better job of working together to destroy this alienation and reflect God's love for everyone. I hope that after engaging with the ideas found in this book, readers will recommit to focusing energy toward understanding others and finding common ground.

We must name our own sin(s) before we can point a finger at others.

The story is told of a Caucasian woman who, after boarding a flight from South Africa to England, realized her seatmate was a dark-skinned African man. She was not pleased with this arrangement and expressed her displeasure

to a flight attendant. The woman said that she was willing to pay for a first-class seat so she did not have to sit next to this African man. The flight attendant walked to the first-class cabin and had a brief discussion with the crew. A few minutes later the attendant returned. She leaned over and said to the African man, "I am sorry to have to do this. I need to make a seating change. If you follow me, we have a place for you in first class."

Most of us would likely be embarrassed if this incident occurred on a flight we were on. We would feel sorry for the man and also likely a sense of vindication as the man reclined in first class while the woman remained in coach. We'd feel anger, maybe even sorrow, about the outdated thinking and might even voice our displeasure. I imagine most would feel righteous indignation toward the woman.

Yet are we willing to consider that sometimes we exhibit the same mindset as that woman? We may not voice it, but we feel superior to those who do not "fit our standards," are poor, or are simply different from us.

Jonah experienced righteous indignation after God spared Nineveh. He believed he was justified. Such an indignant attitude is a problem in the twenty-first century as well. "If you are not on *our* side or do not believe exactly as I believe, you are my enemy," some would say, adding: "and I hope things go wrong in your life." Fortunately, this is not God's mode of operation with us. God is patient, even with those not considered members of the "redeemed." That's just the way God is. God's love does not end with us. It may be more visible through our relationship with God, but it does not begin or end with us.

As with Jonah, God implores us to reach out to others and show love to them as well. God sends us into people's lives to reinforce that love and to be examples for them to see and follow. This is what Jonah couldn't bring himself to accept. I pray we will be more faithful to this shared opportunity. I hope to be more faithful than Jonah.

Our personal monuments are sometimes more important to us than God's.

Have you ever been mistaken for someone else? This happens to me on a regular basis—for a few reasons. The first is because I have an identical twin brother. We were born 12 minutes apart and we look, sound, and act alike. For a few years, we worked three blocks from each other in downtown St. Louis and, on a weekly basis, someone would inevitably mistake him for me and vice versa. The second reason is because I share the same name with a famous singer and actor. When people Google his name, they sometimes reach out in hopes of locating the “real” Terrell Carter.

More recently, I have been mistaken for the “wrong kind of Christian.” When people ask what I do professionally, I tell them I am a professor and a pastor. Inevitably, some experience an immediate change of attitude and I want to qualify my statement. “But I’m not *that* kind of Christian.”

During the month of August, a pastor friend responded to a call for clergy to travel to Charlottesville, Virginia, in response to white supremacists gathering to defend a Robert E. Lee statue in the city specifically, and all Confederate monuments in general. My friend said that on the first day he was glad to see a group of police officers coming toward him in full riot gear with weapons. He believed they’d provide crowd control. Unfortunately, as this group continued to approach, he realized that though they had matching uniforms and even weapons, they weren’t police, but the white supremacist militia there to protect what they considered sacred monuments.

This idea of mistaken identity is important to me because, truthfully, Christians have become known less for protecting the practices of Jesus and more for protecting political monuments. But, as I begin to cast stones, I must pause and ask myself, *Am I any better than them?* What monuments in my life do I protect? I do the same things they do, just for other monuments. If we all would be honest and think deeply, we could each identify “monuments” in our lives, as well. We all hold onto some things that, if challenged, we would likely not act as “children of the King.”

I hope to challenge you to address the monuments

you protect—those built around antiquated and unhelpful concepts of race that cause harm to you and others. I hope to encourage you to be willing to turn them over to God for removal so they no longer hinder you from reflecting the love and grace of our Creator.

Heaven will be more diverse than we can imagine.

What comes to mind when you think of the kingdom of heaven? Based on the visions of Old Testament prophets and descriptions found in the book of Revelation, most of us think of a physical place. Even Jesus said there are many dwelling places in his “Father’s house.” But, what if there is more to heaven than what awaits on the other side? I think that’s partly what Jesus is talking about in the parables in Matthew 13.

