



# RACE AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Leader's Guide

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## Leader's Guide

Talking about race in the United States is challenging, complicated, and fraught. When some people say “black lives matter,” others answer back that “all lives matter.” Some people applaud Colin Kaepernick while others abhor him. Even as so much of our lives are affected by race—from where we live to how we vote—we disagree about how big a problem racism is and even how to define it.

Churches often mirror this divided reality. Many are still largely racially homogenous. And ideas about race—ideas that affect voting, housing, education and more—still divide Christians.

This video series provides one lens through which to explore race in the United States. Focusing on the history of black/white relations in the U.S., it considers how race and Christianity have interacted, for good and for ill. It offers a narrative that helps to answer the question “how did we get here?” I hope that by offering a look at our racial past, we will better understand ourselves and be better able to have those challenging, complicated, and fraught conversations our churches and our country need.

### **What This Series Is...and Isn't**

The series is an introduction to the history of race and Christianity in the United States. Largely chronological, it offers one narrative that will help people understand how we have come to our present moment. That also means that this is one of many possible narratives. There are other ways of telling this story. That's part of what it means to think historically: you recognize that there is more than one way to organize a narrative (note, for instance, the difference between Matthew and Mark or Kings and Chronicles).

The story I tell, however, is not merely my interpretation. I rely heavily on the work of many scholars (I identify them in the resources and further reading sections of the website and guides). I've tried to offer interpretations upon which most historians would agree (even if they may tell it a bit differently). Although cries of “fake news” and “media bias” make some folks think that all ways of telling stories are equally valid because they are all equally biased, for the most part, historians disagree. Even as we recognize that there is more than one way to tell a story, we think that there are stories that better accord with the historical evidence, things like texts and artifacts from the past.

That I'm trying to tell an evidence-based history means two things. First, this history is not one I've designed either to flatter or to denigrate the Christian tradition. Both as a historian and a Christian, I think that getting as close as we can to truth, even if only through a glass darkly, matters. Sometimes, what the evidence says is that some Christians got things very wrong. When that's what the evidence says, that's what I say. When Christians acted well and faithfully, I say that too. Second, it means that you can check out what I claim. Again, I've listed a lot of

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resources, both documents from the past and modern historical works. If you think I've gotten it wrong, I would invite you to read the texts and see if your interpretation is plausible.

A couple of warning about what this series is not. It is not a comprehensive look at the history of race in the United States (that would be a very long series). I only cover black/white relations and, even then, I can only cover some episodes and events. Nor does this series offer much in the way of addressing racism. My goal is to provide a historical background to the problem because I think we have to know where we've been in order to address the problem well.

### **How To Use This Series**

I have designed this series to be flexible and adaptable. I created it with adult Sunday School and small groups in mind, but other audiences and contexts would work as well. Each session is built around a 20 to 25 minute video. The curriculum for each session includes an outline for people who want to follow along or take notes, a short synopsis and overview of the episode's key questions, and some reflection questions.

I suggest the following plan for each class session:

- a quick review of the last episode
- an overview of the key questions for the day. This review might include time for people to write about or discuss what they think the answers might be.
- discussion after the video. This discussion could include time to check for understanding as well as conversation about the reflection questions.

I have also included material for a pre-session. This material focuses on getting a sense of what people know or believe about the history of race in the United States and on what is at stake for people in the discussion. Some groups might find the pre-session material helpful, others might not.

### **Talking About Race**

This series invites people to ask hard questions about the history of the United States and of Christianity. For some people, the idea that people of their race or their faith acted in harmful ways will not be threatening. For others, it will be extremely so. As you prepare for these discussions, you might consider:

1. **Setting some ground rules.** For example:
  - a. Speaking from one's own perspective ("I think" rather than "everyone believes" or "we all know");
  - b. Not using anecdotal evidence to prove general points. Just because you know a black person or a white person who thinks a certain way does not mean that all black people or all white people think that way.

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You might also decide in advance what you are going to do if challenges arise during the series. For example:

- c. Deciding what to do if people disagree with the history or the historical interpretation. Will you look at some of the sources Sarah suggests? If people want to bring in other sources, what kind of sources will you consider valid?;
  - d. Deciding what happens if one or more people start to dominate the conversation.
2. **Helping people think about what is at stake for them.** Sometimes people do not want a certain history to be true because it reflects poorly on their ancestors or because it makes it hard to believe that something to which they are committed—like their faith or their country—warrants their loyalty. Asking what it means for them or what changes for them if a narrative is accurate or an interpretation sound can help people think about their reactions.
3. **Helping people think about what is not at stake for them.** As Christians, we believe that neither life nor death separate us from the love of God. That means that telling hard truths about ourselves or our pasts (individual or collective) won't either. But it can certainly feel like it might. Reminding each other that God's love for us is not at stake can help ground people in their identity as God's children and make difficult discussions feel a bit less fraught.

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## Where are We Starting?

### Leader's Guide

This optional session will help prepare your group for the study. This session has two objectives: 1) establishing what people think they know about the history of race and Christianity in the United States and 2) helping people consider what is at stake for them in learning more about the topic.

#### **What We Think We Know and What We Want to Know**

As lots of students will tell you, history is hard. In part, that's because many students have been taught that history is all about memorizing a bunch of dates. Fortunately, you won't be memorizing here. Still, history can be difficult for other reasons. Sometimes, what you learn overturns what you thought you knew—and changing your mind is usually not easy. And, sometimes, there is just a lot of information and it can be hard to make sense of.

The activities in this section will help with those two problems by helping people articulate what they think they know and what they want to know. Once you know what you think you know, it is easier to make comparisons between that and what you learn. Articulating what you want to know provides a framework for organizing all the information coming at you.

1. Ask people to write down what they think they know about race and Christianity in the United States on the pre-session worksheets.
  - a. This is brainstorming so any response is fine
  - b. People might want categories to help prod their memories. For example, “main characters, significant events, important institutions, key texts.”
2. Ask people to write down what they hope to learn about the history of race and Christianity in the United States on the pre-session worksheets.
3. If you have time and it works for your group, have people compare answers (either in small groups or a large group).
4. At the end of the video series, you might have people revisit these worksheets. What have they learned? How have their minds changed (if at all)? Are there things they still want to know?

