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Faith, Race, and (Non)Violence

July 25, 2017



The Veritas Forum

In 2015, during the fallout of Ferguson, three Black women took the stage at UC Berkley to discuss faith, race and non-violence. Andra Gillespie, associate professor of political science at Emory, Na'ilah Suad Nasir, professor in the graduate school of education at UC Berkley, and Claudia May, who, at the time of this Forum, was a Visiting Scholar in the Department of African American Studies and African Diaspora Studies at UC Berkley. The opening line from our moderator, Claudia May— "Injustice finds no solace in denial"— served as both a framework for this conversation and an provocative invitation for others—an invitation to move past tensions and listen to three powerful perspectives on race in America. This Veritas Forum is deeply personal, but it also explores systemic issues that are increasingly relevant today. We invite you to listen carefully, reflect thoughtfully, and even learn how to model this conversation in your own lives.

Transcript

So, at times it feels as if history functions as a revolving door of never-ending denials. And yet, injustice finds no solace in denial. Recently, I taught to a young African American man, Andra Robie, about the prevalence of racism in America.

I argued that America needed to heal its racial wounds, to which he believed in the future. Andra In 2015, during the fallout of Ferguson, three Black women took the stage at UC Berkley to discuss faith, race and non-violence. Andra Gillespie, associate professor of political science at Emory, explored these issues from a Christian perspective.

Na In Claudia May, at the time of this Forum, was a Visiting Scholar in the Department of African American Studies at UC Berkley, served as moderator. The opening refrain from Claudia May— "Injustice finds no solace in denial— served as both a framework for this conversation and provocative invitation for others, an invitation to move past tensions and listen to these powerful perspectives on race in America. I invite you to listen carefully, reflect thoughtfully, and even learn how to model this conversation in your own lives.

[Music] Judy Scott, Walter Scott's mother, could not watch the whole video that documented the killing of her son. Though the images of her son running for his life weighs on her, Judy Scott does not deny her awareness of the inequitable police practices that mar the police officers in South Carolina's responses to Black men. She is aware of racial profiling.

Nor does she deny her Christian faith. Judy Scott believes that the young Dominican, who filmed the murder of her son, Fédine Santana, was guided by God to capture the horrific scenes surrounding the death of her son. Injustice finds no solace in denial.

Mr. Santana added another perspective to the events surrounding the death of Walter Scott. According to Adam Wintnell of the Independent, Scott maintains that, quote, "Santana only came forward when the police's versions of events that Mr. Scott had seized control of the officers' taser appeared in the media." Injustice finds no solace in denial. And as Walter Scott's girlfriend agrees, the death of her fiancé, she does not hide her tears, her anguish.

Injustice finds no solace in denial. Channeling the sit-ins in the civil rights era, members of the Black branch will continue to make their voices heard as they conduct a modern day sit-in in restaurants located in upscale neighborhoods. Injustice finds no solace in denial.

Though still immersed in grief, Judy Scott's Walter's mother does not deny where her strength comes from. She refuses to let her rage rule her heart. And so she announces that, quote, "Because of the love of God, I feel forgiven." And so she announces that, quote, "Because of the love of God, I feel forgiveness in my heart for the officer," unquote.

She does not try to speak for anybody or everybody. Instead, she speaks for herself even as she affirms her son as a gift, a valuable precious gift to humanity. Judy Scott acknowledges that she wants justice to prevail, and she wants the officer to be tried and convicted for his crime.

During an interview, Judy Scott, her friends and family sang a song by Reverend James Moore called "I Will Trust the Lord." And in her living room, they sang, "I'm going to treat everybody right." To paraphrase these lines, "I will trust in the Lord, Judy Scott, and so many others will stay on the battlefield until everybody treats everybody right." It is my great pleasure and honor to introduce our two speakers, Dr. Andrew Gillespie, Associate Professor of Political Science of Emory University, and our very own Dr. Naiila Naseer, the Department Chair and Associate Professor of African American Studies and African Diaspora Studies here at UC Berkeley. These accomplished scholars and specialists have kindly agreed to engage in a conversation about racial injustice in America, and discuss how this issue interfaces with their experiences, outlook, beliefs, perspectives, and questions. I invite you to listen deeply as we as a community of learners will cultivate an

environment of cultural humility by being open to the possibility that we have much to learn from one another.

Please join me in welcoming our two esteemed scholars. [applause] Good morning. Good evening, shall I say? Okay, so our title tonight is Faith Ferguson and Nonviolence.

Before we launch into some of the meaty questions we have for the evening, I wanted to give the students here a chance to know you both a bit better and get a sense of who you are as people. So let me start with you, Andra. Can you give us a brief sketch of your personal story both in terms of your faith and in terms of your experience of being an African American woman living in America in 2015? Well, thank you for having me here.

I'm actually really happy to be here. I grew up on the East Coast. I grew up in Richmond, Virginia, and I see one of my high school classmates who's a regional director for university over there on the other side of the room.

And so she could tell you a lot about what I was like at 14. But I grew up in a somewhat Christian family. My mother was a strong believer who came to faith when I was a baby.

My father's somewhat, I guess, lukewarm. And I would say that I would describe him as having fallen away from his faith at this stage in his life. But I grew up in a strong Christian home going to church and other types of things.

My mother led me to have a personal faith in Christ when I was a really young child. And so that may be some people's experiences here. But even when you grow up in a Christian household, you have to make a decision for yourself to follow Christ.