When Jesus used the phrase “kingdom of heaven,” he was not talking about heaven just as our final resting place, but to ultimately describe what it meant for God to be present with people, especially in the here and now. The kingdom of heaven is like a small mustard seed, a small amount of leaven (yeast), an unnamed treasure in a field, and an expensive pearl.

Jesus’ listeners would not have viewed mustard seeds or leaven as good things. They both were nuisances that corrupted their surroundings. Heaven was a weed people would be disappointed in and want to get rid of. Heaven was more likely to be thrown away than used.

Jesus suggests heaven is like a man who buys a field because he found a great treasure in it, but doesn’t tell the original owner. That sounds like a shady business practice to me. And, it’s like a jeweler who, hunting for a bargain, comes across a pearl worth more than any he already has, and sells everything, essentially bankrupting himself, to buy it.

In these parables, Jesus uses questionable images to show that the kingdom of heaven would start small and grow into something people could never imagine. The stories of questionable business practices show that the people that make up the kingdom hold tremendous value in God’s

eyes—so much so that heaven would send its greatest gift as a sacrifice to restore right relationship with God.

If this is what heaven is about, God’s body represented in a small band of believers, and God’s willingness to pay for it through the sacrifice of the Son, can that change our view of heaven? Heaven may not be only a place off in the distance, but also something available to all *right now* through the sacrificial work of Christ. Maybe this kingdom can become recognizable in the world through how its members embody God’s love. People may see heaven as the people and relationships that represent God. That’s the kind of kingdom I want to be part of.

Unity in how we live with each other is a sign of spiritual maturity.

President Obama will not be the only person with a legacy of racial division. There has been an even clearer divide along racial lines after the election of Donald Trump. Many have family members, friends, and coworkers they no longer speak to because they voted differently. Yet many people who no longer speak to each other on Facebook or in public continue to attend church together and worship God in the same place.

Paul dealt with this problem in 1 Corinthians 1:10–18, writing to believers who disagreed with each other. Paul wanted to help them navigate the messiness that occurs when people don’t see eye to eye, but live and worship together. Word has gotten back to him that arguments were happening around “who baptized whom”—Cephas, Apollos, Paul? People were missing the point. It didn’t matter *who* because all three were baptizing in the name of the same Lord. Their arguments implied they didn’t have a proper foundation of faith in the first place.

Rev. Paul Bellan-Boyer says the church at Corinth had the wrong spirit. “The problem is not that they have a different household in faith, but that they are quarreling. This points out that they lack the kind of unity which Paul presumes is a fruit of belonging to Christ. Clothing yourself with Christ does not erase our differences, but it does cover them, sets

them aside, puts them in a new context.”¹⁵ So, the problem was not that they had differences. The problem was that they had allowed their differences to become the priority.

The body of Christ can be on opposing sides of so many different things. Rev. Mary Hinkle Shore says, “Unity of mind and purpose comes, not because a particular leader is able to create consensus, or because all possess knowledge or some other spiritual gift. Rather, the unity that Paul urges on the Corinthians is born from a baptism that connects all participants to Christ’s death and resurrection.”¹⁶

Spiritual maturity is seen in our ability not to let disagreements cause us to separate, but instead help us draw closer and be reminded of our common foundation. Dr. Dwight Peterson says, “Unity, of course, does not mean uniformity. But it does mean that the church ought not allow itself to be divided by things like human leaders, but instead ought to keep the Gospel and the power of the cross of Christ firmly in view.”¹⁷ My ultimate hope and prayer is that this book will bring people together and serve as encouragement for those in community with others different from themselves.

I also hope to challenge the white church and contemporary evangelical culture around the perceptions often held, sometimes unintentionally, that black and brown people “need to be saved from themselves,” to be taught the “correct” way to be Christian, or that black and brown people are experts on poverty, social struggle, and the like, but not of scripture.

I write as a black man told by white teachers there were certain things I could and could not do because I was *black*. And, these messages did not end when I left elementary school. My twin brother, after earning four master’s degrees, was hired to lead a department for a company in the Midwest, but was told by a white subordinate he was simply the latest “affirmative action hire.” Having won more industry awards in the field than the entire department didn’t matter. This wasn’t 1990 or 2000. It happened after 2010.