#### **What We Believe and What Is At Stake**

Most people come to the study of race and Christianity in the United States with some beliefs and assumptions. Maybe they assume that Christianity has mainly played a positive role in racial issues. Maybe they assume that the story is one of unimpeded progress. Whatever their beliefs and assumptions, it will be easier to learn something new if they know what they already believe.

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It is also easier to engage a difficult topic if we know what is at stake in our beliefs and assumptions. Sometimes we believe things, but don't really care if they are true. Sometimes, however, our beliefs have significant implications for how we understand things we really care about—things like whether our ancestors were good people, whether our faith helps society, and whether our country gives all people equal opportunity.

To help people in your group uncover their beliefs and assumptions and to consider what is at stake for them, have them complete the rest of the worksheet.

1. First, have them answer the four questions. They do not need to respond to the “Reflection” question yet.
2. After they have answered all four questions, ask them to consider what is at stake for them by:
  - a. Ranking their commitment or stake in their belief on a 1 to 4 scale (the scale is also on the worksheet) They can write the number next to “Reflections”. The scale is:
    - 1=Encountering solid evidence that challenged what I believe about this question would neither surprise nor concern me.
    - 2=Encountering solid evidence that would challenge what I believe about this question would surprise me a little, but I would not be deeply concerned.
    - 3=Encountering solid evidence that would challenge what I believe about this question would surprise me and would be difficult to assimilate because of what it would mean for how I understand myself, my experiences, my faith, and/or my country.
    - 4=Encountering solid evidence that would challenge what I believe about this question would surprise me and I would be unwilling to assimilate it because of what it would mean for how I understand myself, my experiences, my faith, and/or my country.

Let them know that the goal is not to have “low” numbers. They might have very good reasons for their beliefs. The point is simply to get a sense of what beliefs matter to them and why.

3. Next, have them write about their response. They might consider, for example, why the beliefs matter (or don't) to them and what it mean for them if the belief was wrong (or right).
4. Depending on time and the needs of your group, you could ask people to share answers, either in a large or small group.

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## Pre-Session Worksheet

### **What Do I Know?**

In the space below, write what you know about the history of race and Christianity in the United States. If you don't know where to start, think about themes, events, people, and texts.

### **What Do I Want to Know?**

In the space below, write about what you want to know about the history of race and Christianity in the United States.

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### **What Do I Believe?**

When starting to learn about a new topic, it can be helpful to think about what beliefs and assumptions we already have about it. To help you think about your beliefs and assumptions, answer the questions below. Leave the “Reflection” section blank until you have answered all the questions.

1. What do you believe are the main causes of racial problems in the United States?
  - a. What evidence do you have for your belief?
  
  - b. Reflection:
  
2. How much progress do you think the country has made on race from the colonial era to the present?
  - a. What evidence do you have for your belief?
  
  - b. Reflection:
  
3. What role do you think Christianity has played in the history of race in the United States?

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a. What evidence do you have for your belief?

b. Reflection

4. Given what you know and what you have written above, how would you summarize the history of race and Christianity in the United States in a sentence or two?

a. Reflections:

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### **What's At Stake for Me?**

When learning about a new topic, particularly a difficult one, it is helpful to think about how much your beliefs about it matter to you. When we are deeply invested in a belief, we can have a harder time changing our minds or engaging well with people who hold other view.

To help you gain a sense of how much the beliefs you wrote above matter to you and why they do (or don't):

1. Rank your commitment to your response for each question on a scale of 1 to 4 (write the numbers after "Reflections". Note: responding with a higher number is not "wrong." You may have very good reasons for the beliefs that you hold. The point is simply to be aware of what beliefs you hold strongly and why you hold them.

1=Encountering solid evidence that challenged what I believe about this question would neither surprise nor concern me.

2=Encountering solid evidence that would challenge what I believe about this question would surprise me a little, but I would not be deeply concerned.

3=Encountering solid evidence that would challenge what I believe about this question would surprise me and would be difficult to assimilate because of what it would mean for how I understand myself, my experiences, my faith, and/or my country.

4=Encountering solid evidence that would challenge what I believe about this question would surprise me and I would be unwilling to assimilate it because of what it would mean for how I understand myself, my experiences, my faith, and/or my country.

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2. Write about your response. Think generally about why you responded the way that you did. (If you are stuck, consider these questions: How central are various beliefs to your identity? Does the amount of evidence you have for your belief warrant the strength with which you hold it? Were you surprised by what did not matter as much to you?)

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## **Race, Slavery, and Christianity in Colonial America**

Have you ever wondered why, in the United States, slavery was based on race? Have you ever thought about why conversion to Christianity did not change the status of slaves? Using colonial Virginia as an example, this episode explores how race became intertwined with slavery and how Christians used the faith both to challenge race-based slavery and to underwrite the identification between race and slavery.

### **Key Questions:**

1. How did it happen that, in colonial Virginia, some people came to be seen as most appropriately property, as “slaves by birth”?
2. Why, in America, was slavery deemed appropriate only for those who had some African ancestry?
3. What was the role of Christianity in the identification of slavery with race?

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What in this episode most surprised or challenged you?
2. For some Americans, it is important that the early colonial project be a good one, undertaken for noble, even holy reasons. According to this episode, those reasons had much to do with money. How did you react to Sarah’s claims about the economic motivations behind colonization? Why do you think you reacted that way?
3. The Anglican Church in colonial Virginia had to grapple with the reality that many other religious groups would as well: slaveowners would be unwilling to allow them access to slaves if the church did not support slavery (and slaveowners would probably not be church participants either). That was not the only reason that various denomination countenanced or supported slavery, but it was part of the calculus. And it raises a question: at what point (if any) does complicity with an institution like race-based slavery, even purportedly for the sake of evangelization, undermine the claims of the gospel? When is it better to risk losing converts than to make peace with social and economic institutions? How do we know?
4. The slaves who wrote the Bishop of London made their case based on brotherhood (and sisterhood) in Christ. They asked that shared Christian faith matter more than race. Do you have identities that, either in theory or in practice, matter more to you than your Christian one? Do you have identities that make it hard to see some Christian brothers and sisters as your spiritual siblings?

