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Trevor O'Reggio

Andrews University, toreggio@andrews.edu

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THE AMERICAN VIRUS — **RACISM** — AND GOD'S VACCINE

by Trevor O'Reggio

America is infected with a virus more deadly than COVID-19, the virus of racism. This deadly virus has infected and infiltrated every aspect of American life. It cannot be treated with a vaccine and, while COVID-19 may eventually disappear, racism will remain with us. The sad tragedy is that we have grown so accustomed to it, especially for those who benefit from it, we have no desire to get rid of it. A short excursion through American history will remind us that recent events have historical roots.

When the first group of Africans landed in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, they had no idea that their descendants would endure 244 years of brutal slavery and that even after emancipation, they would continue to be treated as second-class citizens. Initially, these early Africans worked alongside Irish indentured laborers. When it became apparent to the ruling elite that the African laborers and Irish indentured workers could form an alliance that would benefit them both, they changed the laws to make a distinction between both groups. After Nathan Bacon's Rebellion, this distinction moved the colony away from indentured labor to Black slavery. Thus began the genesis of racial slavery in the American colonies. From then on, Blackness was identified with slavery.

This institution was now race-based. Since many of the slave-holding colonists were professed Christians, they now attempted to justify their brutal treatment of their fellow humans from their sacred text, the Bible. These two-faced hypocrites mined the biblical text to find support for their horrendous practices. Twisting and misrepresenting the Bible, they offered what they considered biblical support for slavery in an attempt to assuage their guilty consciences. It was not uncommon for these self-righteous hypocrites to rape, abuse, torture, and even kill their slaves, then go on to their churches to worship their White God. In the minds of these so-called Christians, Blacks were not fully humans, which made it easier to denigrate and degrade them. Classified with the master's property, they were treated as such. Their value was only in the labor they could render.

Slavery has been part of most human societies, but in America it took on a particularly virulent character. There was a deliberate and conscious effort to dehumanize and debase the slave. While the institution of slavery was bad enough, it was the philosophy that undergirded it that was even more demonic. Many taught that Blacks were created to be slaves or to do any servile work, so even if at some future time when slavery would be abolished, Blacks would never be considered on par with Whites.

White colonists fought the American Revolutionary War ostensibly for freedom. But freedom for who? They complained about British oppression and their lack of representation. Once they acquired their freedom, they now used it to keep others in bondage. Some of them recognized the obvious contradiction, but the majority of them held fast to this peculiar institution, because it was not simply a labor system, but a way of life. In 1790, the Congress passed the first Naturalization Act to determine who could qualify to be an American citizen. Among the qualifications was skin color—Whiteness. Yes, one had to be White to qualify for American citizenship. So, let's be clear about one thing, the Founders of the American Republic set about establishing a White nation. Almost every subsequent law concerning immigration was meant to favor White immigrants from Europe. This is how our nation began; it was organized primarily to benefit Whites. Some argue that the system is broken because it is not benefiting the non-White population. No, it's not broken; it is working exactly as it was designed.

When the Civil War ended, over four million Black slaves were now "free" after rendering over 244 years of unfree labor, (I wonder how much that is in

dollars—trillions, billions, maybe). The newly freed slaves received little help and after around 12 years of mealy support from the Federal government, they were abandoned to the ire and cruelty of the recently defeated Confederates, who went about stripping Blacks of virtually all their civil rights, even though laws were on the books to secure those rights. Not only were their rights taken away, but they were now subjected to widespread terrorism from individual and government actors. Laws were passed restricting their movement, they were re-enslaved through the prison work system, they were forced into debt peonage on the former slave plantations, they were denied access to capital, they were incarcerated for the mildest offenses, their votes were taken away, they could not testify in court against a White person, they were lynched in large numbers, many times on the flimsiest of evidence, and the White perpetrators invariably escaped justice. Blacks were denied jobs, education, and decent housing. Subjected to innumerable humiliations, they

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were segregated and discriminated against. The evils perpetrated against them are too numerous to list. But there is a record in heaven and one day justice will triumph. There was visceral hatred, especially in the South, against Blacks; they were called apes and were told they had no history, culture, or past to be proud of.

