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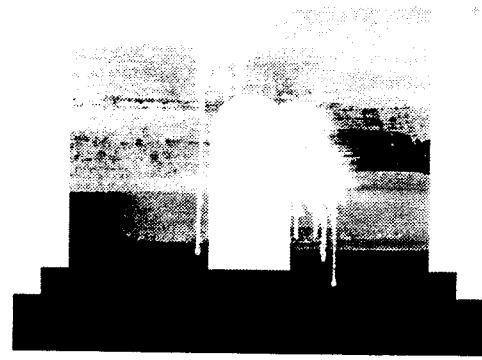
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# TROUBLE I'VE SEEN



## CHANGING THE WAY THE CHURCH VIEWS RACISM DREW G. I. HART



**Herald Press**  
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# 1

## WHEN YOU “FIT THE DESCRIPTION”

**A**fter my junior year of college, ten friends and I planned a trip to drive across the country. We attended a Christian college in Pennsylvania, and one of our friends lived in the state of Washington. He lived out in a rural part of the state, and someone had the idea of dropping him off at home and exploring the country by car along the way.

So eleven of us piled into two cars in central Pennsylvania and first headed toward Chicago. We drove leisurely, taking almost a week to get to Washington. We saw Mount Rushmore. We made a stop at Yellowstone, which is apparently a dream destination for many young white adults (who knew?). We stayed at some homes of people we knew along the way, and we camped at campgrounds a few times as well. One night we were behind schedule, so the five of us in my car decided that we'd just sleep in the car rather than set up the tent in the dark. That wasn't necessarily the best night's sleep.

I felt a bit out of place while stopping in some all-white small towns across the country while we traveled. I was pretty certain there weren't any other black people around for hundreds of miles.

But thankfully we had no problems or incidents on the way, and we finally arrived at our friend's house in Washington.

Watching the change of landscapes across the country was unforgettable. But my friend's house was also amazing. The hills were beautiful, appearing for miles like ocean waves. We really were in the middle of nowhere. You couldn't even see a neighbor's house.

It felt like I had truly jumped into an alternate world. We played basketball, football, and Frisbee—because many young white Christians love them some disc! I played piano for the group, and we sang together. We discussed our faith and our deep questions. We were all totally disconnected from our regular, day-to-day concerns.

And then I got a phone call from my mom.

### **BLACK IN A WHITE-CONTROLLED WORLD**

I have a brother who is one year older than me. For much of my young life we shared a bedroom. We often played and fought together. Others have frequently told me that we look alike. I personally don't see it, though we certainly have similar complexions and builds. We often played basketball together and had a lot of the same interests and experiences growing up. No matter how much we got under each other's skin, as young black men and as brothers, my life was deeply bound up and connected with his.

So there I was, frolicking in the advantages of college life with ten white friends in the middle of nowhere, without a care in the world, when my mom called to tell me about an urgent situation that had developed.

Late one night, my brother was hanging out with friends. They were just minding their business and having a good time. A police car drove by while my brother and his friends were outside and enjoying each other's company.

The cop car drove by again.

Once more the car drove by, but this time the police officers stopped and got out. They immediately arrested my brother for "fitting the description" of someone who had recently committed a crime.

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I am still troubled by the lack of description that my brother apparently fit. The only description they had of the guy they were looking for was "black male with a black T-shirt and blue jeans." My brother and his friends were not even at the scene of the crime, nor were they doing anything suspicious at all. But that description was evidently enough for these police officers to arrest and take him to the station.

I later found out that the police also initially claimed that my brother had a bloodstain on his shirt. However, when the lab results came back, they learned that it was just a ketchup stain.

My brother was eventually put into a lineup before the victim in the case. Of course he was not chosen, and finally he was released.

But not before he had spent four months locked up in the county correctional facility.

His crime? Being a young black man in a white-controlled society.

### **TROUBLE WE'VE SEEN**

Things could have ended up much worse for my brother. I can't exactly call him "lucky," but when black males encounter the police and the judicial system in the United States, things often go very, very badly, whether or not those arrested are guilty. I had always known that being black left one vulnerable in this country, and I certainly had heard about many other black folks dealing with similar or worse situations.

But when my brother, whom many people have said I resemble, was arrested purely based on the description "black male with a black T-shirt and blue jeans," I began to realize how easily something like that could happen to me. Though far worse things happen routinely for black people when going through the judicial process, this event awakened me to the way our nation collectively and quietly accommodates the terrorizing of black people's everyday lives.

