TONY EVANS

KINGDOM RACE THEOLOGY

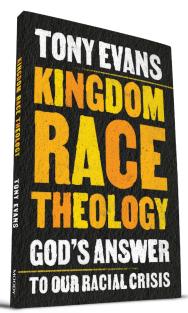GOD'S ANSWER TO OUR RACIAL CRISIS

TONY EVANS

KINGDOM RACE THEOLOGY

MOODY

Bestselling author Tony Evans answers with a fearless and prophetic voice, pointing to God's Word as the only lasting solution. Kingdom Race Theology helps people and churches commit to restitution, reconciliation, and responsibility. His penetrating and practical ideas will help pastors and church leaders sort through the conflicting theories.

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The Need for Kingdom Race Theology

On May 25, 2020, the racial conflict in America rose to a whole new level with the very public murder of George Floyd. His death, brought about by a white police officer kneeling on his neck, was filmed on a cellphone for the world to see. Like fireworks exploding on the Fourth of July, this watershed event ignited a racial firestorm throughout America and beyond. Floyd's death was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back as black, white, and brown people took to the streets in protest. The tragedy provoked lament and grief over a past whose effects, both covert and overt, are yet to be addressed or healed. It also brought to the forefront a number of contemporary social movements and theories that sought to address the matter of racism and injustice. You may be familiar with these social movements and I'll

go into greater detail on each of them in my expanded revision of *Oneness Embraced*, but in short, I'll give a brief overview as we start out:

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Critical Race Theory: a post-civil rights social theory that demonstrates how unjust laws have served as the embedded foundation and filter through which racist attitudes, behavior, policies, and structures have been rooted.

The focus and support of the mantra *Black Lives Matter* is legitimately born out of tragedy. It originally came to a more formalized structure in 2013 and rose on the national scene after the events of Ferguson, Missouri, and Michael Brown's death.[1] It rose to global prominence after the death of George Floyd. The movement highlights the injustices against black lives in much the same way that white evangelicals emphasize that the lives of unborn babies matter.

The Black Lives Matter movement essentially has two aspects. There is the informal movement by those who stand up for injustice against black lives, using peaceful protests and education to bring about healthy cultural and police reforms. There is also the official organization, trademarked as Black Lives Matter, and founded

by Patrisse Cullors (who has since resigned amid controversy), Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. The formal entity of Black Lives Matter advocates key elements of an agenda that cannot be supported by serious Christians. It rejects the primacy and protection of the nuclear family while promoting the acceptance of gay and transgender lifestyles.[2] In addition, the founders openly embrace an ideological framework of Marxism, an anti-theistic movement.[3] The Black Lives Matter focus has merit in the overarching mission of social injustice for black lives in particular, an oft-overlooked aspect of social reform. But like all social movements, Black Lives Matter must be examined, analyzed, and critiqued against the backdrop of God's inerrant Word.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

In the wake of the collective upheaval taking place, the Black Lives Matter movement also gave fresh legs to Critical Race Theory, which now stands tall at the core of today's racial debate.

Critical Race Theory may be defined as *a post-civil rights social theory that demonstrates how unjust laws have served as the embedded foundation and filter through which racist attitudes, behavior, policies, and structures have been rooted and continue to influence the fabric of American life, politics, and systems, even after those laws were changed.*

CRT proponents view race as a social construct created to expand or protect power and control. It also holds that the foundation of society's institutions and power structures are based on white privilege. Proponents frequently contend that these institutions and structures are inherently racist in that they are consciously or subconsciously used to maintain and expand the economic and political power of white people at the expense of people of color.[4] Proponents of CRT also contend that storytelling and narrative-based knowledge is a leading element in changing cultures, affecting worldviews, and even addressing systemic issues. One of the leading CRT theorists, Kimberlé Crenshaw, defines it as "a way of looking at law's role platforming, facilitating, producing, and even insulating racial inequality in our country."[5]

Never has there been a more volatile subject separating schools, school boards, churches, denominations, organizations, businesses and even personal relationships through heated emotions and often verbal vitriol.

