

LENSES

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AN OPENING QUESTION....



MY STORY AND WHAT I AM LEARNING

- East Texas, Dallas, SMU, SWBTS, University of South Africa (Adrio Konig, white man who fought apartheid in South Africa)
- The art of EMPATHY
- Suspended Disbelief
- The Hermeneutic of Suspicion



HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION

- Ski Mask Illustration:



THE BIBLE'S LENSES

- What if the Bible is all about reconciliation?
- Between God and God's creation
- Among PEOPLE of different races/cultures whom God has created

KEY TEXTS: Creation as diverse (Gen 1:26f), "To the nations" (Matt. 28), From Babel to Jerusalem (Acts 2), The final gathering is diverse (Revelation)

THE LENSES OF HISTORY

- Settlement and Colonization of North America – *Although there were missionary efforts involved, the primary motivation was land, money, and power. With the missionary effort that accompanied the “New World” exploration (notably, de las Casas), came notable moments of violence, deception, and conquest from Western European powers.*
- The Slave Trade – *If there was any attempt at all to “justify” or validate the acts of forced slavery, they were done on “biblical grounds” in a wide variety of Catholic and Protestant settings. There were, too, always Christian and non-Christian groups who opposed slavery on moral and/or biblical grounds.*

THE LENSES OF HISTORY

- The governments of various states engaged in state-sponsored acts of terrorism to enforce strict guidelines for slaves.
- Individual treatment varied from cordial to brutal, and there was no standardized guidelines for treatment. Often it was deemed that the Constitutional rights extended to whites did not apply to slaves, since they fell into another “category”.
- Ironically, slavery often brought blacks and whites into the same building for worship; however, as the political climate surrounding slavery became more heated, there was more and more enforced separatism in worshiping congregations between blacks and whites.
- Often black fellowships/churches arose in slave communities, but they were still obliged to attend with their masters.

THE LENSES OF HISTORY

- Reconstruction provided the most difficult and blatantly violent reactions from many whites against many blacks. As the 20th Century dawned, “Jim Crow” laws became more and more prevalent. These laws, enacted under the banner of “states’ rights” and justified by “economic and political necessity” greatly restricted the rights of black men and women in America.
- Where these laws were not specifically in place, there are many instances of a more subtle kind of “Jim Crow” approach by both Northern and Southern governments and individuals.

THE LENSES OF HISTORY

- Black leaders such as Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), Harriet Tubman (1820-1913), and W.E.B. Dubois (1868-1863) emerged, along with the creation of key organizations (NAACP, SCLC, etc.) that assisted the movement toward equality for African-Americans throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries. (more on this below)
- Non-violent AND violent opposition to both slavery and reconstruction racism emerged in the North and South among both blacks and whites.

DISPELLING SOME MYTHS/UNVEILING SOME HIDDEN ASPECTS OF THE STRUGGLE

- MLK was not the only key figure in the Civil Rights Movement, and Rosa Parks was not simply a person who happened to be tired on a bus!
- Malcolm X was not simply a “violent revolutionary.” In fact, he publicly and privately suggested that he saw violence as a last resort and only as retaliatory or as self-defense.
- Martin and Malcolm had more in common in regard to their feelings about the poor, the Viet Nam War, and the need for top-down governmental changes than is sometimes reported!

DISPELLING SOME MYTHS/UNVEILING SOME HIDDEN ASPECTS OF THE STRUGGLE

- Some key Evangelical leaders who became activists for certain causes in the 80s (like abortion, etc.) openly opposed the activism of black and white Christian ministers in regard to integration and civil rights! (e.g., Falwell)
- Key male leaders within the Civil Rights movement ironically downplayed or even ignored **key contributions of women** within the movement
- In America, the Civil Rights movement, although focused on Black Americans, also included pleas for all people of color, and addressed poverty in all races through politics, organization, and demonstration.

DISPELLING/ADDRESSING MYTHS

- Although critical of aspects of capitalism, most key leaders for Civil Rights **did not** embrace Communism
- Although Kennedy and LBJ (presidents during the height of the Civil Rights Movement) spoke in support of Civil Rights and helped passed key legislation (see LBJ's speech in 1964, for instance), both of their administrations oversaw and condoned activities within the FBI (Hoover) to soften or even short circuit key facets of the movement. It was often a study in contradiction!

DISPELLING/ADDRESSING MYTHS

- Progress was indeed made, but resentments and opposition continue. Some of the opposition went “underground,” while others became more radical.
- The ideas of progress have lately been associated with desires by many to “call it good” and forget both the indignities of the past and the need for greater progress in the future. This has left the Church communities in the U.S. filled with a wide range of discomfort as to how to approach the topic of race.

THE LENSES OF SOCIOLOGY

- “The Talk”
- Being stopped by the police
- Profiling in stores
- Taxi cabs
- The “hate stare”
- Complexion (Shades)
- “Passing”
- Housing communities
- Legacy appointments (schools, jobs, etc.)

EMPATHY = “US” INSTEAD OF “THEM”

- With whom did you empathize when you heard of recent shootings of African-Americans by police?
- With whom did you empathize most when you heard of the police shootings in Dallas and elsewhere?

CLOUDED VISION: TOKENISM

“Not everyone from a particular racial minority speaks *for* that racial minority.” (Evaluate this quote and give some examples. Listen for the examples given from underrepresented groups)

NOTE: Majority cultures are not allowed to determine who speaks for a minority culture!

SYMBOLS MATTER

- Self-reference by a group (e.g., “African-American”)
- Racial Slurs
- The double meaning of some patriotic symbols (e.g., Declaration of Independence; Confederate Flag)
- Re-interpretation and recapturing of once derogatory or defaming terms (“Methodist”, “Queer”, the “N word”)

FROM POLITICS TO THEOLOGY

- The Language of Politics (emphases): *demonization of the other; “us” vs “them”*
- The Language of (Christian) Theology (emphases): *the value of the other; the image of God; the God of diverse community*

FROM POLITICS TO THEOLOGY

- The struggle for equality includes the voices of women in general, especially women of color, historical instances of brutality, and sometimes a “back seat” even in struggles for Civil Rights!
- The Church must deal with biblical/theological issues, while at the same time addressing historical/political realities regarding women, people of color, and the all inclusive mission of God in the world.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Stopping some conversations and starting new conversations (address common misunderstandings/myths)
- Finding ways, even in a less diverse area, to keep the conversations going
- Intentionality (the only way these changes happen – See MLK quote)
- Empathy (no “us/them” dichotomy; we are all “us”)
- From politician to PROPHET! Being a pastor in a country that struggles with racial reconciliation requires a prophetic voice.

SOME QUOTES TO DISCUSS

- “A man can stick a knife 12 inches into your back, pull it out 6 inches, and then boast about what progress the two of them have made in relations! Even if you take the knife all the way out, some wounds will remain.” (Malcolm X)
- “Because God has set us free, we are now commanded to go and be reconciled with our neighbors, particularly our white neighbors. But this does not mean letting whites define the terms of reconciliation.” (James Cone)
- “We live in the United States of Amnesia.” (Michael Eric Dyson)
- “What we need, in order to be truthful, is some means of facing the facts without either hating ourselves for our past or hating those who remind us of it. How can we be free? How can my gestures of friendship be saved from being just one more means of elaborate self-delusion....” (William H. Willimon)