Blackness is a visible marker that justifies suspicion, brutality, and confinement by white society. In America, being black has always been defined and understood by the majority group in negative ways: criminal, lazy, obnoxious, ugly, and depraved. White society often deploys static stereotypes and then throws a single blanket over our diverse African American community,

denying the beauty and uniqueness of each of us. My brother's experience immediately increased my awareness of my blackness in a country that continues to stigmatize it as a problem to solve.

It's not always evident how divided our country is. We are inundated by singing and dancing celebrities, intrigued by suspenseful Thursday nights of scandals and murders, and allegiant to the multibillion-dollar corporations that feed us our sports. With these weapons of mass distraction being deployed, many people ignore the ongoing suffering and the deep racial division that is pervasive and has never gone away. But right below the surface, for four hundred years, deep disagreements about race in America have been boiling.

More recent and publicized events than my brother's arrest continue to expose the deep racial divisions that exist in our country. The United States cycles through event after racialized event, each one sparking outrage over issues of racism in America. For example:

- *Michael Donald*. In 1981, KKK members went searching for any black person and found this nineteen-year-old black male. They attacked him, beat him, slit his throat, and then hung him from a tree by a rope.
- *Rodney King*. In 1991, King was viciously beaten by a group of police officers after a traffic stop. Though they initially claimed no wrongdoing, video was released showing them repeatedly beating and assaulting King with weapons and potentially death-dealing blows.
- *James Byrd Jr.* In 1998, three white men offered Byrd a ride home, then took him to a secluded area where they attacked him, poured paint into his eyes, beat him, and tied a rope around his neck. They then dragged him behind a pickup truck until his body was dismembered.
- *Amadou Diallo*. In 1999, four police officers fired forty-one shots at an unarmed Diallo, whose threat was apparently pulling out a wallet while black. Nineteen of the forty-one bullets struck and killed him. The police officers were acquitted.

- *Sean Bell*. In 2006, during Bell's bachelor party, police officers unleashed a barrage of bullets suited for military combat into Bell's car. One officer alone fired thirty-one times into the car, and Bell and two of his groomsmen were shot fifty times. Neither Bell nor his companions had a gun, as the officer initially claimed. Bell died on the eve of what was to have been his wedding day.
- *Oscar Grant*. In 2009, on New Year's Day, Grant was shot while handcuffed and lying on his stomach at a subway station in Oakland, California. Cell phone videos captured the killing from several different angles, sparking outrage across the country.
- *Aiyana Stanley-Jones*. In May 2010, police entered a Detroit home with guns blazing and recklessly killed Stanley-Jones. She was seven years old and had been asleep.
- *Trayvon Martin*. In February 2012, George Zimmerman racially profiled, stalked, and confronted Martin, a child on his way back to his house after purchasing Skittles for a snack. This led to a physical struggle, which resulted in Martin being shot dead in his own neighborhood. Martin was seventeen years old.
- *Rekia Boyd*. In March 2012, an off-duty police officer recklessly fired several shots into a crowd of people with an unregistered semiautomatic gun. A bullet hit Boyd in the back of the head and killed her.
- *Jordan Davis*. In November 2012, at 7:30 p.m., Davis and some friends made a stop at a gas station. Michael Dunn, a middle-aged white man from out of town, asked them to turn down their rap music, and they refused. Dunn then proceeded to fire several bullets at the car, striking and killing Davis. The police investigation, as well as the testimony of Dunn's girlfriend, countered Dunn's claim that the boys had a gun.
- *Renisha McBride*. In November 2013, following a car accident, McBride went searching for help in the early morning. After she knocked on the door of his house, Theodore Wafer shot McBride in the head with a 12-gauge shotgun through the still-closed screen door. She died immediately.