THE 1619 PROJECT

Using the framework of CRT, the 1619 Project was created in August 2019 by Nikole Hannah-Jones with contributors from the *New York Times* and the *New York Times Magazine*. The journalism project argues that the very existence and establishment of America was rooted in the purpose of protecting the institution of slavery that they

say began, not in 1776, but in 1619 with the first group of slaves arriving in Jamestown, Virginia. While the year of the first slaves to arrive in America is debatable (some placing it as far back as the early 1500s and some arguing that the individuals in 1619 were indentured servants), the issue of dates isn't the most alarming. The 1619 Project contends, among other historically inaccurate statements, that the American Revolution was fought in order to preserve the institution of slavery, a glaringly wrong conclusion that has brought it a tremendous amount of intellectual criticism.[6] Many historians have criticized its historical validity in other areas as well.

1776 Unites

A number of black ministers and civic leaders have joined together to create the black-led movement called *1776 Unites* that served as a rebuttal to the 1619 Project. In the dedication of the book of essays published as a response to the 1619 Project, originator Robert Woodson writes,

No nation is perfect, but America—more than any other—is a place where people from every imaginable background have been able to pursue their dreams and realize their potential. . . . This is as true of black Americans as it is anyone else. During the worst of Jim Crow, we built thriving communities

full of families, churches, businesses, and countless civic institutions. On the very soil where we once toiled in forced labor, we found the seeds of our liberation. At a time when many are trying to pull us apart by stoking grievances and sowing discord, the overwhelming majority of Americans remain devoted to our founding principles and to one another.[7]

This increased focus on racial issues comes with new tensions. This short book is not intended to go into depth on these movements but to focus more on the solution I am calling Kingdom Race Theology.

Regardless of the many movements at hand, the many definitions given to certain terms is also contributing to our cultural confusion. It seems that everyone has a different way of interpreting what terms mean at this time. Certain terms such as *systemic racism*, *white privilege*, *microaggression*, *implicit bias*, *victimization*, and others trigger emotional responses that often kick opportunities for authentic conversations to the curb. A mixed bag of personal definitions of these terms combined with a variety of personal experiences have turned the dialogue on diversity into a heated battle of hearts, oftentimes leading only to confusion. This has caused many on both sides to throw the proverbial "baby out with the bath water." As a result, people reject these concepts, ideologies, and viewpoints out of hand rather than pursuing an honest intellectual exchange on what may be valuable.

The redefinition of terms and multiple meanings of words, often dependent on who is using them, has made it almost impossible to discuss relevant issues reasonably. As Thomas Sowell puts it, "One of the many signs of verbal virtuosity among intellectuals is the repackaging of words to mean things that are not only different from, but sometimes the direct opposite of, their original meanings."[8] Thus, before we start any discussion on racism and reconciliation, I want to start by giving you my definitions for what I'm about to address.

> **racism:**
> the conscious or unconscious belief in the superiority of one race over another race, or ethnicities, which manifests itself in a variety of dismissive, oppressive, or exploitive ways.

Racism and Systemic Racism

Many people define racism in many different ways. This is due to the tremendous variety in both the practical and emotive experiences that form the perspectives through which life is viewed. I define racism as *the conscious or unconscious belief in the superiority of one race over another race, or ethnicities, which manifests itself in a variety of dismissive, oppressive, or exploitive ways.* Racism shows up in the use of power, influence, resources, or communication, which is

employed to discriminate against, marginalize, exploit and/or subjugate people of another race or ethnicity. When unaddressed prejudice gets married to power there is going to be an unintended pregnancy that will give birth to the evil of racism.

I have heard the assertion, as I'm sure you have, that "systemic racism" no longer exists. I often hear that from people who with their next breath say they are not racist, and some might even add that they never owned slaves. These two statements are often tied so closely that they appear to be a defensive posture. By negating the existence of systemic racism or its consequences, they attempt to absolve any personal feelings of attachment to it. The white author Ken Wytsma connects this defensiveness to a need for personal comfort. After being told to not use the term *white privilege* in a talk at a Christian university, he observed that "our desire for comfort leads us to defensiveness when we are confronted with questions of race." He continues with a good question: "But when did our comfort become the driving value?"[9]

Yet I have also heard the same denial of systemic racism by many well-known black scholars and conservative black theologians, who do so with a focus on personal responsibility and moral values. They seem hesitant to acknowledge the existence or lingering corporate, social, political, and economic effects of racism, as if this somehow eliminates the possibility and primacy of promoting personal responsibilities.