And so there were pivotal moments in my life both in high school and in college where I grew in my understanding of faith because intellectually I was growing into that capacity. And I can make really conscious decisions to follow Christ. So my faith is my own.

It's not something that I was raised in. It's something that I actively choose to be a part of. That's the way that I haven't struggled with my faith.

And that's what I say that I haven't struggled with my faith with regards to issues of race. And in particular, I had to deal sometimes with people who profess to be Christians but then do really crazy things in real life. But that's kind of sort of where I am from a faith perspective.

In terms of sort of my cognizance of race, I started to think about race probably as a small child. I have this theory and I'm not a developmental psychologist. But my hunches by watching members of my family, that usually I think black children figure this out by the time they're about four years old, that they look a little different.

And that usually manifests itself in some sometimes troubling ways in its parents'

responsibility to help affirm people in their identity as young children. I didn't think about race. I thought a lot about trying to assimilate as a teenager.

And when I got to college, I was kind of on that path. And it was classes that I took that really kind of struck me to think about race in really critical ways. And so all of a sudden I found myself shifting my focus in political science away from international politics to where race and politics in the United States.

So I've been on that path ever since and doors opened up for me to pursue graduate studies in political science where I focused on race, ethnicity and equality. And it's been really fruitful for me. And I think probably my academic work helps me to process what it's like to be black in America.

And so I'm always thinking about research questions that typically relate to my experiences and also the experiences of people around me. Thank you. And you, Nailah? Yeah, that's a pretty different story.

I guess that's why we're here. And I told the organizers when they asked me to do this, that I wasn't the right person. And I said that because one of the first things they asked me to do was identify myself with respect to a religious community.

And I said, "You know, I just can't really do that." And in part because that part has been pretty personal for me. So I'm just going to invite you all into that space where I am and we'll kind of go from there. So I'll follow your model, Andra, and start with the kind of narrative around my faith.

I did not grow up in a religious family at all. I grew up in a very, very secular working class family here in the Bay Area. I started wrestling with ideas around faith and religion in my early 20s.

Yeah, my early to mid 20s. When I felt like there were many experiences I was having in the world as a young person and as a young woman that didn't fully make sense just from a kind of secular perspective, right? Where you start to feel like this can't be all there is to this. And at that time, I liked how you talked about it being a really conscious journey because it was and is a really conscious journey for me where I decided I wanted to find a faith tradition.

And I kind of shopped around like you'd shop around for anything. I went to churches and mosques and I don't think I went to any synagogues but I explored lots and lots of things and lots of versions of lots of things and really let myself be kind of open to where I was being led. And a couple of years into that I became Muslim and changed my name, covered my hair and was a very staunch member of a Muslim community for many, many years.

And then it started not to fit for me, which is a part that I don't think I've ever talked

about publicly. I think there are people that know me when I first went to the job market and this isn't a professor with my hair covered like all kind of staunchly. Orthodox.

And really at that time, super unapologetic about it. It was just a part of who I was and how I cared myself in the world and I loved it. I loved the comfort and for me what I loved about Islam was knowing that you were doing the right thing, knowing that you had these set of things you could do.

And if you did that, you and God were all right. I also really appreciated the idea that every time you make a lot, every time you make prayer, you start clean. I was like, oh, thank goodness.

And so the notions of forgiveness were really important to me. In any case, there was a point where that didn't fit for me and I'm still kind of wrestling with that, struggling with that and at a place of peace around my personal connection to God and having really come through Islam to develop that relationship. I'll probably talk more about that as we continue and what that means for how I carry myself in the world.

As I said, I grew up working class, African-American family in the Bay Area and was conscious of race as long as I can remember. I went to a high school that was heavily tracked where like many high schools, the white and Asian students were in the higher tracks and the black and latino students were in the lower tracks, the kind of remedial courses. And I questioned that and it didn't make sense to me and I began very early reading about that and thinking about that.

I went to, came here for undergrad and was able to take courses in African-American studies here that really developed my ability to talk about it, to have the discourse, to have the language to think and talk about race. And then went on to a PhD in Educational Psychology at UCLA where again my focus was looking at issues of culture, cognition and race and that's the work that I do today. A lot of the work that I do is in schools.

My last book was titled Racialized Identities. It's about how kids develop a sense of themselves as African-American students and both the African-American and the student part of that develop simultaneously in relation to each other. And it's also about the ways that school environments in particular provide opportunities for identity development.

So not just about the identities people bring into spaces, but the way that spaces tell us who we are or give us options for who we are.

[MUSIC] Exactly eight months ago, Michael Brown was shot by a policeman in Ferguson, Missouri. An event that reignited both a local struggle and a national and international conversation about a range of issues.

So again, Andra, as a political scientist, do you think we have been seeing something new in the past eight months or have the events in Ferguson and the death of Eric Garner in New York, among others, simply serve to highlight an ongoing problem? Well, racial brutality has been going on for years. And so I can be struck by being in graduate school 15 years ago and reading in Hazel Carby's class, you know, accounts of police brutality situations, and the fact that police brutality situations in 1895 in New York. And so that really helped to put some perspective.

So at the time it was just off of the heels of some other very high profile police brutality cases so we could look at the sexual assault of Abner Louima and the murder of Amadou Diallo. And so similar types of situations where the force that was being met for an unarmed black man just didn't merit at all. Like there was no reason for Diallo to have been shot 40 times.

And so we're looking at these situations and processing it at the same time. You know, you sort of realize that this has been a long, ongoing problem. And it hits at certain moments when certain cases get a lot of publicity.