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## **Race, Slavery, and Christianity in Colonial America**

- I. Introduction: Elizabeth Key Case
  - A. Biography
    - 1. Born to a white father and a slave mother
    - 2. Became an indentured servant
    - 3. Listed as property when John Mottram died
  - B. Key's Case
    - 1. Claimed she could not be a slave because her father was white, she had served her term, and she was a Christian.
    - 2. Ultimately won her case
  - C. House of Burgesses' Response
    - 1. 1662: Condition of slavery follows the mother
    - 2. 1667: Baptism does not free "slaves by birth."
  - D. Key Questions of Episode
    - 1. How did it happen in colonial Virginia that some people came to be seen as appropriately property or as "slaves by birth"?
    - 2. Why, in America, were those people with some African ancestry?
    - 3. What was the role of Christianity in the identification of race and slavery?
  
- II. Making Slavery Black in Virginia
  - A. Factors in identification of slavery with being black
    - 1. Existing transatlantic slave system.
    - 2. Christian evangelization
    - 3. Rebellion
    - 4. Greed
  - B. Transatlantic Slave System
    - 1. Turn from "quick" money to labor intensive ventures increases demand for labor.
    - 2. Europeans imported Africans to the Americas, Africans worked cash crops, Europeans sold the crops in Europe, and Europeans took money to Africa to purchase more slaves.

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3. System not fully in place in Virginia in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century—  
but was by early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

C. 1705 Act Concerning Servants and Slaves

1. Differentiated between white people and non-white people

a) White servants could only be whipped naked with permission of the justice of the peace; non-white “servants” could be whipped naked without permission.

b) Black people and white people—free or otherwise—could not marry.

c) Conversion did not free people whose ancestry was African

d) White people could not be slaves; black people seen as naturally slaves.

III. Why Limit Slavery to Black People?

A. Money

1. Labor supply for England was inconsistent, particularly after Great London Fire of 1666.

2. Slavery, unlike indentured servitude, possibly self-perpetuating

B. Why not enslave poor white people?: Rebellion

1. Bacon’s Rebellion witnessed black slaves and white indentured servants making common cause against elites.

2. Giving white people—rich or poor—a common identity and the shared right not to be slaves made poor white people more likely to align themselves with white elites, not black slaves.

IV. What’s Christianity Got to Do With It?

A. Some slaves used Christianity to argue against slavery

B. The possibility that Christianity might undermine slavery made slaveowners reluctant to have slaves evangelized.

1. 1667: Assurance (by church and colony) that baptism did not free slaves

C. Theological Implications of 1667 Decision:

1. Freedom grounded in race, not religion.

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2. Earthly parentage more determinative of status on earth than heavenly parentage.
  3. Anglican Church supported slavery.
  4. Identification of being Christian with being white.
    - a) In 1705 Act, non-white Christians have descriptors; white Christians were simply “Christian.”

D. 1723 Letter

1. Written by a slave or group of slaves to the Bishop of London
2. Claimed that the Christian message was about freedom and kinship.
3. Noted that slavery made important Christian practices impossible.

V. Slavery and What It Means to be Black and White

A. By 1705:

1. Laborers classified based on race.
2. Race—not religion or class—has become the most significant marker of difference among people.
3. Racial identification has buried commonalities, including shared religion.

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## What's Race?

The connection between slavery and blackness predated the arrival of Africans in Virginia. In this episode, we go back in time in order to explore the roots of the connection between blackness and slavery and the role Christians played in solidifying that association. We will also learn more about what race is (and isn't) and why where our ideas about race come from matter today.

### Key Questions:

1. What are the roots of the connection between blackness and slavery?
2. What is race?
3. How might the history of race affect our engagement with modern debates?

### Reflection Questions:

5. What, in this episode, most surprised or challenged you?
6. In this video, Sarah claims that people began to read Genesis 9 in a way not supported by the text owing to a race-based economic slavery. Do you think Christians today read modern understandings of race into biblical texts?
7. How did you define "race" before watching this video? Do you still define it that way?
8. If Sarah is correct and our modern racial categories are neither "natural" nor morally innocent, what does that mean for how we think about our racial identities and those of other people?
9. Think about the ways you identify yourself. How do you react when those identities are challenged or their roots explored? Why do you think that you react the way that you do? [Note: this question is not meant to suggest that anytime you react negatively to an identity being challenged, you are doing something wrong. It is meant to get you to reflect on when and if that is so.]

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## What's Race?

### I. Introduction

#### A. The Curse of Ham

1. Story from Genesis 9 in which Noah curses Ham's son Canaan after Ham mocks Noah's nakedness.
2. Although the story is odd, many religious people over centuries believed it clearly indicated that God cursed Ham with black sin and slavery.
3. How did a strange interpretation become so widely accepted?
  - a) What came first, bad Bible reading or large scale enslavement of Africans?

B. This episode goes further back in time to explore how—before Africans were brought to colonial America—blackness became identified with slavery. It explains how the idea of race grew out of a desire to identify some people as naturally slaves and others as naturally free.

### II. Slavery in the Atlantic World

#### A. In the long history of slavery:

1. Slavery not associated with any particular skin color (often people of what we would consider the “same race” enslaved each other).
2. Slavery was associated with dirtiness and darkness.
3. Europeans did not have uniformly negative attitudes toward Africans

#### B. Early connection between blackness and slavery

1. Began when Muslims and Christians began enslaving large numbers of sub-Saharan Africans.
  - a) Started in the eighth and ninth centuries among Muslim slave traders.
  - b) Large scale enslavement of Africans shifted perceptions of them. Over time, Africans identified with most menial labor.