And while I agree that our laws and legal systems on paper have been addressed and corrected over the years, I would assert that certain cultural repercussions remain. Just as a football team may win or lose on paper but perform very differently in the actual game, paper laws intended to help don't always produce equitable outcomes. This is because the carrying out of those laws, as well as the residual effects of the earlier laws, applies to people, not paper. Whenever you insert humanity into the equation, you've inserted sin and sin, invariably, messes things up.

Systemic racism, or the resultant lingering effects of it, continues to show up in pockets and places across our land. You see it in unequal access to quality health care and lack of affordable nutritious meal options in urban centers. This leads to increased obesity and negative health outcomes (physical and mental), as well as lower access to quality job opportunities. It also leads to the disparate amount of transferable generational wealth largely due to the equally disparate numbers of home ownership over the last century.

It can also be argued that systemic racism exists through less overt, but cyclically produced ramifications of decades of racist-based legislations (again, whether or not these legislations still exist). Urban crowding and its lasting legacy of poor education, dismantled families, and high crime is one example. There is no "law" keeping black Americans living in highly populated urban

centers, but there is also not much of a way out since many of the individuals there face so many hardships at such a young age, coupled with inadequate training, which often prevents upward mobility.

systemic racism:

racist practices and processes embedded in and shaping the social, political, economic, legal, educational, religious, infrastructural, and medical systems and policies of a society— initially established and perpetuated by the government.

It is my belief that racism has embedded itself not only in many individual hearts throughout our history but also, to varying degrees, in the many structures of our society. Whether those structures are political, economic, legal or many others, they impact how entire groups of people think and live.

Systemic racism is said to exist whenever racism has become part of the policies, procedures, and mindset by which a particular entity or societal structure operates. And while law-based existences of systemic racism may have been overturned or done away with through nationwide reforms, the lasting implications of many of these systems can still be felt by many. Some people get stuck in semantics over whether or not officially sanctioned "systemic racism" exists in our nation through governmental laws, or whether it

exists through cyclical and cultural effects. Instead, believers ought to be open to examining real life struggles and how to solve them.

Systemic racism recognizes that the sin of racism is, or was, not only a personal issue, but a corporate one as well. In fact, systemic racism even recognizes that while individuals themselves might not be racist, the structures and entities in which these individuals live or function can be established and still run on racist policies, practices, ideals, and intentions. I have heard many people argue against systemic racism through arguing that not all people of a certain race are racist. But that is not what systemic racism is. To acknowledge that systemic racism exists is not the same thing as declaring all white people to be racist. Systemic racism speaks to the structures, policies, and institutions of a society and not to the entirety of the individuals who inhabit it.

Thus, I define systemic racism as *the presence, or cyclical resultant effects, of racist practices and processes embedded in and shaping the social, political, economic, legal, educational, religious, infrastructural, and medical systems and policies of a society—initially established and perpetuated by the government.* These then overlap and interconnect in such a way as to give an unjust advantage of resources, rights, mindsets, and privilege for a majority number of one race while denying, or limiting, it to a majority number of other races or ethnicities. Systemic racism's impact over the decades when it loomed large still impacts

a myriad of things such as employment, education, housing, incarceration, health care, family dynamics, wealth gaps, and much more. Whatever the system or structure of racist realities (known or unknown), these contribute overall to inequitable opportunities for personal advancement or personal wholeness. These same principles can apply to class divisions or caste systems and have existed in other nations divided by ethnic or racial constructs. It is not only a white/black matrix, depending on the nation and the group in power.