I think a lot of cases have gotten publicity now. I think it's in part because we're in the Obama era. But I also think it's in part because technology has changed and people have taken photographs and videotapes.

So whether it's Oscar Grant here or whether it's Walter Scott in South Carolina, there's now this videotape sort of evidence that some of the things that are happening in the Obama era. And there's also evidence that suggests that things that people of color, particularly black and Latino people, have been saying about police brutality for years have not been made up. And this fits a longer narrative.

So we could go back to the founding of the United States. I happen to be from Virginia. And I went to the University of Virginia where Thomas Jefferson founded the place.

And I refer to him as Mr. Jefferson like everybody else does. But Mr. Jefferson had a slave mistress. And it wasn't until there was DNA evidence that that was actually publicly acknowledged.

It was 1998. So there have been stories for years about the fact that this had happened. But one of the reasons why historians wouldn't believe it, aside from the fact that they just didn't want to believe it, was because they discounted the oral traditions of African Americans who didn't necessarily always have a literate culture to be able to pass those stories around.

And so because it was being passed through an oral tradition and not a written tradition, and the written tradition said this didn't happen, people took the written tradition over the oral tradition. And this just reflects people's own cultural biases and predispositions.

So what we're seeing now is the sort of reckoning with truth and reality in ways that we haven't had a chance to see before.

And so now people are saying, look, black people weren't making this stuff up. You've seen videotape of people saying, I can't breathe and they die. And then police officers get off and are not held accountable for having killed them.

Or you can see somebody making up stories about this guy was getting ready to tase me and there's videotape evidence to say that he was running away from that situation. There's still going to be people who are going to come up with excuses about this who are still going to be sort of recalcitrant in their refusal to accept situations. But as we continue to see more and more evidence like this, this is really going to force people to have the conversation and to come to grips with the fact that these things are real and that they've happened all the time.

Now, you have done a great amount of research on educational disparity and inequity. To what extent do you think our school systems are creating or exacerbating the problems highlighted by Ferguson? Yeah, it's a good question. I think I would even step back and broaden that question a little bit.

And rather than I think schools being the cause, they're another place where the same set of processes play out, right? Where you see structural racism on the one hand and a narrative of meritocracy, right? And the ways in which, similar to the police killings, you see a story about where all equal, we live in a just society, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, the most diligent, get ahead, and a reality that structures life for people very, very differently than that. And I think that what's interesting for me now in this kind of, you know, the kind of Obama moment or post Obama moment is that we are out of touch in a way with the reality. And we've come as a society to believe the narrative, and that's why these videos are so shocking to us, because we actually want to believe, we collectively want to believe that things are better, that things are different, that racism doesn't exist.

And we've convinced ourselves to some degree that that's true, which is why I think when the videos come out, it's like, well, then why was he running away? Or you see the ways people try to hold on to the narratives that the evidence are showing just don't make sense. I think the other connection for me is between issues of discipline in school and the kind of extreme police violence that we've seen so much of this year in particular, but as a part of a long historical continuum. African American, Latino kids, males in particular, but girls also are disciplined in schools at astronomical rates.

And so you see the same, and the root of it is the same, right? It's devaluing a dehumanization that happens in black and brown bodies. That means then you get to, you don't feel the same sense of damage to humanity when people are treated inhumanely. Thank you.

One of the issues raised by the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner is a distinction between conscious and subconscious racism. There is a certain proportion of the US population that will be explicitly and consciously racist in their approach, but there is also a real problem of implicit racism where people make judgment calls on the basis of race without necessarily like necessarily realizing it. Nailah, do you think we are naturally predisposed to be suspicious of people of a different ethnicity or is racial bias a result of our education and socialization? Yeah, well, I mean, I don't think we're naturally, I think we are cognitively predisposed to think in categories, but the substance of those categories is entirely socially and culturally created, right? Race doesn't even really exist.

It's actually not a biological thing at all, it does not exist, so it only exists as a social and cultural construction. So I think that I'm a person who believes socialization and culture are terribly, terribly powerful. And honestly, I think it takes a lot of work to make us racist.

It takes a lot of social work for us to accept the level of inhumanity that we accept as a society. It actually pulls us very far from how we're born into the world and the level of kind of empathy and humanity and compassion that is hardwired into us biologically, spiritually. And so I think that the place that we are now really speaks to how the structures in our society have conditioned us to accept levels of inhumanity.

And the every dayness of that, the fact that we can accept that some people don't have healthcare, that we can accept in the society that there are people who are homeless and we walk past them every day and it's okay, but that's inhumane. Yeah. Andra, do you think we have a natural tendency to discriminate based on factors including ethnicity? If so, how does this square with the Christian belief that all people are made in God's likeness? Well, I think there are a number of things.

So, you know, I agree with Naila. I believe the social psychology literature that tells us about implicit biases. And I think part of the reason why this has come up a lot is because we live in an allegedly post-racial society.

So even before 2008 and we started coining the term post-racial, we knew that we were in a post-civil rights society where the narrative of the country had changed. So most people know that you're not supposed to say certain words or you're not supposed to talk about the biological inferiority or superiority of certain groups. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they don't harbor types of prejudicial stereotypical or discriminatory views about other people and that that doesn't manifest itself in how they treat people.

And so it's subtle. The problem is that you can't point the finger to it. Like, you really, it's always usually subtext.