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- c) Note: that Muslims enslaved large numbers of Sub-Saharan Africans before Christians did neither negates the negative repercussions slavery had on the descendants of enslaved people nor shows that Christian morality with regard to slavery was superior to Muslim.
    - 2. Large scale enslavement made it convenient to apply the Curse of Ham to Sub-Saharan Africans.
  - C. Spain, Reconquest, and the Spread of the Curse of Ham
    - 1. As Christians gained control of formerly Muslim-controlled portions of Spain, Jews and Muslims had to convert, leave, or die.
      - a) Some Christians doubted the authenticity of Muslim or Jewish conversions. These Christians worried about “blood purity,” meaning that Christian blood differed from Jewish and Muslim blood—and that conversion would not change that.
    - 2. At the same time that some Christians began accepting the idea of immutable differences among people (i.e. “different blood”), the Curse of Ham interpretations spread into Spain and Spaniards began importing Africans into Spain.
      - a) Result: Belief that Africans were fundamentally different from Spaniards (had “different blood”) and naturally slaves. This is the development of what we call race.
  - D. Back to Virginia
    - 1. Existing traditions about slavery
      - a) Not having slaves
      - b) Having slavery, but not basing slavery on race
      - c) Supporting race-based slavery with the Bible
        - (1) Even though the tradition existed, it still needed to be codified through law.

### III. What is Race?

- A. Common belief: race is a biological reality, meaning it is natural and immutable.
- B. Reality: not a biological reality

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1. Over time, people have named biological, natural, immutable differences differently.
    - a) People who were considered “essentially” different in fifteenth century Spain are considered “the same race” in the United States today.
  2. Race is a human creation: people decide what differences matter in how we group people.
    - a) Examples: Norwegians and Italians; Nigerians and South Africans.
  3. Skin color does not reflect other, immutable similarities or differences.
    - a) People we group in the same race have as much difference among themselves as they do with people of other races.
      - (1) Examples: Fingerprints; lactose-tolerance.

C. Race as a “construction”

1. Not biologically real, but (because people have made it so) socially meaningful.

IV. Why Does It Matter?

A. Race and Current (Facebook) “Debates”

1. Question: why no “White History Month”?
  - a) Note that people do celebrate ethnic and immigrant identities.
  - b) “White” is not a morally innocent category. The category was created so that some people could be protected from slavery and other people designated as appropriately slaves.
    - (1) “Whiteness” became a way of naming kinship more determinative than baptism.
2. Does this mean Sarah hates white people?
  - a) No. There is a difference between recognizing a category people created has a problematic moral history and hating people who are grouped into the category.
3. Why isn’t Black history month a problem?

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- a) Difference between immigrant stories in which people know where they came from and forced migration (slave) stories in which people's ethnic identities were erased.
  - b) Proposal: there is a difference between finding a way to celebrate what was intended to be a negative category that was imposed upon you and celebrating a category created so that some people could impose upon others.

V. Conclusion

- A. Although slavery is very old, race-based slavery is relatively new (historically speaking).
- B. Many of the primary ways we identify ourselves come out of a racial system designed to justify enslaving some people and not others.

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## Christians, Race, and Nation in the New Republic

In the 1780s, a group of black Methodists left their church in Philadelphia when white congregants refused to let them pray at the altar. The story of those black Methodists is notable for many reasons: it speaks to the growth of Christianity among African Americans, the rise of independent black denominations, and the desire on the part of some white Christians to delineate who really belonged—and who didn't—on the basis of race. In this episode, we will explore the growth of Christianity among African Americans and the ways that some Christian teachings could challenge racism. We will also see how other Christians created and enforced racial boundaries in both church and state.

### Key Questions:

1. What tendencies within American Christianity impeded its growth among African Americans in the colonies and early republic? What tendencies encouraged it?
2. How were the rise of African American denominations related to understandings of who really belonged in the United States?

### Reflection Questions:

1. What, in this episode, most surprised or challenged you?
2. Before watching this episode, how did you think about racially-distinct denominations and congregations in the United States? Has your thinking changed?
3. Think about your own corner of the Christian world (e.g. your church, your denomination, the people you follow etc.): what are the explicit messages they give about who “belongs” and who does not in terms of race? What are the implicit messages? Now think about the country. What are the explicit messages you hear about who most belongs? What are the implicit messages?
4. The white congregants at St. George's Church did not want to treat black people equally, and did not want them to protest their unequal treatment, but also did not want black people to be independent of white people's oversight. Do you see similar racial dynamics at play in churches today? What has changed? What has not?

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## Christians, Race, and Nation in the New Republic

### I. Introduction

A. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Moravians in North Carolina stopped giving the kiss of peace to new African American Moravians.

1. A shift for the Moravians who had tended toward egalitarianism.

B. What the Moravian story shows about Christianity in the U.S. during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries:

1. Growing number of African American were becoming Christians.

2. The Christian message could offer a critique of racial division and hierarchy.

3. Christian churches could also enact and normalize racism.

C. In this episode, we will see how African American Christians used Christianity to protest racial injustice and how Christianity could enforce racial boundaries and support racial hierarchy.

### II. Growth of African American Christianity

A. History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1816) begins in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when a group of African American Methodists attending a mixed-race church in Philadelphia were told they could not pray at the altar with white congregants.

B. Few African American converts in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries

1. Slave owners were reluctant to evangelize

2. Missionaries told slaves to obey their masters

3. Slaves particularly and non-white people generally given little spiritual authority.

4. Continuing slave trade meant continuing influx of African religious practices

a) Religious systems did not survive the Middle Passage and the lack of communal support in the colonies, but practices did.