Such experiences may not be the standard experiences of all black people. But, they are for more black people than

not. Race does not play a factor in every experience. Class and sex play roles as well. But, we need to try to see racism for what it is.

Racism is not the explanation for everything black people face, but we can't overlook the past racist actions that have shaped our communities, states, and nation. "One of the enduring realities of life is that majorities discriminate against minorities, especially where race or ethnicity is concerned. Each of us likes to believe that God especially loves our group and its ways. We feel suspicious and threatened by other kinds of people. The unfortunate result is discrimination."¹⁸

I write this book from the privileged vantage point of serving as the first African American pastor of two historically white churches, one of which formed specifically to serve white Christians who wanted to worship separately. Although both churches learned to love people of all races and ethnicities, diversity happened as a conscious decision to invite people unlike the congregation.

Finally, I hope to offer those seeking informed pastoral engagement an understanding of what the past may contribute to the discussion of race and our relationships. My experience with these conversations has taken years of pain and frustration. Yet, rather than point at the villains and lay blame, we must seek to remember both sides are human beings who inhabit a fallen world and are themselves products of fallen, sinful people. In this messy game of spiritual tug-of-war, we can all too easily forget we are not the only ones on the side of righteousness, and those who disagree with us are not far from God's side.

I hope you will be emboldened to continue in this critical journey with me.

Terrell Carter, D.Min.
April 2018

1

Roots of Our Racial Division

“I still think today as yesterday that the color line is a great problem of this century. But today I see more clearly than yesterday that back of the problem of race and color, lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements it: and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance, and disease of the majority of their fellowmen.”

—W.E.B. DU BOIS¹

When you were in high school, what table did you sit at when you ate lunch in the cafeteria? If you went to a high school such as mine, Gatesville Senior High, home of the Fighting Hornets, you had a certain table that you were expected to sit at. And, only certain people would sit at that table with you. The table where you sat symbolized your social status. It represented where you stood in the food chain of life at Gatesville High School, and everyone had a place. More specifically, everyone had a *table*. Athletes had a table. Preppy kids had a table. Cheerleaders had a table. The smokers stood outside by a dumpster behind the cafeteria. It would take an act of God, or by one of the cool kids, to help you move. If you tried to sit at a different table on your own, there could be severe social consequences.

So, what table did you sit at? Or, a better question may be: At what table do you sit *now*? You still can have certain expectations placed upon you by the group you associate with. Much of the underlying tension our nation experiences stems from this separating along social and economic lines.

Who are you not expected to sit with? What type of person makes you cringe when you see them coming your way? Is it someone with a lot of tattoos? Could it be a black or brown woman with a group of children? A police officer?

If you grew up in Gatesville, Texas, it was anyone who came from McGregor, Texas. McGregor is located 20 miles east of Gatesville, and the only good thing about the town of McGregor (to *my* mind, back then) was the fact that the highway that led to Waco, Texas, went through McGregor. When I lived in Gatesville, the two towns despised each other. The relationship between Gatesville and McGregor was like the Hatfields and McCoys. We did not like them and they did not like us.

Part of the reason for this was because Gatesville could not beat McGregor in anything. They whupped us in every sport. From football to basketball to baseball to track. They were always bigger than us, stronger than us, and faster than us. We were smarter and more creative than them, but nobody wanted to brag about the fact that we beat them in our regional headline writing competition. If one of our friends moved from Gatesville to McGregor, they became *persona non grata* to us.

This act of treating people differently based on where their family lives, or their town of origin, is not a new phenomenon. No matter how old you are, you've probably known a story like this since you were a child. We find multiple examples in the Book of Acts in the New Testament. Specifically, in Acts 11, the disciple Peter almost got into serious trouble with the religious people of his day for simply eating with the "wrong" people.

Imagine: instead of dirt roads from the Bible, a two-lane highway runs through town. And, instead of donkeys, there are pick-up trucks, and the local Walmart and the Texas

Department of Corrections at the edge of town are the two places everyone works.

Now imagine Peter is the president of the campus Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and he's just returned from a trip where he met with people from McGregor High School, the sworn enemies of any proud Fighting Hornet. When Peter sits down in the cafeteria for lunch, he is confronted by members of the debate team. The boys are a force to be reckoned with, and they're keen to give Peter a piece of their minds for breaking the rules and spending time with their enemies. The head of the debate team steps forward and tells Peter they've heard he's had lunch with a "McGregor"...