It's not actually really overt. And so because of that, we spend a lot of time debating this in American society. So, I mean, if we think about law, certain narratives that you've probably heard in political discourse about what to do about residual racism and things that remain entrenched in American society, there's a camp of people who say, well, we took care of everything we could take care of with the Civil Rights Act in the mid 1960s.

So whatever the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act and the Fair Housing Act couldn't take care of, that's individual stuff and we really can't legislate morality in this situation. And so what they think is that that helped to set the norm that everybody is technically equal. And then all the other stuff that happens is basically some type of variance or noise.

That's the part that I disagree with because in part some of those institutions that were created long before the mid 1960s still work and operate and affect each and every one of our lives and help privilege some people and disadvantage other people. And oftentimes in our public policy discourse, we refuse to acknowledge that. And as long as we refuse to acknowledge that, these groupings are going to matter.

And so we don't address that situation. And I think also in particular legally, when people are looking for, so if you want to look at the reason why certain parts of the Ferguson case are not going to be subject to Civil Rights prosecution, for instance, it's in part because of the types of patterns that legally people are looking for have to be like extremely overt. So Darren Wilson would have basically had to have been a card carrying member of the Ku Klux Klan with his hood in the closet for him to have been brought up on federal civil rights charges.

That's the kind of stuff that we have a hard time kind of conceptualizing because we don't want to talk about stuff. And so because we don't want to talk about stuff, we don't get over it. And I think that relates to a larger spiritual issue that I think sometimes we have a harder time dealing with.

So we're all God's creation. God made all of us equal. But we also live in a fallen world.

And so we also have inherited a very sinful nature. And so because we've inherited a sinful nature, we're prone to do stupid and selfish things. And I think racism is sort of in many instances, the height of selfishness.

You're trying to hold goods, power and services for yourself or for people like you. If you've decided that an alliance with people who look like you is okay. And so I firmly believe and affirm the notion of attacking structure.

I firmly believe in the power of education to help educate people out of some of their prejudices and helping people to understand what stereotypes are and understanding what unconscious bias is. But I also want to affirm the fact that we're always going to be

selfish and tell that part of us is actually surrendered to God to actually bring us back into right relationship. With himself.

That's the part where that's the part that sort of puts everything together. Because I know in my own human nature, I'm naturally going to be predisposed against certain people. And yes, it manifested itself.

It was culturally or socially sort of inscribed onto me that I probably have certain biases towards certain people. So it probably wasn't predetermined which biases I was going to have. I have certain biases because I was born at a certain time, certain place in a certain skin and a certain location in the United States.

But the impulse to try to make myself more superior than other people, that was perfectly part of my sin nature just manifests itself differently in other people. Christianity in America has a mixed history when it comes to questions of race. On the one hand, many church leaders and self professed Christians were part of the machine of racism and felt no tension between their Christian beliefs and their ownership of slaves or oppression of African Americans.

On the other hand, the civil rights movement in America followed the abolitionist movement in Britain by being a strongly religiously motivated movement led by convinced Christians who saw their campaign for justice as inextricably linked to their faith in Jesus. And today studies show that African Americans are the most religiously affiliated ethnic group in America and that more than three quarters of African Americans identify as Christians with some sort of church affiliation. Andra, why have Christians been prominent on both sides of the history of civil rights and racial equality in America? The short answer is Christians do a really bad job of following Jesus.

I mean, that's just the way it is. Especially in this country. I mean, so it was actually really funny.

A couple of years ago, I took an adult Sunday school class at my church that was about apologetics and sort of sort of defending the faith. And one week was, how do you defend Christianity when Christianity has been sort of responsible for all kinds of drama in the world? So you can look at the crusade or you can look at slavery. And I remember somebody raised their hand and said, how do we know that Christians were actually a part of that? And it was just like, oh, come on.

Seriously. And the lesson from that was, I remember seeing her a couple weeks later in church as we were coming back up from the communion line and I rolled my eyes at her. And God convicted me of, you got to show love to her even though you think she's stupid.

So I thought about that. I mean, that was just, I mean, and even kind of sometimes when

I see her church today, I still have to remember you must show love and all of those kinds of things. It was really, really hard.

So, you know, oftentimes we conflate our own cultural biases with Christianity and try to rationalize what we do culturally as saying that it has the imperature of God on it instead of actually checking with God to see what he thinks. And so as a result of it, there are people who think that, well, because it looks okay or everybody else around me is doing it, that therefore God must have said it was okay. And here in the United States, if it's marginally successful in the short term, then it must actually have the blessing of God upon it because we made a lot of money off of it.

So, yeah, I think that we have to be careful about this. And many times people were just taking their own self-interest and then saying that their self-interest was actually God's interest. And we really have to interrogate that and challenge it.

And there are certain things. I'm not talking about slavery. I'm not talking about the crusade.

There are certain things where I think people are entitled to their own opinions and to their own preferences on these types of things, and they're interested in their own perspective. And so you could understand where people's self-interest kind of comes in. What I want people to do is to just say, this is my self-interest.

Like, I don't need you to say, I oppose a 39% marginal tax rate because Jesus said that taxation was bad because Jesus did not say that. Right? Your bank account says, I don't want to pay that extra 4%. And I'm okay with that.

I'm just going to disagree with that. And so as long as we understand that, instead of actually trying to sort of impute some type of righteousness onto it, I'm okay with it. But so often, we don't.

And that's where this becomes really problematic. And I think that that ends up undermining the testimony of Christians in the public space. Yeah.