C. More converts during the Great Awakening (1740s)

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1. Great Awakening refers to a series of religious revivals in the colonies
    - a) Notable for the influence of evangelical Christianity, a Protestant movement that emphasized a conversion experience and the spiritual authority that came with a conversion experience.
  2. Evangelical focus on conversion made egalitarianism a potential tendency in evangelicalism, one that did not always manifest.
  3. Evangelical preaching attractive to some enslaved and free black people.
    - a) First generation of black preachers emerged during Awakening

### III. Methodists and the Problem of Equality

#### A. Back to the African Methodist Episcopal Church

1. When Methodists came from England in the 1780s, brought an anti-slavery message and the system of circuit riders.
  - a) American Methodists kept the circuit riders, but changed their anti-slavery stance.
2. Richard Allen, born a slave and converted by a Methodist, became a circuit rider.
  - a) In 1786, Allen moved to Philadelphia and joined St. George's Methodist Church. Led to more black congregants.
  - b) After 1787 exclusion from the altar, Allen and other black congregants started Bethel Church. Led to the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

### IV. Race in the New Republic

#### A. Thinking about the rise of racially-distinct denominations

1. Easy to assume that the rise of racially-distinct denominations is about choices, which Americans tend to like.
2. Reality not so innocent given how race functions historically
  - a) Racial categories have been used to identify who has power and who really belongs.

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B. Who belongs in the United States

1. In 1790, Naturalization Act made it possible for free white persons of good character to become citizens, not people brought forcibly from Africa.
2. Right to vote not given to free black people in many states.
3. Many white people, even those who opposed slavery, saw the United States as a country for white people.
  - a) This was the logic of the American Colonization Society: free black people could not become part of the body politic.

C. Back to racially-distinct denominations

1. Not a simple matter of choice or preference
2. Not historically innocuous. Occurred in situation in which race named who belonged and who did not in the country more generally.
3. This is not a criticism of people like Allen who started such denominations.

V. Conclusion

A. Rise of evangelical Protestantism changed the landscape of U.S. religion

1. Methodists and Baptists, both evangelical groups, became the two largest Protestant groups in the country.
2. More African Americans convert
  - a) In the North, they could create their own denominations
  - b) In the South, usually had to worship under the supervision of white people.

(1) Led to “invisible institution,” secret slave worship

B. Varying white evangelical responses to slavery

1. Some white evangelicals opposed slavery
2. Some white evangelicals made peace with slavery or embraced it.

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## **Race, Christianity, and the Slavery Debates**

In his second inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln pointed out that people on both sides of the Civil War “prayed to the same God” and “read the same Bible.” Given these commonalities, it would seem like these people would have been able to resolve the question of slavery without resorting to arms. They could not. In this episode, we will see that, for many white Protestant Americans especially, a shared commitment to the Bible and to a particular way of reading the Bible made the question of slavery even harder to resolve. We will also see how racist thinking permeated biblical interpretation among many white Americans and why other ways of reading the Bible, including those on offer from black Christians, exerted little influence as the country moved to war.

### **Key Questions:**

1. Why couldn't evangelical Protestants, particularly white evangelical Protestants, come together and resolve the issue of slavery without recourse to war?
2. Why did so many white Protestants believe slavery to be compatible with Christianity?

### **Reflection Questions:**

5. What, in this episode, most surprised or challenged you?
6. How do you, your church, and/or your denomination interpret what the Bible says about slavery? (Some of the key passages include Exodus 1-2 & 12; Ephesians 6:1-9; Colossians 3:18- 4:1; Galatians 3: 26- and Philemon.)
7. What are the “common sense” messages that you receive about race? In other words, what have you been taught, explicitly or implicitly, to see as natural that might, in fact, be constructed or historically contextual?
8. Who do you read the Bible with? Are they people who could help you see where you might be reading your assumptions—particularly your racial assumptions—into the text? Why do you read with the people you do? Why don't you read with the people you don't?

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## Race, Christianity, and the Slavery Debates

### I. Introduction

#### A. Two accounts of Christianity and slavery

1. Frederick Douglass, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

a) “Christianity of this land” versus Christianity of Christ.

2. James Henley Thornwell, “The Rights and Duties of Masters”

a) Slavery allowed by the Bible

b) Slavery helps society function

c) Slavery a fitting position for “Africans”

#### B. The Civil War as a “Theological Crisis”

1. Majority of religious people in the United States were Protestants, but they could not resolve slavery, the central religious question of the day. Indeed, denominations split over slavery before the country did.

2. In this episode, we are going to explore two questions:

a) Why couldn't white evangelical Protestants resolve the slavery question?

b) Why did so many white Protestants believe slavery to be compatible with Christianity?

### II. The Slavery Crisis

A. By the 1840s and 1850s, there was a new urgency to the debates about slavery.

1. Slavery debates became sectional around the 1820s

a) 1820: Missouri Compromise failed to balance the power between slave and free states. It did not work.

2. Slave revolts elevated fear in the South and led to more restrictions on slaves.

3. Growth of abolition sentiment in the North, including some white evangelicals (like Charles Finney) who called slavery a sin.

4. Other white evangelicals rejected the argument that slavery was a sin owing to how they read the Bible.

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### III. White Evangelical Bible Reading and Slavery

#### A. Common Sense Realism shaped how white evangelicals read the Bible

1. According to Common Sense Realism, God gave all people a common sense that enabled them to apprehend the world correctly.
2. According to Common Sense Realism, God also made the Bible so that all people could apprehend it correctly without interpretation.
3. White evangelicals pointed out that the Bible does not forbid slavery.

#### B. There were other ways of reading the Bible on slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

1. Douglass: You cannot reconcile American slavery with the witness of Jesus.
2. African American Interpretive Tradition: God's liberating work for the Israelites specifically and the arc of liberation in the Bible generally show that God desires human liberation, not slavery.
3. Historical and Textual Arguments: Biblical slavery fundamentally different from American slavery; Golden Rule precludes slavery

#### C. Problem for Common Sense Realists: All of these other ways of reading the Bible violate Common Sense Realism. For many white evangelicals, these ways of reading the Bible seemed to be trying to get around the plain meaning of the text.

1. George Armstrong: If "slavery" in the Bible meant something different than slavery in the United States, words have no determinative meaning and, thus, the Bible has no clear meaning. All attempts to use historical investigations or the example of Jesus to combat slavery were simply attempts to get around what the Bible clearly taught.