Theological comparison

Perhaps a theological comparison can help illustrate the point. Men are born under the evil law of sin and death. This sentences all mankind to the slavery and oppression of sin (Rom. 8:2; Eph. 2:1–3). Upon conversion, that law is cancelled and replaced with a new law, the law of the spirit (Rom. 6:6). This new law legally frees believers from the law of sin and death. However, just because the law changed, the abiding struggle with sin did not automatically disappear (Rom. 7:14–25). Only consistent growth in the application of the law of the spirit can overcome the flesh's attempt to keep us functioning as spiritual slaves (Gal. 5:16–18). Failure to apply the new law means that the abiding effects of the evil system of the old law continues due to the historical power of the old laws' influence on our flesh, even though it has been replaced. This reality serves to deny

believers the full experience of freedom the new law promises (Rom. 8:3–13; Gal. 5:13). Likewise, the abiding effects of racism continue at various levels depending on the willingness of people to submit to the new laws of justice that have been established.

Historical comparison

Our shared history begins with the system of whites enslaving blacks, which arguably began as far back as the 1500s. Of course we are all aware of the evil system of slavery, a legal system enacted to oppress black people based on the color of our skin. But what many people do not realize is that when slavery was dissolved, the ideologies within it merely got embedded into other structures in society. So while the practice of slavery was outlawed, the principles that undergirded it remained present through other legalized systems from the Black Codes to Jim Crow. Thus, when people point to slavery as a contributing factor to present-day issues, they are pointing to slavery and the resultant practices and policies that flowed out of it up until now.

For example, after slavery there immediately developed a practice called debt servitude (peonage), where an employer would compel an individual to work in order to pay off a debt. This was primarily used by landowners or merchant suppliers as a way of keeping blacks in a state of perpetual servanthood. On the surface, debt servitude does not necessarily seem evil. It is only when

you uncover the ways in which it was enacted upon mi-
nority ethnicities after slavery that you see the evil for
what it was. Price gouging on life-sustaining items such
as flour, eggs, or milk, in order to create lifelong depen-
dence and debt, was commonplace. And while this form
of peonage was outlawed by Congress in 1867 due to its
imbedded evils, many people found a way to continue
the principles of the practice through other means.

In addition to debt servitude, the criminal justice
system sought to exploit a clause in the Thirteenth
Amendment that stated a person was free unless they
were a criminal. This resulted in an extension of peon-
age well into the 1900s, through the profitable practice
of convict leasing.

What this clause unleashed was an avalanche of
criminal charges against black boys and men for even
the most minor of infractions. Often no crime was com-
mitted at all, or it was invented, such as an accusation of
littering with no proof, or planted proof. For example,
certain vagrancy laws even made it a crime to be unem-
ployed at a very young age.

Once put in prison, these young boys and men would
frequently be held way beyond what they were arrested
for, and forced to live and work in conditions that in
many cases were worse than the conditions in slavery.
From a purely a business standpoint, the well-being and
the health condition of the slave mattered more to the
master than to the prison owner. If prisoners were lost

to death or disease, they could be replaced with another criminal without much effort. The prison owner also had no long-term view of the life and long-term contribution of the convict to seek to preserve. Thus, conditions deteriorated rapidly as people learned how to work, and fill, the system. For example, "In the first two years that Alabama leased its prisoners, nearly 20 percent of them died. In the following year, mortality rose to 35 percent. In the fourth, nearly 45 percent were killed."[10]

The *New York Times* gives insight into why so many died when it described the condition of these prisons in December 1882. It "told of black prisoners packed into a single cramped cabin like slaves on the Atlantic passage. The building had no windows. Vermin-ridden bunks stacked three high were covered with straw and 'ravaged blankets.' 'Revoltingly filthy' food was served cold from unwashed coal buckets, and all 150 black convicts shared three half-barrel tubs for washing."[11]

As you can imagine, many black families had their strongest male contributors plucked from their homes at a young age during the decades of convict leasing. Convict leasing was a lucrative practice to produce goods at a low cost. The price of using criminals for work assignments was less than a fraction of a penny. For instance, in 1866, Texas leased 250 men to two railroads for $12.50 a month.[12] A dollar could buy the labor of twenty black prisoners for a full month.

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