Can I say right? Before we turn to the next, please. I want to add to that because I feel like you hit on something really, really important and a really important distinction that is true with respect to Christianity, but is true with respect to religion, and almost any ideology as well, that we are, what we're naturally disposed to do is rationalize. And that's where I think I would say that there's kind of God and Spirit and being directly connected to God and hearing the Word of God in your own life, and then there's your ego.

And when you conflate those two things, it's always going to be a problem. And so I think the way that I think about it maybe slightly differently than you is I actually don't think about, I mean, that may be true, but let me just say it then, I don't think about the ego

as a part of your essential self. Right.

So for me, the ego is you need that to live in this world that will stomp you down otherwise, but you also, you should be managing your ego, your ego should not be running you. And that for me is a part of the spiritual work so that those, your kind of spiritual muscle, your spiritual self is stronger than the ego that wants to act in a way that is selfish that puts other people down that leaves you on top. And that you can recognize when that is happening internally so you can pull yourself back to the, to the point where you can, you can say, well, this is actually just because I have a self interest in this situation.

And that for me connects with these issues of race because what happens, I mean, I was in a, say too much as the cab cameras on, huh? I was in a family meeting the other day where it was clear that there were some things being expressed that were out that were about a personal agenda, but they got wrapped in well I just think this is better for the collective good. Well, that's actually not true. And I just need to know you can recognize the difference, but, yeah, because I'll tell somebody that your agenda and they'll be like, you shouldn't have said that.

Well, why I will say is that scripture is not in denial of the messiness of our humanity. And I think that so often those who, of us who call ourselves Christians are not really often willing to engage with that messiness. Okay, now you came from a Muslim background and Islam represents the second largest religious affiliation of African Americans.

How do you see the relationship between Islam and race in America today? I think it's a, it's a long, deep relationship. I mean, many people came to Orthodox Islam in this country through the nation of Islam, right, which was very much a political and social movement. It has its own kind of long history.

And people were drawn to it in part because there's a little theology mixed in there, but there was a lot of strength and standing up to the system and developing an ideology and an identity that was in counter in opposition to a racist system and being able to say black people are okay just as we are. And that was, I think, one of the gifts that the nation of Islam gave the nation. And then there was a point where Elijah Muhammad died and his son brought the converted, the nation of Islam followers, into Orthodox Islam.

And so I think Islam has long been in the black community seen as and taking action as a kind of radical black self-love organization. And I think African American Muslims kind of come through and build on draw on that tradition to be unapologetically who you are. I think that post-9/11, the world is a different place for Muslims in this country.

And that has happened in some ways instantly and in some ways gradually, that if you

just attend to the images of Muslims in the public media, they are images of terrorists. And that has been reinforced again and again and again. And so it's almost like in some ways Muslims are the new black people in this country.

They're the group that everybody's okay demonizing and it goes kind of unquestioned, unexamined, undiscussed. And so I think that's something that we deal with on this campus in major, major ways and all that controversy over Bill Maher graduation. And it's something that we are in the midst of dealing with as a society.

And it's a little terrifying. I think it's a terrifying moment. I love how you're sort of modifying the whole notion of terror, you know, who's really being terrorized.

I mean even to think about that, I can't remember what stated was the young Muslim couple that was killed supposedly over a parking space and the way that that got spun in the media and the way that it was, it didn't, the parts of it that were about ethnicity and religion did not become a part of the mainstream story. And in fact the incident itself, which speaks to this power of technology, didn't get on the mainstream media's lens until it went crazy on Twitter. Right.

And so similar to the ways in which we don't call police violence racialized, we don't call terrorism against Muslims racialized either. Yeah, very good.

[Music] And, Andra.

Martin Luther King was obviously a hugely influential figure in the civil rights movement, motivated by his Christian faith and advocating for a non violent response to the violence that had been seen and was being perpetrated against African Americans. Do you think non violence is still the right approach to racial injustice? In general, yes. But by non violence, I don't mean being non confrontational.

And so I think it's actually sort of a really important distinction to make because I think we see Martin Luther King marching, we know Martin Luther King had a dream and we sometimes minimize the radical parts of Martin Luther King that were also being informed by his faith. And so this was a person who in the latter years of his life was deeply unpopular because all of a sudden it wasn't all about peace and love. He was talking about economic redistribution and people had a problem with that.

You know, his notion of non violence extended to not being engaged in the war in Vietnam. And there were people who found that deeply problematic. So, you know, non violence is a tool for a particular reason.

And it was in part because they were taking advantage of the new technology that was available to them to paint a stark contrast. So they knew who their enemy was and they knew that their enemy was crazy and would overreact. And if it ended up on television, people would see black people getting beaten down by hoses and dogs because they

wanted to sit at lunch counters or they wanted to go to school and that that would eventually kind of sort of captivate the hearts and minds of the country so that it would turn the tide.

And what they were doing was that they were asking for the country to just live up to its creed. To live up to the things that our founding documents that we were supposed to have. And so all they were asking for was things that were inherently conservative and so it very much worked in that situation.

But for his time, King was actually considered a militant. And he was considered a militant relative to older African American leaders who wanted to play brokerage politics and go behind the scenes and promote incremental change. So they were hoping to do things slowly kind of behind the scenes and not upset the vote, the vote and then eventually, you know, blacks and whites would be equal in the south.

And people just kind of got a little impatient for that so you can understand why. You know, when people started to talk about it's not non violence versus violence, it's non violence versus self defense. So I think, you know, we have this image in our head about who the Panthers were and so, you know, what they were talking about was not necessarily violence for the sake of violence.