- *Eric Garner*. In July 2014, a police officer put Eric Garner in a chokehold during an arrest. Garner said “I can’t breathe” eleven times before he lost consciousness. He was pronounced dead an hour later.
- *Michael Brown*. In August 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, a police officer confronted Brown for walking down the middle of the road. Deep disagreements emerged about what followed, with the majority of witnesses testifying that Brown had his hands up while shot, even while the investigation claimed otherwise. The officer fired twelve shots at Brown, hitting him at least six times, including two shots to the head. Brown was unarmed. The officer would later say Brown looked like a “demon” as he approached him.
- *Tamir Rice*. On November 22, 2014, twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was playing with an Airsoft replica gun in a park. Some people called the police to mention their concern, but also said it was most likely a toy gun and that they believed the person to be a juvenile. A police car pulled up to Rice, and within two seconds of getting out of the car, one officer shot Rice in the stomach. Video surveillance shows that officers did not attempt to provide first aid to the boy. He eventually died from the gunshot wound.
- *Walter Scott*. On April 4, 2015, Scott fled from a police officer after a traffic stop and was killed. Initially the officer reported that Scott had stolen his Taser and that he felt threatened. But video footage revealed that Scott was unarmed and running away when the officer shot him five times. The officer had planted the Taser on the ground by Scott’s body after he was shot.
- *Freddie Gray*. On April 12, 2015, in Baltimore, Gray was arrested and taken for a long ride in a police vehicle. During that time his spine was severed. As I write this, the details are still not fully known, but an investigation resulted from the uprising that took place after these events. Many ex-police officers have suggested that Freddie Gray was taken on a “rough ride,” an unofficial yet routine tactic by which many police officers punish those in their custody.

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This list represents just a fraction of the cases that have gone viral in the past few years. Hundreds of people have lost their lives, either through intentional malice or because their lives were not deemed valuable enough to ensure their protection within our white-controlled society. This cycle is not new. It happens like clockwork.

The responses to events like these are also predictable, as many people fall into their default defensive positions. People’s perceptions of what happened are as shaped by their socialization as by the event itself. The majority of white people believe that racism is a national problem rather than a problem in their own communities.<sup>1</sup> Many deny and dismiss the experiences of black Americans, claiming that our reactions are mere emotionalism and represent an inability to deal with the facts. Sometimes white people dismiss and label people of color as “race-baiters” for daring to speak on the subject at all. Apparently, only white dominant culture is seeing things objectively and clearly. Everyone else, it is assumed, is allowing outside influences like the media to shape them.

Yet before we think that white supremacy is merely white people’s problem, we ought to interrogate how black Christians have been responding to racism in our society as well. While many black churches want to take credit for the civil rights movement in the 1950s and ’60s, the truth is that only a small percentage of black churches actually participated in the freedom movement. Few black Christians today have acknowledged how they regularly give their full allegiance to the racialized status quo that slowly destroys us. Many black Christians have partially internalized and reproduced the very same antiblack sentiments and racialized frameworks constructed to subjugate us. Having turned a blind eye to the sufferings of others, too many black Christians, in imitation of the dominant culture, have pursued the American dream in a decisively Western and selfish manner. Too many have rejected following after Jesus concretely and have missed God’s revolutionary vision for shalom. While there is certainly a rich

1. Janie Velencia, “Majority Of White People Say There’s Racism Everywhere, But Not Around Them,” *Huffington Post*, July 7, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-people-racism-poll\\_55a91a4fe4b0c5f0322d17f2](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-people-racism-poll_55a91a4fe4b0c5f0322d17f2).



tradition of Afro-Christian faith that has resisted the domestication of Jesus for generations, we cannot assume that every black Christian is necessarily joining God in divine transformation and resisting white supremacy through active justice and peacemaking.

Whether white, black, Native American, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, or Asian, we all get caught up in the currents of our white-dominated society and internalize its messages. Each of us must turn to the good news for a more hope-filled present and future. Given the racial history of the church in America, which has unfortunately often been at the center of the problem, few have considered the subversive life of Jesus as the way out of our racialized and hierarchical society.

Churches have often been the least helpful place to discuss racism and our white-dominated society. If racism is talked about at all, it is often addressed on isolated Sundays set apart for grieving some national event or engaging in sparse and limited pulpit swaps. None of those efforts are necessarily problematic. But when our actions are limited to such strategies, they reveal that we don't really understand the full scope or nature of race and racism in our society.

And therein lies the problem. Churches operating out of dominant cultural intuitions, perceptions, assumptions, and experiences define the problem one way, while most black people and other oppressed groups bear witness to an alternative and diverging reality. This epistemological divide concerning racism—that is, the different ways of knowing and understanding life—is an even greater gap within the church than it is among the rest of society.

