



RELIGION AND
RACIAL JUSTICE



IN MEMORIAM THIS WEEK: TWO CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERS WHO NOTABLY INVOLVED RELIGION IN THEIR STRUGGLE

REV. C.T. VIVIAN



“IT WAS ON THIS PLANE (THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL PLANE) THAT THE MOVEMENT FIRST CONFRONTED THE CONSCIENCE OF THE NATION” – C.T. VIVIAN

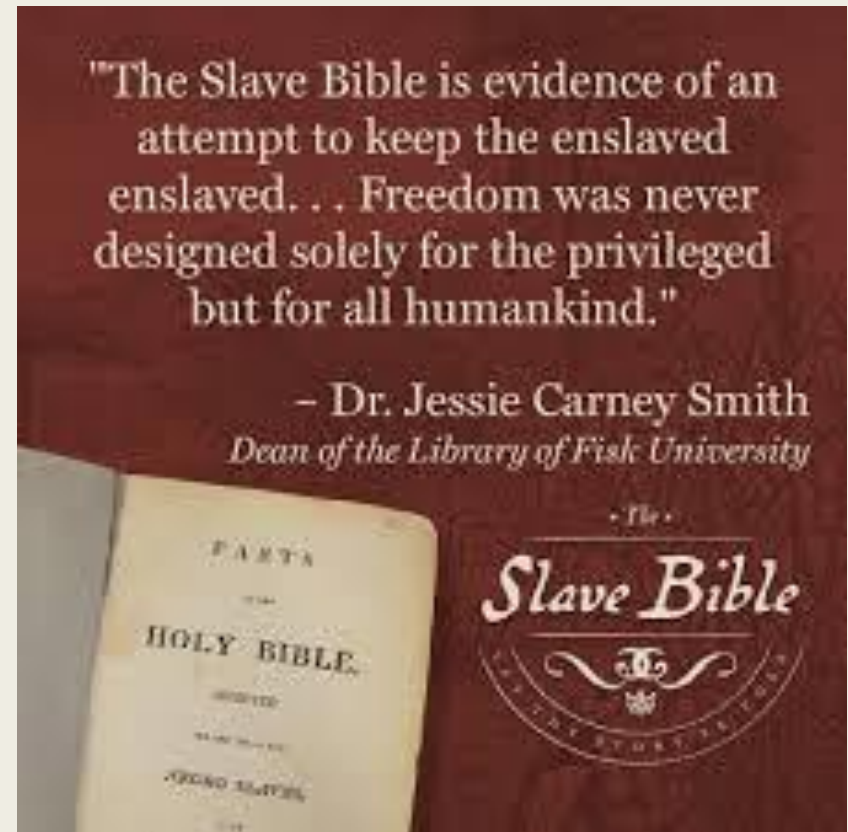
CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS



“IF IT HADN’T BEEN FOR MY BELIEF IN GOD ALMIGHTY, THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND MY OWN PARTICIPATION WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE A BIRD WITHOUT WINGS” – JOHN LEWIS

1. KNOW YOUR HISTORY: RELIGION AS A RATIONALIZATION FOR RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY IN THE US

- POPE ALEXANDER VI: 1493 DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY
- JUSTIFICATIONS FOR SLAVERY AND THE SLAVE BIBLE
- JUSTIFICATIONS FOR SEGREGATION AND WHITE SUPREMACY
- IS RELIGION STILL RACIST OR IS THIS ONLY LONG AGO? FRINGE GROUPS, INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES, INTERVIEW WITH TRILLIA NEWBELL (CNN)
- NOTE ON NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS



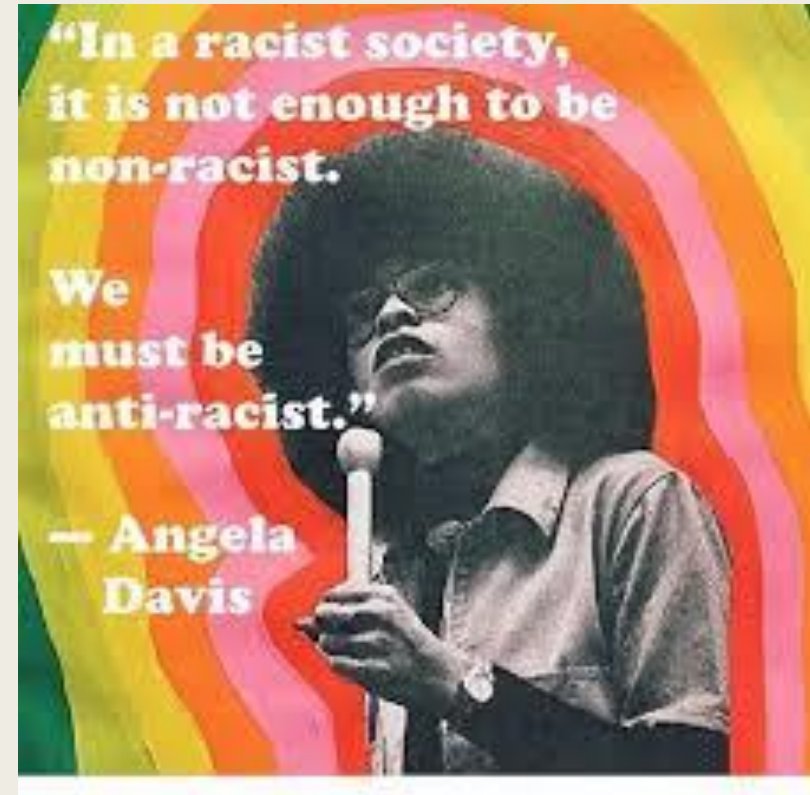
2. KNOW YOUR HISTORY: RELIGION FUELS ANTI-RACISM

- SLAVE REVOLTS: NAT TURNER, DENMARK VESEY
- ABOLITIONISM: SOJOURNER TRUTH, JOHN BALDWIN, GEORGE HUCKINS
- INDEPENDENT BLACK CHURCH DENOMINATIONS: REV. RICHARD ALLEN
- CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: REV. DR. M.L.K. JR., REV. CT VIVIAN, JOHN LEWIS, REV. JAMES LAWSON
- BLACK THEOLOGY AND WOMANIST THEOLOGY: REV. DR. JAMES CONE, DR. JACQUELYN GRANT
- CURRENT EVENTS: MORAL MONDAYS, BLACK LIVES MATTER: REV. WILLIAM J. BARBER II, DENOMINATIONAL STATEMENTS
- NOTE ON NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS



3. DEFINING TERMS: FROM RACIST TO NON-RACIST, FROM NON-RACIST TO ANTI-RACIST

- MOST MAINSTREAM RELIGION IS CURRENTLY NON-RACIST, BUT IS THAT ENOUGH?
- SCHOLARS CHARGE THAT NON-RACISM AND APOLITICAL RELIGION ARE A COVER FOR COMPLICITY IN MAINTAINING WHITE PRIVILEGE AND STRUCTURAL RACISM
- ECONOMIC/INSTITUTIONAL REALITIES RELATED TO “NOT TAKING SIDES”
- WHAT IS RELIGION???



DEFINITIONS: (From *How To Be An Antiracist* by Ibram Kendi)

- **Racist:** One who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea.

Antiracist: One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea. 13

Racism: a preliminary definition

“**Racism** is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities.” 18

“**Racial inequity** is when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing...**Racial equity** is when two or more racial groups are standing on relatively equal footing.” 18

“A **racist policy** is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups. An **antiracist policy** is any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups. By *policy*, I mean written and unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations, and guidelines that govern people. There is no such thing as a nonracist or race-neutral policy.” 18

Similar terms for racist policies: institutional racism, structural racism, systemic racism

“A racist idea is any idea that suggests one racial group is inferior or superior to another racial group in any way...An antiracist idea is any idea that suggests racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences—that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group.” 20

Racism defined:

“Racism is a powerful collection of racist policies that lead to racial inequity and are substantiated by racist ideas. Antiracism is a powerful collection of antiracist policies that lead to racial equity and are substantiated by antiracist ideas.” 20