They were talking about self defense. And so it's understandable sort of that particular perspective. But I think for us today, confrontation actually has to be an important part of it.

So it's the idea that you don't let sleeping dogs lie, that you don't just let open wounds sit and fester or you don't pretend that the stuff isn't there. You have to call things out. And so in many instances, sort of the biblical principle there is kind of confession.

Right. So when we're in denial, we're not confessing things and when we're not confessing things, then God can't work. So remember it says, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But it's the moment of confession. It's not you trying to clean it up. It's you saying, I messed up.

I can't fix this. So God, what you did at the cross of Calvary can fix the situation. So I'm letting you take over this to help fix this.

And so when I think about what needs to happen in this country and what are for us to truly move toward racial reconciliation, the first thing that has to happen is that there has to be an acknowledgement of all of the stuff that went badly. And so I think people are usually kind of like, okay, we'll acknowledge that slavery was bad and we'll acknowledge that Jim Crow was bad or we'll acknowledge that internment was bad. We don't really want to acknowledge that removing Native Americans from their lands was

bad.

We don't want to talk about microaggressions. There are all kinds of things we don't want to talk about. Well, those things that we don't talk about, that's the stuff that festers and that's the stuff that usually ends up manifesting itself in riots.

And so if you don't talk about it, then we're dooming ourselves to having the cyclical problem of racial profiling or whatever other racial inequality issue that we're going to have. So if we don't deal with this now, the same way I could tell you about Amadud Yalu and Abner Lulima when I was your age, 15, 20 years from now, is going to be somebody else. And so we either deal with it now or we're dooming ourselves to continually perpetuate the cycle in the future.

And then I said, Nailah, speaking of nonviolence, do you feel unique, pressure, not only as an African American, but also as someone with a Muslim background to prove yourself to be a peaceful person? And how has expectation to be a model minority affected you and how have you seen it affect others? That's kind of a deep question. I don't feel the need to prove myself to be nonviolent or peaceful, nor do I feel the need to be a model minority. And in part for me, that's because I have made a decision not to operate in reaction to, right? Because if you start to take all of that on, it's paralyzing.

And the truth is I don't represent black people, I don't represent Muslims. And I don't take on that burden as I move in the world. And for me, there's a freedom in that.

And not the kind of freedom, what is the actress that made those silly comments about not being black, or ravens of moans? Not in a ravens of moans kind of way, where you just deny membership just because it's uncomfortable. But in an unapologetic way where you say, yes, this is part of who I am. I have a dedication to my people of all kinds, all of my kinds of people, and I have a dedication to all oppressed people.

But I don't see my actions as needing to prove to the world that black people aren't bad, or that Muslims aren't violent, or I don't take that burden on it. And part of what that is for me is being able to be, at this point, at this age, being able to be in my own truth as I move in the world, and being able to call out injustice when I'm called to do that. Not because I care what people in the room think about that, but because if it occurs to me, it's something that I am inspired to bring to a situation.

So I kind of feel like each of us has our own unique set of skills and talents and gifts, and that those are God given. And so your job is to develop those, to be in tune with those, to use them in the world, because the way that you fail to fulfill your kind of covenant with God, or your agreement with God, your implicit agreement with God, is not to do that, right? It's to deny your voice, it's to silence yourself, it's to conform, it's to be what other people want you to be, it's to pretend to be what you're not. You are who you are exactly because that's what you're supposed to be, and that's the unique thing you bring to the

world.

You're not bringing the thing, Destiny and I have a different thing we bring to the world. You and I have a different gift to give. I can't be running around trying to give your gift, that don't make no sense.

And it leads you to get wrapped up in these ego things around how are people seeing me, how are people perceiving me, do they think I'm smart enough, do they think I'm good enough, and that's always a losing. If that's the road you're going down, that's always a losing battle. For me the questions are more about, am I fulfilling my mission? If I have a passion for justice, for equality, for seeing, I think one of my personal missions is creating healing spaces for people, right? And so that's the spirit with which I come to my work as department chair, the spirit with which I come to my work as a faculty member.

So my metric is, am I doing that? Whether people see that or acknowledge it, or whether it gains me accolades or not, that's not the set of issues that I'm most deeply concerned with. Well you're living in freedom then, right? When I remember, when you remember, just keeping it real, right? Keeping it real. Okay, so what can students here tonight do, both now and their future careers to make a difference to racial equality in the US, and this is to both of you who have wants to start first.

Well I guess I'll start. First thing is take advantage of your education, take advantage of the fact that you're here, take advantage of the fact that there are great people who are studying these things and then teaching from them. So I mean numbers of people, so you can look at Nailah, you can look at colleagues in her department, there are colleagues in African American studies and educational studies and political science who I know deeply care about and study these issues.

This is the time for you to learn about those types of things. Like when I heard Ravenson Mone's comment, my first reaction was, "Oh poor baby needs to go to college." I was like, "No one in the view from the cause, we sure needs to take a couple classes so that she can understand." Like I understood the impulse of what she was trying to say, but she's not articulating it well because she hasn't been trained to have the vocabulary to be able to talk about and to process those types of issues. And so this is a real privilege that you have, and so take that privilege and then you can take what you have learned and then share that with your friends and with your family and then one day with your children to actually sort of help them to be able to access that.

The other thing that I would tell people is to really kind of self-examine themselves and really come to grips with people's biases because everybody has them, we've all kind of had them culturally inscribed on us. And so understanding them is actually what's power. The reason why subconscious biases work is because they go unexamined.