Who Would Jesus Hate?

There was no love between Jews and Gentiles during the time of the early church. They did not like each other, and they did not trust each other. It was not that Jews and Gentiles never mixed. Truthfully, most Jews did not have a choice but to live in a world full of people who were not of their heritage. Jews and Gentiles lived life together, whether they liked it or not. Now, one of the challenges for Jews was adhering to the idea of being "clean." For them, the idea of being clean stemmed from multiple requirements given by God in Leviticus to address certain actions that would make a person unclean and unacceptable before God. In Leviticus 11–26, God gave 613 rules the children of Israel were to follow to stay clean.

There were many things that could make you unclean, and thus unacceptable before God—things such as getting too close to a dead body, bearing a child, or eating certain foods. It was understood that no one could keep the purity laws perfectly, so there were provisions for becoming clean again. For Peter, the bigger problem was that he'd willingly gone to a Gentile's home and eaten with him.

The purity laws lent themselves to a spiritual hierarchy between those who considered themselves close to God, and the "unclean," who were shunned as impure sinners. Instead of expressing the holiness of God, the practice of

being pure became a means of excluding people. Following these rules became a way to justify keeping certain people out and believing them far from God. By voluntarily doing what he did, Peter was bucking that system.

The traditions that have shaped our nation have been used to keep groups of people separated from each other. Specifically, they have been used to keep one group of people in power over and above multiple others. Beliefs, laws, policies, and practices have been created by whites and used to keep black people enslaved and subjugated for years. The effects of those laws are still being felt in the twenty-first century.

Before we look at Darwin's contribution to racial oppression, we need to define some words.

Race—A group of people possessing certain physical characteristics in common determined by heredity.

Races, historically, are the descriptions for people of color developed as white racial identity was itself being established. First came the transatlantic slave trade, and then came the scientific language of race, which helped organize Western societies around that very lucrative practice. Race is a myth biologically, but it is a political reality. Racism is the effort to create and sustain systems and structures for whites. Race is a financially incentivized anthropology designed to legitimize the buying, selling, and owning of African bodies.²

Racism—Racism is more than just a personal attitude. It is the institutionalized form of that attitude. It is "the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group to congenital superiority."³

Racism as an ideology is founded on two myths, which have permeated human social relations for centuries. By *myth* here I mean, "a notion based more on tradition or convenience than on fact." One myth is that there is something called European "white" civilization which over time evolved to become the

highest form of human development and cultural refinement and by which standard all other races and cultures must be judged, measured or assessed. The myth asserts that this European civilization is founded on Judeo-Christian values and has been destined to lead the world towards the achievement of the highest levels of human development.⁴

Racism is racial prejudice plus power. Racism is the intentional or unintentional use of power to isolate, separate, and exploit others. This use of power is based on a belief in superior racial origin, identity or supposed racial characteristics. Racism confers certain privileges on and defends the dominant group, which in turn sustains and perpetuates racism. Both consciously and unconsciously, racism is enforced and maintained by the legal, cultural, religious, educational, economic, political, and military institutions of societies.⁵

Institutional racism is one of the ways organizations and structures serve to preserve injustice. Intended or not, the mechanisms and function of these entities create a pattern of racial injustice.

Racism is one of several sub-systems of domination in the modern world. It interacts with other sub-systems to produce broad patterns of oppression and exploitation that plague the world. Among these sub-systems are class and sexual oppression. Women who are also victimized by racism face a compound burden. They not only have to deal with oppression due to their racial origin or identity, but they are also confronted with economic and political exploitation and oppression based on their sex and/or class.⁶

Prejudice – “Prejudice is a personal attitude toward other people based on a categorical judgement about their physical characteristics, such as race or ethnic origin.”⁷

With those definitions in place, we can continue looking at how Darwinism influenced several things—including the

Dred Scott decision, the 13th Amendment loophole, and Jim Crow laws—to justify slavery.