So what are Christians who participate in dominant society to do when their racial intuitions and racialized experiences contradict the experiences and concerns of historically oppressed groups? Are Christians in dominant culture prepared to listen to groups of people who have seen trouble, so much trouble? Is the church a place where we can talk about the trouble we've seen? Is the church a place not only where we'll be truly heard and understood but also where we will become a transformed community? Will the church take on the form of Christ in our racialized society?

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**TIME TO WAKE UP**

In the spirit of the original black spiritual, “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen,” this book is rooted in what I’ve seen, in what black people have seen, and in what all who have experienced the underside of white supremacy have seen. This experience from below—from literally living on the underside of America’s racial hierarchy—is not commonly known or understood within the dominant culture.

Just trying to start a conversation about racism in the church—which I am determined to do—often results in defensive and even antagonistic dismissals by some of my white brothers and sisters. Having two-way conversations on racism is challenging when white people respond to discomfort with either defensive emotionalism or white fragility, which is the inability to deal with stressful racialized situations. These responses are the norm in too many Christian communities.<sup>2</sup>

The language that dominant-culture Christians frequently use to talk about race, full of colorblind rhetoric, gives the impression that they have somehow transcended these problems. Such claims imply that they do not even notice the diversity of skin tones in people and that they are oblivious to racial categories. However, the common white Christian plea to just “see people as people” is undermined by the highly racialized life of the average white person. White Christians, especially, seem incapable of recognizing the contradictions of their utopian language and their distinctly and deeply racialized lifestyles and daily choices. Colorblind rhetoric prevents people from evaluating the majority of their social relationships, the places they feel they either belong or do not belong, and the kinds of cultural, intellectual, and artistic influences that are worthy of engagement. With such contradictions, I can only assume that it is not color that they are not seeing; rather, it is racism that is being missed.

Colorblind ideology is the twenty-first-century continuation of white Christian silence to racism. During legalized chattel slavery from 1619 to 1865, white silence to this horrific institution didn’t

2. Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility,” *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (2011), <http://libjournal.uncg.edu/index.php/ijcp/article/view/249>.

get us anywhere. Nor did white silence from 1865 to 1945 move us toward progress. This is the era in which well over one hundred thousand African Americans were forced back into slave-like conditions through the convict leasing system, which allowed people to be arrested for things like not getting permission to change jobs, vagrancy, or perceived inappropriate conduct with a white woman.<sup>3</sup> White Christians were silent when five thousand black men, women, and children were lynched throughout the twentieth century. Many of the early lynchings were actually moments of white entertainment, drawing crowds by the thousands, many of whom took photos of their white children standing in front of hanging black bodies.<sup>4</sup>

From 1970 to the present, the prison system exploded from around three hundred thousand people to over two million. Black males have been most disproportionately affected by the prison industrial complex, most having been convicted for small nonviolent drug charges.<sup>5</sup> In fact, both black and Native American people get shot or abused by police at deeply disproportionate rates compared to the rest of society.<sup>6</sup> Drug use ought to be considered primarily a public health concern rather than seen through the lens of criminality, but the so-called war on drugs has targeted poor black and brown neighborhoods.

Current research, however, reveals that black youth and white youth are using and selling drugs at comparable rates, and yet stereotypes run wild within dominant cultural discourse that make people assume otherwise.<sup>7</sup> As someone who has lived in several black inner-city communities as well as for three years in a white

3. Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 53–54.

4. James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms, 2000).

5. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 6–8.

6. “Native Americans Get Shot by Cops at an Astonishing Rate,” *Mother Jones*, July 15, 2015, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/07/native-americans-getting-shot-police>.

7. Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 7.

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suburban neighborhood, I can personally attest that the war on drugs is not being carried out in white middle-class communities. When white youth use or sell drugs, they are seen as “experimenting” or “going through a stage.” When black youth engage in the exact same actions, they are seen as destroying the fabric of American values. This results in our society putting one in every three African American males through the criminal justice system at some point in their lives (mostly for these nonviolent drug offenses).<sup>8</sup> Likewise, black women are the fastest growing demographic being targeted by mass incarceration.<sup>9</sup> The disproportionate policing, stop-and-frisk encounters, arrests, and incarceration of racial minorities ought to awaken the church, because Jesus himself called for us to visit the imprisoned (Matthew 25:34-46) and to bring release to the captives (Luke 4:18-19).