Christianity: a definition 17

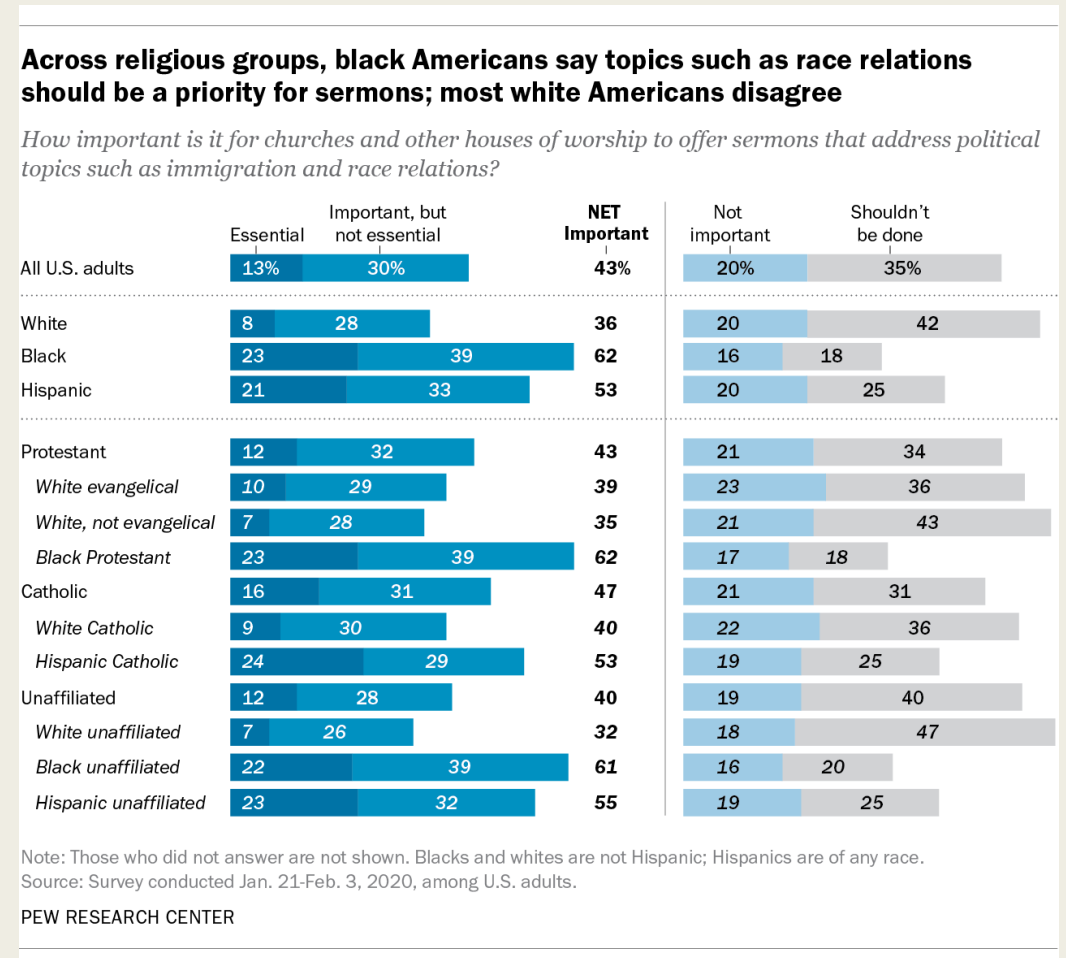
“What is your definition of a Christian?” Kendi’s dad asked James Cone.

“A Christian is one who is striving for liberation.” Cone replied.

i.e. Christianity is about struggle and liberation.

4. SOCIOLOGICAL DATA: AFRICAN-AMERICANS AND WHITES EXPECT DIFFERENT THINGS FROM WORSHIP SERVICES/SERMONS

- PEW STUDY SHOWS THAT ABOUT 2/3 OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHRISTIANS THINK CHURCHES AND SERMONS SHOULD REGULARLY TALK ABOUT RACIAL JUSTICE
- THE SAME STUDY SHOWS ABOUT 1/3 OF WHITE CHRISTIANS FEEL THE SAME WAY
- WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR THIS DIFFERENCE? DOES THE VERY IDEA OF WHAT CHRISTIANITY IS, AND/OR WHAT RELIGION IS DIFFER BASED ON RACIAL IDENTIFICATION? WHY?