#### D. Some pro-slavery Christians claimed that defending slavery was part of defending the clarity of the Bible.

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1. Pro-slavery Christians also noted that some abolitionists were theologically heterodox and, thus, association with the abolitionist position was dangerous to orthodoxy.

#### IV. Slavery, Bible reading and Race

A. White evangelicals tended not to see something about the Bible and slavery: biblical slavery was not race-based. If slavery is biblical, there is no biblical reason not to enslave white people.

B. White evangelicals—believing that they were “just reading the text”—were reading race into the Bible.

1. Thornwell: moves from an abstract biblical defense of slavery to making specific claims about what is “good” for white people and what is “good” for Africans.

- a) Thornwell treated race, a human construction, as something that named real differences among groups of people.

- b) Like Thornwell, many white evangelicals applied their ideas of racial difference to the Bible and then called those ideas biblical.

C. Many white evangelicals who disagreed with slavery agreed with racist thinking. They did not think black people should be enslaved, but they also did not think they should be citizens.

#### V. Conclusion

A. Why couldn't white Protestants resolve the slavery question?

1. White Protestants shared a way of reading the Bible that made it hard for them to argue against slavery on biblical terms.

2. For some white Protestants, defending slavery became enmeshed with defending the Bible, which really meant defending a particular way of reading the Bible.

3. Even some white Protestants who disliked slavery found it hard to beat the pro-slavery argument on Common Sense Realist terms.

4. White Protestants did not recognize that they were reading race into the Bible and that their arguments could be used to justify the enslavement of white people.

B. Implications

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1. The Civil War resolved the question of whether slavery would continue in the United States, but it did not resolve the question of whether one race was superior nor what the Bible really said about slavery.
  2. Biblical authority undermined by the use of the Bible to support slavery
  3. Idea that black people were inferior and unable to be citizens remains
  4. Many white Southerners remained convinced that racial hierarchy was God's will.

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## Reconstruction: American Redemption?

In 1898, a group of white men in Wilmington, North Carolina overthrew the town's elected (and somewhat racially progressive) Republican leaders. The coup was part of what many white Southerners called "redemption," or the taking back of the South from what they considered black and northern rule. In this episode, we are going to explore how in the last three decades of the nineteenth-century, many—but not all—white Americans, most of whom were Christians, defined citizenship as belonging only to white people and defined the country as, in its essence, a white, Christian nation.

### Key Questions:

1. What were some of the post-war possibilities for race relations in the United States?
2. What role did Christians play in creating the Jim Crow South in the decades after the Civil War?

### Reflection Questions:

1. What, in this episode, most surprised or challenged you?
2. Some white Southerners claimed that the pre-Civil War South was "godly" because it respected the Bible. What do you think makes a society godly—or do you think it is a term that should be used for societies?
3. In the video, Sarah argues (following historian Ed Blum) that white Americans reconciled after the Civil War on the basis of injustice for black people. How have you heard the term "reconciliation" used in racial (or other) contexts? Does it include justice? Should it?
4. One of the questions in this episode (and in others) is who the nation really is for. What do people have to do or be to be considered a real citizen? How do you think various groups of people (e.g. black, white, Christian, not Christian, young, old etc.) in the United States would answer that question today? How would you?

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## Reconstruction: American Redemption?

### I. Introduction

#### A. 1898 Coup in Wilmington, North Carolina

1. Part of 1898 election in North Carolina during which Democrats gained control of statewide offices by feeding fears of “negro rule” and by threatening violence to Republican voters.
2. In Wilmington, a newspaper owned by black men was destroyed, the (white) Republican officials were overthrown, and leading African Americans were banished.
3. 1900: New voting rules largely end black voting in North Carolina

B. In this episode, we are going to explore how in the last three decades of the nineteenth-century, many—but not all—white Americans, most of whom were Christians, defined citizenship as belonging to white people and defined the country as, in its essence, a white, Christian nation.

### II. Post Civil-War Possibilities

#### A. Post-war question: What will be the status of African Americans?

1. Thirteenth Amendment ends slavery.
2. However, not clear that black people will be allowed to be equal citizens.
  - a) Black Codes passed in many southern states
3. Some people, black and white, argued that the nation should become truly interracial: Gilbert Haven, Sara Stanley, Linda Slaughter

#### B. Radical Reconstruction (1867-1872)

1. Demanded universal male suffrage and ratification of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment
2. Passed 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment
3. Over 2,000 black people held public office; others exercised right to vote.

### III. Religion of the Lost Cause

#### A. 1877: End of Reconstruction (radical and otherwise)

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B. “Redemption” and Religion of the Lost Cause: belief that slave-holding South was godly society that God wanted white Southerners to recreate. That would entail “redemption” from black and northern rule and the reinstatement of white supremacy.

1. Made visible in statues: Julian Carr speech ties statues and white supremacy.

2. African Americans lost political rights and protections.

3. Lynchings were used to enforce submission

- a) Ida B. Wells showed that the ostensible reason for lynchings—rape—was often untrue and was also hypocritical.

C. Northern Reactions: white Northerners largely let the white South do as it wanted.

1. Reconciliation of white North and white South seen as more important than rights (or lives) of black people.

#### IV. Conclusion

A. Lucius Hosley: Black people in danger if they are respectable. Black people were not denied rights because they were uneducated or “unrespectable.” They were denied rights because they were black.

B. The country reunified after the Civil War, but on the basis of injustice for black people.

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## Whose Nation?

In the 1920s, millions of white Americans joined a revived Ku Klux Klan. The Klan's message—that the country was made by and for white Protestants—resonated with people throughout the country. In this episode, we consider ways in which that logic, the logic that the United States was white and Protestant and that Protestantism and whiteness went together, affected where people lived, who went to the best schools, and who built wealth.

### Key Questions:

1. How did the Klan's logic hold together whiteness and Protestantism?
2. How did housing policy in the mid-twentieth century affect black people and white people differently?