When you examine them and you actually make them conscious, then you're like, "Oh, I shouldn't think that. That's actually like, you know, that's a biased or discriminatory thought." And so you'll likely behave accordingly. And then I know this is actually really, really hard and sometimes there's more subtle ways to do it and sometimes there are explicit ways to do it.

But when people say and do stupid things around you, lovingly call them out on it. You know, so, you know, I've been with people who started to make comments like, "Oh, we're in a bad neighborhood." Basically all of us are with brown people. And yes, you know, and so you could look socioeconomically, but just because it's poor doesn't mean it's a bad neighborhood.

So my reaction to that situation is not to give somebody a lecture and hoorang them about how racist they are, but to say, "Looks fine to me." To see if they kind of like, you know, start to update sort of like their thinking and their language and also learn to listen. I think especially in communities of color, there's a tendency to focus on the oppression of one's own group without putting it in a global context. And so there are people in other countries who look like you or don't look like you, who are going through the same types of systemic types of oppression.

And so it's always helpful to kind of know that and to be cognizant of it. And then if you feel so called to actually make this your life's career, then go forward knowing that there will be people who support you in doing that. Yeah, I guess I would.

I mean, I think she said all the good things, so I'm just good. That's what happens when you go second behind brilliant people, one of my philosophies never to do. But I guess I would just add that having a life and a career that's dedicated to pushing back against racial injustice is a little bit like, you know, that metaphor of the guy that's walking on the beach and the beach is covered in jellyfish, right? And jellyfish are going to die because they're all on the beach and he's picking up one after the other and throwing it in the water and throwing it in the water.

And you know, the person that's with him says, you do realize that most of these jellyfish are going to die, that you're only saving like a few of them. How do you have any illusion that this work that you're doing matters? And the guy says, well, it mattered to that jellyfish. I think it's kind of like that, you know, where the problems are so vast, they're so huge, they're so overwhelming that you have to kind of measure your success in smaller, more micro ways.

You're not going to change this whole system of oppression that's been developed and continues to perpetuate, but you can change small pieces. You can create small spaces in the world that operate differently and that has to be enough to kind of fulfill you. Otherwise, you just, you can get lost in a despair, right? So I think that's the other part for me is being connected to your sources of hope and joy and love and dedicating

yourself but not martyring yourself, right? That you have to be whole in order to do this kind of work and kind of attending to that wholeness.

Because I think sometimes we avoid getting whole and throw ourselves into the work, right? Because it allows us to not do the kind of introspection that you're talking about. So again, just recognizing when you're doing that, you know, it's like that when you have a big test and all of a sudden the biggest priority is to clean your house. Kind of like that, just know, okay, I am officially procrastinating.

Go ahead and clean! But just know that that's what you're doing. So go ahead and throw yourself into the work, but recognize when there might be some inner things that you need to work on and heal and give yourself the time and space to prioritize those as well. I want to add on to this whole notion of healing as well because I think at least from A, not the Christian perspective, but A, Christian perspective, I think it's really important to continue to learn how to bring all of yourself to God.

To bring your messiness, to bring your anger. God's not overwhelmed by that anger. And I think there's a way in which we do this disconnect between how we talk to our friends and how we talk to God.

And I think it's really important to, when you experience racial injustice as one of the many injustices that people go through, is to be as real with God as you are with some of the people in your inner circle. I also think it's really important that, and I'm going to speak specifically to people of color, that there have been strategies of resistance that we have learned from families or communities that sometimes we don't legitimate or privilege because they're not theorized as being acts of agency. And for example, I have my parents, especially my stepfather, my parents are Jamaican, and he made it, he was very clear that he was never going to change the way he spoke.

And it didn't matter if people did or did not understand him. He held on to his Creole Jamaican accent. And I think that for me was a real act of resistance and agency and pride.

The other thing is when black people in the 50s, when they came over to England, and you'll find this in Duke Joints in the south and the east coast, where they weren't welcome in certain gatherings, they would create their own gatherings parties in their own home. And again, it was a way to find release from the pressures. And I think we also need to be mindful that we don't define ourselves by our suffering.

I think each, in one day, there is so much to explore, and there's so many possibilities that we experience that should not be reduced to suffering, really. And so I think we need to be mindful that we don't see ourselves completely through the lens of suffering. And then when it comes to identity, many people think about ethnicity and faith as parallel categories.

Someone might say, "My parents are African-American Christians, so I'm an African-American Christian." Or, "My parents are Indian-American Hindus, so I'm an Indian-American Hindu." "Asking me to change or reconsider my faith would be like asking me to change the color of my skin." In what ways do you see your faith identity as in a different category from your ethnic and cultural identity? Or do you see your faith as a by-product of your cultural background? Well, I mean, I would be remiss if I didn't say that it wasn't part of my culture. But at the same time, my faith and my race are two different identities. I think they're complementary, but they're definitely different.

I look at the claims of Jesus Christ as being universal, and then also exclusive at the same time until I believe that Christ died for everybody, and that he died and meant to be the Savior, and meant to have a relationship with everybody. And I think that can get filtered through different cultural experiences and through different cultural prisms and be equally valid. And so I think the history of the United States and the history of the West in particular, particularly in the last 200 years, where we saw missionaries who were extremely well-meaning, who actually did start to impose a certain type of cultural hegemony on places that they visited and what we would now call the developing world, I think helps to conflate that in ways that could be very damaging to sort of the Christianity in terms of its image, but then it also, I think, sends a really wrong message because I think they told a lot of people that cultural practices that really didn't have anything to do with whether or not somebody believed that Christ died for them and rose from the dead.