If the response to our racialized society is turning away from and ignoring these outcries rather than dealing with them, how will we ever participate in God’s transformational work in a Jesus-shaped way?

The church urgently needs to understand the realities of racism better than it has previously. Christians must do a better job of thinking, analyzing, discussing, and ultimately transforming our racialized lives into antiracist and antihierarchical ways of life that conform to the way of Jesus. We must learn to see and understand the racism all around us so that we can faithfully resist being complicit in its patterns. Once we are able to see it, we must engage in initiatives of deep metanoia, or repentance—initiatives that change us from racialized accommodation to resistance.

### **CUP OF SWEET TEA . . . AND RACIAL HIERARCHY**

How desperately we need to change our views of racism became distinctly clear to me a few years ago when I met with a white suburban pastor at a McDonald’s in the middle of the afternoon. We didn’t meet for lunch but just for a beverage that would relieve

8. *Ibid.*, 9.

9. “Facts about the Over-Incarceration of Women in the United States,” American Civil Liberties Union, <https://www.aclu.org/facts-about-over-incarceration-women-united-states>.

some of the summer heat. We both decided to grab a one-dollar sweet tea.

I must admit that I find McDonald's sweet tea to be pretty good. It is southern-style. You know that you have had true southern-style sweet tea when you can feel the sugar gritting through your teeth. Yup, it is pure magic.

This pastor was close to my age but a little older, and he pastored a young, white missional congregation outside of Philadelphia. He had reached out to me hoping that we could get to know one another and, more specifically, so that we could dialogue across the racial divide. During our time together we shared lots of stories. We talked about our churches. We discussed seminary life and some mutual professors we have had. We shared some of our personal journeys and meaningful experiences along the way. The conversation was fairly well-rounded. We had some overlapping perspectives as well as diverging experiences and points of views that kept the conversation lively.

And then in the middle of the conversation, this white pastor abruptly grabbed one of the foam cups of sweet tea and placed it directly in the middle of the table between us. It was a sudden and unexpected rupture in the flow of our conversation, and I hadn't a clue what was to follow.

"Drew," he said, "This cup has writing on my side of the cup and a logo on yours." He paused. "But I can't see what is on your side of the cup," he continued. "Likewise, you can't see what is on my side of the cup." This was all happening very quickly, and I wasn't at all sure where he was heading with this teachable moment.

Then it came. "Because I can't see what is on your side of the cup, I need you to share with me your perspective so I can see things from your standpoint," he explained. "Likewise, you need me to share *my* point of view so that you can understand the world from my vantage point."

What a nice sentiment, right? Unfortunately, it is actually a naive way of understanding how racism has perverted human relationships.

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So first I expressed my gratitude for his nice gesture. Then I said, "But this is not how things actually work."

I explained that, in fact, I *did* know what was on his side of the cup. This is because I have learned Eurocentric history written from a white perspective. I have read white literature and poetry. I have learned about white musicians and artists. I have had mostly white teachers and professors through every stage of my educational process. I have read lots of white authors and have heard white intellectuals give lectures on a variety of topics. I have been inundated by white-dominated and controlled television and media. I have lived in a mostly white suburban community, and I have lived on a predominately white Christian campus. The truth of the matter is that I wouldn't have been on track to a PhD without becoming intimately familiar with the various ways that white people think. My so-called success means that I have had to know what it takes to meet white standards, whether they are formal or informal.

After explaining why I already knew what was on his side of the cup, I continued on. I noted that in contrast to me, he most likely could go through his entire life without needing to know black literature, black intellectual thought, black wisdom, black art and music, or black history. That is, he could choose to never engage with or be changed by the range and beauty of the black community. Nor would he be penalized for it. That option of white exclusivity would not affect his livelihood or means of providing for his family. No one would question his qualifications if he didn't know how to navigate black communities and cultures or understand the daily realities of most black people in America. Immersion in and understanding of the black community have never been routinely expected or necessary for employees, politicians, scholars, doctors, teachers, or pastors. This is even more so the case for most white Christian communities, which willfully ignore the diverse gifts of the black church tradition. Black faith and tradition are rarely looked to as worthy sources for learning about how to practice spiritual disciplines, embody daily discipleship, and share in Christian community.