### Reflection Questions:

1. What, in this episode, most surprised or challenged you?
2. In this video, Sarah explains how she had to learn not to hear “Christian” as really meaning “white Christian.” Did her story resonate with you? Have you had a similar experience or know people who have had one?
3. How has where you live affected your life? How has where your family lived affected your life?
4. In this video, Sarah argues that equity—and when and where people in a family were able to get it—matters in discussions about race. Do you agree or disagree? How might churches engage that issue (or should they)?

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## Whose Nation?

### I. Introduction

#### A. Two Pictures

1. Klan march in Washington, D.C. in 1926
2. Map of Seattle, Washington from 1936

B. In this episode, we are going to explore various ways some people, largely during the middle third of the twentieth-century, implicitly or explicitly claimed that the United States was really for and about white people. In ways both subtle and overt, we live with these claims still, so it's worth knowing where they come from and why they continue to matter.

### II. The Klan and Protestant America

#### A. The Nadir of Race Relations

1. Some white, Protestant Americans were concerned that the continued presence of African Americans and increasing numbers of non-Protestant immigrants undermined the character of the country as a white, Protestant nation.

B. Re-emergence of the Klan in the 1920s part of this fear. Klan argued that:

1. America's success was due to white Protestants.
2. "Winning" showed God's favor. Because the United States had been "won" by white Protestants, people could assume God favored white Protestants.
3. White people the real Protestants (even though most African American Christians were Protestants).

C. Do white Christians today echo Klan thinking?

1. Do some Christians assume that the only stories about Christians doing good that really "count" are stories about white Christians?

D. Even though the Klan declined after the mid-1920s, other institutions, including the government, echoed Klan logic about who mattered.

1. Lynchings continued.
2. African Americans still denied the right to vote in the South.
3. New Deal programs often excluded black people.

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### III. Housing and Race

- A. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, millions of African Americans moved out of the South.
- B. Depression era housing policies and their aftermath
  - 1. Created Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Authority.
  - 2. As the government assessed the risk in its loaning, it considered race.
    - a) Racially homogenous white areas deemed less risky and more likely to get help from HOLC
  - 3. FHA insured in racially homogenous white areas.
    - a) Led to redlining: banks and real estate agents would not sell to black people in “white” areas or give them mortgages to buy.
    - b) Black people unable to buy homes in the areas that appreciated the most and had the most money for schools, parks etc..
  - 4. Fair Housing not passed in Seattle or the nation at large until 1968.
- C. Does this history still matter?
  - 1. Some Christians argue that racism is no longer a problem or no more of a problem than “reverse racism.”
  - 2. That position does not take equity into account.
    - a) Equity is a multi-generational benefit available mainly to white people (although not accessible to all of them).
      - (1) Equity also has implications for education since property taxes help to fund schools.
  - 3. Is guilt the point?
    - a) No. Understanding wrongs so they can be redressed is the point.
  - 4. Are you saying that all white people are rich?
    - a) No. But race has usually not played a negative role in wealth creation for white people and it has often played a negative role in wealth creation for black people.

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#### IV. Conclusion

A. Stories of Klan and mid-century housing policy show a pattern in which many white Americans, including white Christians, think of the United States as primarily for white people.

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## **Civil Rights: Myths and Realities**

The Civil Rights Movement produced significant changes in the United States. For many people, it stands as one of the great moral and political achievements in the country's history. Yet, over the years, myths have built up around the Civil Rights Movement, myths that make the Civil Rights Movement seem more celebrated and less contested than it was. These myths have made it easier to believe that most Americans supported the movement (or would have, had they been alive) and that Christianity underwrote it. In this episode, we explore the myths and realities of the Civil Rights Movement in the hopes that, by knowing the realities, we will not take comfort in incomplete myths but can wrestle with the challenges presented by a truer, but more complicated, history.

### **Key Questions:**

1. What are the persistent myths around the Civil Rights Movement?
2. What do the realities around the Civil Rights Movement tell us about our country and about Christianity's relationship to racial justice?

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What, in this episode, most surprised or challenged you?
2. In this video, Sarah identifies several myths related to the Civil Rights Movement. Were any of these myths familiar to you? Why do you think these myths persist?
3. One of the themes in this video is that while many white Christians conceded that forced segregation was probably wrong, they were uncomfortable with the tactics the Civil Rights Movement used to end it and, often, with legislation that addressed it. Did that surprise you? Do you see any contemporary parallels?
4. In this video, Sarah describes different responses by Christians to the Civil Rights Movement and to racial justice. Which of the response do you think most clearly aligns with the Bible? Which response do you want to have? If historians 60 years from now were to look at your life, which response would they say that you had?

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## Civil Rights: Myths and Realities

### I. Introduction

#### A. Stories about the Civil Rights Movement

1. A morally uplifting story in which the Civil Rights Movement (1955-1965) was supported by Christians and largely solved the problem of racism in the United States

B. In this video, we are going to look at some of the persistent myth of the Civil Rights Movements in the hopes that, by knowing the realities, we will not take comfort in incomplete myths but can wrestle with the challenges presented by a truer, but more complicated, history.

### II. Myth Number One: the Civil Rights Movement was a southern movement that started in 1955 with the Montgomery Bus Boycott and ended in 1965 with the Voting Rights Act.

A. Reality: Africans Americans fought for a very long time, both before and after what we consider “the Civil Rights Movement” and that fight was not confined to the South.

1. Problem with the myth: makes it easy to think that once African Americans began protesting racial injustice, the majority of white (Christian) Americans responded positively and quickly.

B. Long Civil Rights Movement: decades of fighting against segregation and racial injustice.

1. Black Christian women played a significant role.

2. Some white Christians fought for racial equality, but more often those who worked against racial injustice worked for a more benevolent forms of segregation.

C. Civil Rights Movement did not end in 1965

1. Between 1955 and 1965, Civil Rights Movement fought for concrete changes and focused on the U.S. South.

2. After 1965, the Civil Rights Movement focused more on systematic, national issues.

### III. Myth Number Two: the Civil Rights Movement was widely supported, at least outside the South.

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A. Reality: Many Americans, particularly white Americans, disapproved of the Civil Rights Movement's tactics.