The Influence of Darwinism

Historically, the theory of evolution has been used to justify viewing people of some races as inferior to others. The theory of evolution was heavily influenced by the book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, written by Robert Chambers. Scottish-born Chambers wore many hats in his lifetime, including that of publisher, geologist, and journal editor. He was highly influential within mid-nineteenth-century scientific and political circles. Chambers believed: “Various races of mankind, are simply...stages in the development of the highest or Caucasian type...and that the Blacks were the least developed, and the Caucasians were the highest, most evolved race.”⁸ In the end, *Vestiges* proposed a theory of social and biological evolution that concluded: “The Negro was ‘at the foot of’ the Mongol, the Yellow race between, and Caucasians at the top.”

Charles Darwin, a geologist and biologist, built on this theory within his book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. *On the Origin of Species* posited that, through the process of natural selection, some groups and/or populations learn necessary skills to evolve and/or change over time, while other groups/populations do not. He applied this theory specifically to people.

One of the interesting things about Darwin’s personal life is that he was opposed to all forms of slavery. However, this personal belief did not stop him from concluding that one of the strongest evidences for evolution was the existence of living ‘primitive races,’ which he believed were evolutionarily between the ‘civilized races of man’ and the gorilla. After making contact with the Indian population of Tierra del Fuego, Darwin wrote, “I could not have believed how wide was the difference between savage and civilized man; it is greater than between a wild and domesticated animal... Viewing such a man, one can hardly make oneself

believe that they are fellow creatures and inhabitants of the same world.”⁹

In Darwin’s view, the civilized races (whites) would eventually replace the savage races (all other races) throughout the world. Darwin saw this natural selection coming to fruition in multiple ways. He saw it in action through the killing of the indigenous peoples of Australia by British forces. He saw the black race as one of the “savage races” and categorized them as being closer in kin to gorillas than to other humans. He also advocated against social programs that benefited the poor and weak because he believed such programs permitted the least desirable people in the gene pool to survive when they should be allowed to die off.

Darwin wrote:

At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man (White) will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races (Black) throughout the world. At the same time, the anthropomorphous apes...will no doubt be exterminated. The break between man and his nearest allies will then be wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilized state, as we may hope, even than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as now between the Negro or Australian and the gorilla... It has often been said...that man can resist with impunity the greatest diversities of climate and other changes; but this is true only of the civilized races.¹⁰

By the late 1800s, Darwin’s theory of evolution had spawned Social Darwinism. Quickly after its inception, Social Darwinism began to take hold of society’s collective thinking. Social Darwinists took the ideas found in Darwinism and evolved them to argue forcefully that certain inferior races were less evolved, or less human because those who were “less evolved” were more akin to apes than to normal humans. With Darwinism as their model, social scientists

Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner argued that a society's existence was a life-and-death struggle in which the best individuals would eventually overcome inferior individuals. Sumner argued that wealthy Americans, almost all of whom were white, were the beneficiaries of natural selection and, as the superior race, were necessary to the advancement of civilization. Africans and their descendants were viewed as a degenerate race.

Additionally, there was the belief that one of the drawbacks of evolution was the idea that the existence of racially inferior people groups was unavoidable. This idea appeared in many of the biology textbooks that were being used at the time. *A Civic Biology*, a trusted American high school textbook, included a section on evolution under the subtitle "The Races of Man." The section identified the five races or varieties of people. Each race was very different from the others in instinct, social customs, and structure. It should not be hard to guess which group was at the top and which was at the bottom. "There are the Ethiopian or Negro type, originating in Africa; the Malay or brown race, from the islands of the Pacific; the American Indian; the Mongolian or yellow race, including the natives of China, Japan and the Eskimos; and finally, the highest type of all, the Caucasians, represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America."¹¹

A Civic Biology was not unique. Most textbooks described blacks as physically and mentally inferior to most other races. The book *The Negro: A Menace to American Civilization* stated:

By the nearly unanimous consent of anthropologists this type occupies...the lowest position in the evolutionary scale... [T]he cranial sutures...close much earlier in the Negro than in other races. To this premature ossification of the skull, preventing all further development of the brain, many pathologists have attributed the inherent mental inferiority of the blacks, an inferiority which is even more marked than their physical differences... [T]he development of the Negro and White proceeds on different lines... [I]n

the former the growth of the brain is...arrested by the premature closing of the cranial sutures... The mental [differences] are at least as marked as the physical differences... No full-blooded Negro has ever been distinguished as a man of science, a poet, or an artist.¹²