This disparity is not merely a result of a fracture in a bridge that divides us racially. That seems to be the way my pastor friend imagined the task necessary to restore human relationships. He seemed, like most people in the church, to comprehend the problem as though it were a horizontal divide between two people on equal standing. If that were the case, then our problem could be fully solved with strategies that mirror cross-cultural exchange programs. We could sit across a table over a drink and swap stories and experiences until we closed the gap of misunderstanding. While cultural intelligence and awareness is definitely needed in these discussions, that horizontal understanding doesn't adequately resolve the full scope of racism in the church or in society.

Racism isn't first and foremost about a horizontal divide; it is a vertically structured hierarchy. Social hierarchy and power have defined, in varying degrees, human worth, beauty, and significance in society. White people since the sixteenth century have been increasingly categorized and perceived to be more valuable, innocent, truthful, and worthy of love and relationship than nonwhite people. Through a paternalistic imagination, racism has taught white people to unconsciously assume that they are the best people to dominate and control society. This racially hierarchical vision, which classifies whiteness as the most prized human characteristic, perceives other people to be at the bottom of the human ladder.

If racism socializes people to overvalue white bodies, as though they were created to rule and dominate over others, then blackness has been conceived as its polar opposite. Blackness in our racialized society has been ascribed with all kinds of negative features, and resides at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. The loss of black life is rarely worth grieving. Black bodies are presumed guilty. Black experience and testimony are assumed to be lies. And experiencing and learning from the range of people and perspectives within the black community is not desirable or needed. Loving black people has never been normative in America.

My white pastor friend had an oversimplified understanding of racism that resulted in an oversimplified solution: two people sit and share stories. Of course such interactions are needed. But such relational engagement and proximity does not necessarily

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lead toward dismantled racial hierarchies in our lives. Many have thought that pulpit exchanges, multicultural programs, and more conversations with their one black friend would be the solution to racism because they were refusing to segregate themselves for that moment. Such actions may at times align very well with antiracism work, but not always. Very frequently, racial exchange solely happens under the terms and conditions of white people, which in itself is already an act of reaffirming the racialized hierarchy.

Relational, social, and geographic proximity across the racial divide does not necessarily result in the new humanity to which we are called in Christ. One must only remember the close proximity that many enslaved Africans found themselves in during our 250-year history of chattel slavery. This fact reminds us that relational proximity doesn't necessarily dismantle our racialized ideology, intuitions, and behavior. Many enslaved Africans, under the white control of slave masters, frequently labored in the homes of white people. They cooked, cleaned, and raised white children. Many were raped routinely by these overseers as well. This is a deep and intimate proximity, but of course that didn't mean racialized hierarchy was being dismantled in their lives.

Just like my white pastor friend, most Christians tend to operate out of a naive and thin understanding of racism, which doesn't factor in the depth and width of our racialized and hierarchical society. I enjoyed that cup of sweet tea very much, but the analogy of the cup representing two different angles—on equal footing and needing only to be swapped and considered across the racial divide—is insufficient. Without intending to, people who frame racism in this way deeply misunderstand it and its everyday implications. This framework actually prevents people from unveiling the racialized hierarchical society we inhabit.

Hopefully, through a renewed commitment to following Jesus and by pulling back the curtain on racial power dynamics in society, we can transform not only what we know about racism but also how to resist it every day. When we know a little more about racism's impact on society, we can not only bridge the divide of racial segregation but actually begin dismantling racial hierarchy.



## WHERE WE ARE HEADED

Books that rehearse arguments for racial reconciliation have been written several times over. This book will instead guide us through the challenges of racism for the church by confronting Christian frameworks for how racism operates and how it affects our lives. The posture that this book takes as it analyzes racism is one that dares to peer upward at the ladder of racial hierarchy. It looks at the *vertical* expression of power in social relationships, rather than merely sideways across a supposedly *horizontal* gap.

The church must confront its popular definition of racism, which has historically never implicated the white majority by its framing of the problem. Many think that racism is only about KKK-like behavior, or about doing or saying things that were common for white people in the mid-twentieth century. Few have wrestled with what white supremacy—a superiority complex and the practice of racial dominance fueled by racial ideology—looks like in the twenty-first century. Many white people assume racism is only about individual racial prejudice and hatred, and therefore they are always on the lookout for the “bad racists” to scapegoat. Many refuse to think about the larger racialized patterns of society that shape individuals’ ideologies and habits. Others assume racism today is just the residue left over from slavery; in their minds, when the older generations die off, we will naturally transition into a post-racial society. These same people have rarely considered the ways that young white people in the twenty-first century continue to make daily choices that advantage them, structurally and systematically, over people who are not white.