The Civil War ended, but the underlying philosophy about Blacks actually flourished and shaped the thinking, culture, customs, and practices of America. White supremacy, which was part of the colonies from their inception, was a virus that was now part of the American body politic. It could no longer be distinguished from the American DNA. It affected every aspect of American life. Policing, which began in America as slave patrols hunting down runaway slaves, was a vital part of reinforcing White supremacy. The police enforced the laws, even if they were blatantly racist, and the police force became the public face of an inherently racist order. How, then, can you account

for the huge disparity of Blacks in the prison system? The police were also supported by a judicial system, judges and prosecutors all working together in a system that was and remains inherently racist and biased against Blacks. This brings us to the recent events of police brutality, especially against Blacks. The record is replete with numerous cases. The invention of cell phones with cameras is only now bringing to light what has been going on for decades. Without the cell phone videos of that police officer putting his knee on the neck of George Floyd, nothing would have come of that case. George Floyd's death would have been written up as just another Black criminal resisting arrest. The knee of the police officer on George Floyd's neck is emblematic of America's knee on the neck of Blacks throughout American history. It is a graphic illustration of the sufferings of Blacks living under a racist socio-economic order set up to disenfranchise and marginalize them.

Is there hope for a cure for his virus of racism? Humanly, I am pessimistic. Racism will not go away.

What must Blacks do in order to strengthen their immune system against it, and learn how to live with it? Work hard, study diligently, learn, succeed, pray, vote, fight injustice wherever one encounters it, march against it, write against it, preach against it, call it out wherever you see it, change the laws, become police officers, go to Congress, form alliances with like-minded people, love each other, support each other, be a father to the fatherless, a mother to the motherless, mentor the young, learn your history, build businesses, invest in your communities, become judges, lawyers, governors, teachers, doctors. Determine in your mind that you will leave the world a better place than when you arrived. Live a life worthy of emulation. Do these and a million other things that will make America a place where, in spite of the presence of the virus of racism, Blacks will not only survive but thrive.

We must fight for social justice and recognize that we have a great ally, our Heavenly Father, who has called us to be ambassadors of justice. The words justice and righteousness are the same in the Bible. A call



to justice is also a call to righteousness. As long as injustice reigns in our land, where the marginalized and the disenfranchised experience the brunt of injustice, God's people cannot remain silent. Some Christians argue that we should not get involved in politics, but only preach the gospel. But I reject that false dichotomy. The pain of injustice is real for the victims who have suffered from mass incarceration, high unemployment, terrible schools, violent neighborhoods, brutality from police officers, neglected communities, drug addiction, gang infestation, inadequate housing. It is easy to blame the victims for their misery, as America has done so often, and wonder why they can't pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Those who make this judgment very rarely understand what the poor are going through. Like the unjust judge in the parable of Jesus in Luke 18:1-8, they blind their eyes and deafen their ears to the pleas of the poor, like the widow in the story. But like this persistent widow, we must not give up and give in. We must protest the problem persistently, which may involve marches, boycotts, and a thousand ways to confront it, but we must never become comfortable and complacent in the face of injustice. No justice, no peace. Do not relent, break the inertia, tear up the apathy. Evil will never go quietly; it sometimes must be ripped up and uprooted. This requires time, energy, effort, and resources. The widow in our story was relentless and tenacious. Recruit others to join in this fight. While the coming of **Jesus** brings an ultimate end to injustice, allow yourself right now to be used by God as an agent in His hand to begin the process of establishing God's kingdom on earth. "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing stream." Amos 5:24 ESV. God's Word is the ultimate vaccine, the antidote for the virus of racism.



Trevor O'Reggio is professor of church history and chair of the Department of Church History.

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