Thomas Huxley, an early proponent and defender of evolution and believer in the physical and social superiority of the White race, wrote:

No rational man, cognizant of the facts, believes that the average Negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man. And, if this be true, it is simply incredible [to assume] that, when all his disabilities are removed...he will be able to compete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed rival, in a contest which is to be carried out by thoughts and not by bites.¹³

The Social Sciences

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the social sciences have also contributed to extensively lengthening the divide between blacks and whites. One example is the study published as *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. The study argued that human intelligence is substantially affected by multiple inherited and environmental factors and is the best predictor of how a person will behave in life, especially as it relates to the personal dynamics of income, job performance, birth out of wedlock, and involvement in crime. The authors also argue that people with high intelligence are successively finding themselves separated from those of average and below-average intelligence.

The authors, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, claimed that inherited intelligence was the primary determining factor for how a person turned out in life, and not their environment or social class. They wrote that "success or failure in the American economy, and all that goes with it, are increasingly a matter of the genes that people inherit."¹⁴

They also stated: “The poor are poor not because they are unlucky to be born poor, but because they were not lucky enough to have inherited good genes.”¹⁵ The authors also stated that IQ tests and scores were the most reliable way of learning and measuring a person’s cognitive ability. They also claimed that a person’s cognitive ability likely could not be improved.

Through their research, they argued that people within the United States were naturally self-selecting and separating among themselves based on cognitive abilities. Those with high IQs were forming a group of “cognitive elites,” and those who were not as mentally astute were finding themselves as members of the inferior class. Those with high IQs were destined to experience wealth and upward mobility, while those with low IQs were destined to experience lives marred by poverty, unemployment, crime, and dependence on government assistance.

The authors used their accumulated data to suggest that certain social programs, those that primarily benefited African Americans, needed to be ended or have their funding severely slashed because those programs only helped to subsidize the continuation of a population with lower intelligence and lower life expectations. The groups they were primarily referring to were African Americans and Latino/as. The authors wrote, “The ranks of the cognitively inferior are disproportionately filled with blacks, Latinos, and today’s immigrants. And that’s a serious disadvantage because low IQ—not education or opportunity—is the key factor underlying problems ranging from poverty and criminal behavior to out of wedlock births and being a bad parent.”¹⁶

Obviously, not everyone agreed with their findings. In the article “Flattening the Bell Curve,” journalist Joe Sims wrote:

The racist proposals put forward in *The Bell Curve* are more than just talk. They are increasingly becoming governmental policy. The Republican Contract on America is *The Bell Curve* in legislative form. One of the main planks in the contract is the so-called Personal Responsibility Act whose intent is clear:

eliminate welfare to lower birthrates among African American and Latino women.

...The Bell Curve is a direct challenge to the concept of human equality. Inequality is said to be immutable and determined by heredity... The ideological generals of the right wing admit as much. Here are two examples. Pat Buchanan said, "I think a lot of the data [in *The Bell Curve*] is indisputable... It does shoot a hole straight through the heart of egalitarian socialism which tried to create equality of result by coercive government programs."¹⁷

Mr. Sims' argument against *The Bell Curve* study is that it implies governmental funding through social services is not helpful because certain groups of people, unfortunately, are not as equal as others. I believe he's right and that the study smacks of Darwinistic thinking.

Medical Experimentation

There is a long history of medical experimentation on black bodies in America. We know about some of these experiments because they were documented by the slaves experiencing them. Former slave John Brown described how his master, Dr. Thomas Hamilton of Georgia, performed homemade medical experiments on him in which he was made to sit naked on a stool that rested above a burning pit. As a slave, Brown could not disobey his master, so he had to suffer through whatever Dr. Hamilton subjected him to. Brown said of this experience, "I could not have helped myself. There was nothing for it but passive resignation, and I gave myself up in ignorance and in much fear."¹⁸

After the temperature of the stool reached 100 degrees, Brown passed out while Dr. Hamilton stood by with a thermometer. Unfortunately for Brown, this was not the only time he would have to endure Dr. Hamilton's curiosity. In another experiment, Dr. Hamilton attempted to determine the width of a black person's skin. He did this by burning and blistering Brown's hands and feet and measuring them

after he was injured.