My point is that the church’s understanding of racism is frequently too thin, narrow, and deficient for it to be antiracist in its witness. Our very instincts about what racism is tend to be unhelpful.

I suggest directly and indirectly throughout this book that our very intuitions cannot be shaped in hierarchy and dominance, as were the postures of Caesar, Herod, and Pilate. Instead, we must come alongside the crucified of the world in solidarity, as Jesus himself did, so that we can have our minds renewed. Dominant

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cultural intuitions run contrary to Christ's way of knowing. The one taking on the form of Christ in the world does not take for granted the popular or dominant view of things. Rather, the person committed to Jesus follows him to the margins and cracks of society, entering into what I call "counterintuitive solidarity" with the oppressed. Revelation, inspiration, and understanding come in the context of following the crucified Christ in the world.

The book seeks to replace our foundation in the sinking sand of taken-for-granted racialized perspectives found in dominant culture. Instead, it seeks to place our feet on the solid ground and firm footing of the way of Jesus, our Rock. No longer rooted in a world constructed by white supremacist hierarchies and antiblack dehumanizing lenses, we can be formed to withstand the storms and thundering waves of our age. Therefore, the next chapter will immediately begin challenging the shortcomings of commonly held individualistic views on racism, while offering a framework that helps us see our racialized society through widespread patterns and social realities.

Chapter 3 will reconsider the life of Jesus and give attention to the subversive implications of his life and teachings that undermine dominant cultural ways of living. It renounces the image of the white, domesticated, status quo savior that has passed for Jesus Christ for too long. Jesus, the Jewish Messiah executed by imperial Roman methods of torture, now invites us into non-conformity with the racialized hierarchical patterns of this age.

Next, chapter 4 lays out a vital premise of the book: that is, that intuitions shaped by dominant culture are inherently limited. In particular, from a historical perspective, the white majority's way of knowing has repeatedly left it unaware of its own complicity in each generation. Counterintuitive solidarity in the way of Jesus is offered as a revolutionary alternative. Chapter 5 extends those concerns by offering a view into the everyday implications of white identity and practice. In that chapter I will articulate the meaning of whiteness as a social construct and social performance.

Equally important, chapter 6 reflects on the meaning of antiblack racism in society and how it is a problem for everyone, not

just for white members of society. This chapter calls us to consider how we all are internalizing the ideologies and habits that affirm and overvalue whiteness as a characteristic above everything else. Black Christians, then, will particularly be challenged to consider whether they actually and concretely love other black people. Here, counterintuitive love, congruent with God's own peculiar love for the least and the last, will gesture us toward sharing love with one another. Once again, in chapter 7, black Christians and other racial minorities will be primarily challenged to consider how the lure of respect and status often entices us away from following the scandalized life of Jesus.

Because this book is largely written from my vantage point, filled with my personal stories as a young black male navigating our racialized society, chapter 8 broadens the scope of social hierarchies and its meaning for other racial minorities beyond the African American community, beginning with Native Americans. Likewise, the chapter reflects on other prominent ways that America organizes society in hierarchical ways through an exploration of the overlaps of race, class, and gender. The church must learn to become attentive to all the diverse experiences within our society. If the church is going to manifest the "beloved community," we must keep track of any time anyone is deemed as less valuable than others. In the spirit of Galatians 3:28, we must renounce all social hierarchies if we are to truly be one in Christ.

Finally, in the last chapter, this book switches gears. In it I move beyond dismantling and deconstructing old and unhelpful frameworks of racism toward offering some everyday practices that will guide the church toward being a people in which the reign of God is visibly manifested. The final chapter gestures toward a communal life capable of subverting white supremacy both internally, in our churches, and externally, in our neighborhoods and around the globe.

When my own brother was arrested and confined in a cage for being a black male, I, like thousands of others, was compelled to wake up and begin speaking truthfully. I was compelled to talk about the racial ladder that has strung people, who are

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wonderfully and fearfully made, into humanly constructed categories of varying worth.

Join me as we begin to change the way we view racism. "Jesus is the answer for the world today" is not just a cliché. In our racialized and hierarchical society, the way of Jesus is also a realistic, practical way for the church to make the kingdom of God visible.