5. THE ACADEMIC VIEW FROM RELIGIOUS STUDIES: RELIGION IS CULTURALLY CONSTRUCTED AND CONTESTED

- RELIGIOUS VIEWS OFTEN REFLECT CULTURAL VIEWS OF THEIR TIME AND PLACE
- RELIGION IS OPEN TO INTERPRETATION
- RELIGIOUS CATEGORIES (APOCALYPSE, MARTYR, SACRIFICE, HOPE) CAN HELP US TO UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT MOMENT
- WHAT IS YOUR INTERPRETATION? SHOULD RELIGIONS BE POLITICAL AND/OR FIGHT FOR JUSTICE? SHOULD THEY BE APOLITICAL AND FOCUS ON THE SPIRITUALITY AND SALVATION? DOES CHRISTIANITY MANDATE THAT WE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE? DOES CHRISTIANITY MANDATE THAT WE FOCUS ON HIGHER THINGS RATHER THAN THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD? ON WHAT BASIS ARE YOU MAKING THESE JUDGMENTS? WHO GETS TO DECIDE WHAT A RELIGION REALLY IS, OR WHAT IT TRULY MEANS?

6. IN CONCLUSION: RELIGION'S RELEVANCE IN THIS MOMENT

- RELIGION HAS MUCH TO DO WITH THE CURRENT MOVEMENT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE IN TERMS OF HISTORY, THEOLOGY, ETHICS, MOTIVATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL POWER, AND THE FAITH AND HOPE NEEDED TO FEED SOULS DURING THE FIGHT
- THE #BLM MOVEMENT HAS ASKED US TO KNOW OUR HISTORY AND THE VARIOUS WAYS WHITE SUPREMACY IS BUILT INTO OUR COUNTRY AND INSTITUTIONS: RELIGION IS NO EXCEPTION AND HAS JUSTIFIED AND FUELED RACISM
- THE BLACK CHURCH AND OTHER DENOMINATIONS AND RELIGIONS HAVE FUELED THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE WITH A DIVINE FIRE: RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY CAN BE POWERFUL FORCES OF ANTI-RACISM
- IF RELIGION IS A REFLECTION OF CULTURE, AND BLACK AND WHITE CULTURES DISAGREE ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF RELIGION, AND MOST WHITE RELIGION NOW IS NON-RACIST AND APOLITICAL, WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT OUR CULTURE, AND ESPECIALLY WHITE, CHRISTIAN, AMERICAN CULTURE? IS THIS ENOUGH? OR IS THIS COMPLICITY?
- MUST RELIGION BE RELEVANT TO RACIAL JUSTICE? THE ANSWER TO THIS MAY BE VERY INDIVIDUAL: WHAT DO YOU THINK? IS IT RELEVANT FOR YOU IN THIS MOMENT? FOR SOCIETY? SHOULD IT BE?

TO REVIEW: QUESTIONS TO LEAVE YOU WITH:

- IS RELIGION RACIST? NON-RACIST? ANTI-RACIST?
- IS OR SHOULD RELIGION BE ABOUT POLITICS AND COMMUNAL JUSTICE, OR SIMPLY ABOUT INDIVIDUAL RELATIONSHIPS TO GOD OR THE TRANSCENDENT AND ABOUT PERSONAL SALVATION?
- SHOULD SERMONS REGULARLY ADDRESS RACIAL INJUSTICE?
- WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHRISTIANS DIFFER FROM WHITE CHRISTIANS REGARDING WHETHER CHURCHES SHOULD ADDRESS RACIAL JUSTICE?
- WHAT IS RELIGION? AND WHO GETS TO DECIDE THE TRUE CORE OF A RELIGION?
- IS RELIGION RELEVANT IN OUR CURRENT MOMENT REGARDING RACIAL JUSTICE? HOW? IS IT RELEVANT FOR YOU IN THIS MOMENT? HOW?
- AND FOR NOW, MOST IMPORTANTLY: WHAT ARE **YOUR** QUESTIONS?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: SELECTED BOOKS

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