B. Polling

1. Majorities of Americans supported the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act but many wanted moderate enforcement, rejected further civil rights legislation, and disagreed with the tactics of mass demonstrations.

C. Both white moderates and white liberals disappointed Civil Rights workers

IV. Myth Number Three: Christians overall were on the side of the Civil Rights Movement.

A. Reality: Christians could be found on all sides of the Civil Rights Movement playing often contradictory roles.

B. Some Christians resisted the Civil Rights Movement's strategy of mass demonstrations and legal changes, arguing instead for individual regeneration and more moral voters.

1. Civil Rights workers responded that changed laws were necessary in order for black people to have their constitutional rights respected and that there was little evidence that regenerate individuals alone would end racial injustice.

C. Some Christians resisted the changes brought by Civil Rights

D. Some Christians understood the Civil Rights Movement as an affirmation of fundamental Christian beliefs.

E. For Christians involved in the Civil Rights Movement, Christian faith provided hope in the face of violence and resistance.

V. Myth Number Four: the Civil Rights Movement did not criticize the United States.

A. Reality: Civil Rights workers criticized the country and were often perceived as being hostile to it.

1. Many Americans thought that Communists were deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

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2. King, among others, offered significant criticisms of the United States, claiming that racism was a longstanding part of the country's identity.

## VI. Conclusion

### A. Why let go of the comforting myths?

1. Makes it too easy to believe I would have supported the movement.
2. Makes it too easy to believe my faith naturally leads me to support what is good and right.

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## How'd We Get Here?

Over the course of the twentieth century, the United States realigned politically. The solid, Democratic white South became a solid, Republican white South. African Americans largely moved from identifying with the Republican Party to the Democratic Party. White evangelicals, who had not been consistently identified with one party (owing, in part, to regional differences) became a key voting bloc for the Republicans. In this episode, we are going to explore why that realignment occurred and what it might tell us about what Christians of different races prioritize and how they think about the problem of racism in the United States.

### Key Questions:

1. What factors drove the political realignments of the twentieth century?
2. Why do white evangelicals and black Protestants vote so differently?

### Reflection Questions:

1. What, in this episode, most surprised or challenged you?
2. Sarah claims that understanding the history of twentieth century political realignment helps us understand our current political moment better. Do you agree? What, if anything, does this history illuminate for you?
3. What do you think are the most significant issues facing the country today? What do you vote on (if you vote)? How do you make those decisions?
4. At the end of this video, Sarah argues that racism is a systemic social ill in the United States? Do you agree with her? Why or why not? If she is right, what does that mean for you?

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## How'd We Get Here?

### I. Introduction

- A. Political party support among Christians differs by race
- B. In this video, we are going to explore how black Protestants and white evangelicals particularly came to identify with two different political parties.

### II. A Political Realignment

- A. Between the beginning and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States went through a political realignment
  - 1. South went from dominantly Democratic to dominantly Republican
  - 2. The two parties became more ideologically homogenous
  - 3. African Americans moved from aligning with the Republican Party to the Democratic Party
- B. What explains political realignment?: Expanding federal government, secular humanism, gender issues, and race.
- C. Expanding Federal Government and Race
  - 1. 1930s: Some white, Southern Democrats accept federal intervention into the economy during the Depression.
  - 2. 1940s: Growing hostility to federal intervention by (among others) transplanted, white Southern Democrats and a move to the more libertarian wing of the Republican Party.
  - 3. 1964 Election: Barry Goldwater runs for president on pro-states' rights platform. He loses the election, but does well in the South. He wins only 5% of the African American vote.
  - 4. After 1964, white South becomes increasingly Republican and African Americans become increasingly Democratic

### III. A Religious Realignment

- A. In the last half of the twentieth-century, white evangelicals, North and South, became reliably Republican voters. Again, expanding federal government and race play a role. So too do secular humanism and gender issues.

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B. The Civil Rights Movement demonstrated that the federal government would intervene in the states. This intervention worried some conservatives, North and South. Historians debate why.

1. Answer #1: White conservatives rallied against federal intervention because it was intervention on behalf of black people.
  - a) Evidence: Key leaders of what became the Religious Right fought moves to end tax-exempt status for private schools that racially discriminated, including Bob Jones University. These leaders backed Ronald Reagan for president because he promised that the schools would not lose tax-exemption.
2. Answer #2: Even if the above is true, it does not fully explain what galvanized white evangelicals nationwide. More factors played into the identification of white evangelicals with the Republican Party.
  - a) Factor #1: Supreme Court rulings calling mandated, teacher-led Bible reading and prayer in public schools unconstitutional. This seemed, to some white evangelicals, to constitute an unwarranted federal intervention into what should have been a local issues and to establish secular humanism—putting people, not God, at the center of reality-as the de facto state religion.
    - (1) Led to the conclusions that the interventionist federal government should be shrunk and that it should be run by conservatives who would intervene in the right ways (if at all).
  - b) Factor #2: Gender issues. Movements for women’s rights and gay rights in the 1960s and 1970s united white evangelicals. Unlike racial segregation, the idea that God used gender to order the world was biblically supportable.
  - c) Factor #3: Abortion. After *Roe v. Wade*, white evangelicals became convinced that abortion was a national crisis and that it was a manifestation of secular humanism. Figures on the Right also argued (convincingly for many) that anti-abortion politics made the most sense with conservative policies.

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#### IV. What About Race?

A. Although Answer #2 might seem like it has nothing to do with race, it does. White evangelicals and black Protestants (including some black evangelicals) tend to make different decisions about what issues present the greatest threats the country and about what issues you should compromise on.

B. Americans (including white evangelicals and black Protestants) have different understandings of what racism is, how much it affects the country, and what to do about it.

1. Answers to the question “if blacks would only try harder, they would be just as well off as whites” vary considerably by race and political ideology.

a) Americans disagree on whether racism is primarily an interpersonal problem or a systemic social ill and on how level the playing field is for people of different races.

b) Americans then also disagree on how to address racism and how urgent addressing racism is.

#### V. Conclusion

A. Many religious historians, Christian and otherwise, agree that racism is a systemic social ill.