Dr. Hamilton was not unique in subjecting slaves to unnecessary injuries. Hospitals regularly advertised within local communities seeking slaves for participation in experiments. For example, in the 1850s, Dr. T. Stillman sought "sick negroes" who could not adequately perform their daily duties. He wanted to perform experiments that would possibly "heal" the slaves so they could get back to work. Slave owners willingly delivered their slaves to Dr. Stillman in hopes that they would return to productivity. Some did, but others died while participating in the experiments.

Experimentation on African Americans occurred not only during slavery, but well into the 1970s. Until that time, prisons regularly conducted experiments on prisoners without their knowledge or permission, most of whom were black. Dow Chemical Co. paid Philadelphia's Holmesburg prison to test potential carcinogens on the mostly black prison population. The results of the experiments were that many of the prisoners developed certain cancers, skin conditions, and mental illness.

One of the most well-known mass medical experiments on African Americans was the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment was a clinical study conducted between 1932 and 1972 by the U.S. Public Health Service. Its purpose was to study the natural progression of untreated syphilis in African American men. The experiments took place in rural Alabama. To entice participants, the leaders of the experiment told locals that they would be receiving free health care paid for by the federal government. Altogether, 600 black sharecroppers took part in the study. None of the participants knew what was taking place.

When the experiment began, 399 participants were already infected with the disease, while 201 were not infected. During the experiments duration, the participants were provided with free medical care and meals. An extra incentive for participants was a free policy for burial insurance. Funding for the experiment was limited and eventually ran out. This did not deter those conducting it

from continuing. The experiment continued, even though none of the participants were advised that it had officially been discontinued. Participants also were not told that they were infected with Syphilis or that they were not receiving proper treatment for their conditions. Although penicillin was available and affordable to those who were conducting the experiment, participants remained untreated and languished from their infections.

In the end, several participants succumbed to their infection, at least 40 women contracted the disease from participants, and 19 children were born with congenital syphilis. The only reason the experiments ended was because a whistleblower eventually advised the government that the experiments had continued, even after the loss of funding. Fortunately, this led to new regulations and protections for people who participate in medical testing, including requiring medical teams to get informed consent from participants, the right for patients to receive clear communication concerning any diagnosis, and accurate reporting of test results for those who participate in experiments or clinical trials. But none of that helped the original subjects.¹⁹

Legal Support of Racial Division

Slavery is one of America's most grievous enduring legacies. It served as the foundation for much of the country's advancement, and it continues to serve as the foundation for much of the tension felt between black and white. It will continue to affect future generations as well. Ira Glasser wrote, "The residue of slavery and centuries of legal discrimination still stain every institution in this society, and substantially limit the opportunity of many, perhaps most, black children."²⁰

The practice of enslaving one race was one of the clearest signs that our founding fathers did not consider black people fully human. Many black men and women, assisted by kind-hearted whites, gave their lives to fight against the institution of slavery—not just for their own sakes, but for the sake of future generations. Christopher Carter wrote, "It is important

for blacks to be considered fully human: Being referred to and looked upon as fully human is something black people have fought and died trying to achieve—for my people, our common humanity matters.”²¹ Although the process of freeing slaves was in full swing in the 1800s, it would be many more years before African Americans were viewed as truly free or even somewhat equal to others. The following are just a few factors that contributed to the delay in African Americans reaching legal equality with whites.

The Dred Scott Decision

Dred Scott was a slave, who, after being moved from a state that supported slavery to a state that did not, attempted to sue his owner in court to gain freedom for himself and his family. Although Scott’s effort was valiant, the courts ultimately denied his request for freedom and ordered him to be returned to his owner. In the official ruling against him, the courts determined that, according to the Constitution, any person that was descended from Africans, whether slave or free, was not a citizen of the United States.

The court effectively determined that African Americans had no legal claim to freedom or citizenship, at all. The ruling also determined the following findings:

- Since they were not citizens, African Americans did not possess the legal standing to bring a lawsuit in a federal court.
- Since slaves were private property, Congress did not have the power to regulate slavery in the territories and could not revoke a slave owner’s rights based on where he lived.
- This decision nullified the essence of the Missouri Compromise, which divided territories into jurisdictions, either free or slave.
- Because Scott was considered the private property of his owners, he was subject to the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which prohibited the taking of property from its owner without due process.

The court determined that, according to the Constitution,