All of a sudden, God labeled as bad when it's just different. And so that kind of different is okay. And so you can have different cultural practices, you can have different customs, and still all be united around this notion that you believe in Christ and you believe in what Christ did at Calvary and you think that he's got.

And I think that's really hard for us to get away with. I mean, I also think it's a difference sometimes between taste. So I have certain types of taste differences, even looking within Christianity, that are just my personal preferences might be sort of culturally informed, but that doesn't mean that it's different.

So for instance, when I was in college, I know you guys have a different sort of ethnic fellowships on campus that started in the late 90s because of people like me who would complain that I heard too much acoustic guitar at large group. So there was one time where they let me run phrase and worship during a large group, and I went the opposite end of the spectrum and started singing Negro Spirituals. One of my friends looked at me like, "You are so wrong." But that's just a taste.

Like there's nothing wrong with acoustic guitar. And as much as I can't stand the FCA version of Amazing Grace, it's okay. Like that's just my personal taste.

What starts to happen is that people start to create these crazy narratives about why

that's not spiritual. And then they're making it up because they can't point to anything in the text that says, like, "Yeah, that you have to sing Amazing Grace one way or another." So I just needed to get over myself and realize that I was in a space where I was not in the majority and that as long as that got respected, and as long as people sort of asked me to affirm myself in certain ways, we could all get along and be fine with that. And so I think the other thing that kind of relates to that in terms of faith is the idea that God doesn't have grandchildren.

So each and every person has to make a decision for themselves about what they believe and who they're going to follow. So you can't just fall back on when my parents did it this way or my grandparents did it this way. The call is for each and every one of us to make a decision about those kinds of things.

So you can't feel, "Oh, I was raised in America, so therefore I have to be Christian." Yeah, no, I mean, you have to sort of be more thoughtful about this and make a decision on your own. Yeah, I think about it a little bit differently because obviously I don't have a religious tradition in the way of like I grew up this way and so this is a part of my cultural heritage. I always see myself as marginal to lots of community, so I belong to lots of different spaces sometimes they don't so well.

But let me see if I can articulate this. The connection for me is that God uses your race or ethnicity to push you to grow in the ways that you need to grow, which is to say that my belief is we are here in human form as spirits in human form with the task to grow, to become more compassionate, to become more loving, to become more courageous, to become more accepting, to become more whole. And that one of the ways that we do that is here on earth in this society and in any society, you do it by facing hard things.

The only way we ever grow, like if you work out, your muscles get stronger when they face resistance, your spirit gets stronger when you face hard things. Being a subjugated person, being a member of an oppressed group is a hard thing. God is using that to push you to grow.

And so that's really more the way that I think about it and that each of us from whatever kind of cultural perspective or family ethnic history that we come from has particular kinds of challenges that are really at their core about helping us become bigger and wiser and more. So that when we leave this earth, when we leave this human form, we leave our spirits stronger than they were when we came here. And so I think that then, you know, I study African American Studies.

I'm a believer in the importance of ethnicity, race, being a member of a cultural community, but from a spiritual perspective, it's just a part of one of the tools that is used to push us.

[MUSIC] We're going to move into Q&A. It's of racism as white as perhaps on a day to

day basis, be more aware and conscious of our actions in order to not perpetuate racism.

Yeah, I'm not sure I believe there are that many positive aspects to racism. And I get the, I get that you get more stuff sometimes, and I guess that could be viewed as a positive thing. You get more stuff, stuff comes more easily.

But I think that it's almost like the, if you're a parent, which I know most of you aren't, and you're raising kids, one of the worst things you can do for your kid is give them a lot of stuff really easily, right? And so I see it as an advantage at one level, but a deep disadvantage at another level, which is to say people in privilege, if any sort of privilege, don't see the full reality. And so as a woman of color in the academy, I am privileged to be a faculty member. I don't deal with the reality of this campus and the way that you all do, right? That privileges me and that it's my days might be a little easier moving through this place.

But it disadvantages me and then I then lose touch, right? And there's a lack of understanding and a blindness that that provides. But I'll take the question in the spirit in which it was asked, which is what can you do? I think read, talk to people, be open to your assumptions being challenged, know that we are all operating from a set of biases, and know that there are things you cannot see. And when people tell you that they are there, know that you cannot see them and yet they are there.

And I would argue, I would add to that, not necessarily argue because I think sometimes the things that I've encountered is that when that other perspective gets presented, it gets discounted. And sometimes it gets discounted offhand without people really stopping to think and process whether or not that was a valid perspective. So, you know, I think a lot of it is sometimes learning to kind of shut up and sit back and listen and not necessarily feel the need to always have to take the lead in certain situations.

And in fact, it is empowering for other people to liberate themselves. And so sometimes that doesn't always come through. And so sometimes when people are well-meaning and they intend to help, they end up offending in that space because they end up perpetuating that same type of privilege in certain spaces that are supposed to be liberatory.

I have a dear elder who says her daily prayer is I pray I would never be unteachable. And I think one of the ways that especially those who claim the Christian faith is their faith, God is a great teacher. And I think we don't ask Jesus for enough help.

Help me to see a person through your eyes. Help me to listen to them through your ears. I do not know what to do, but my eyes are on you.

I think it does take a certain humility to be able to realize that you can't see others from your own strength or own ego. We have to be quick to listen and slow to speak. It's a

good idea to actually study how Jesus related to people.

Go figure. [laughter] I just think there's a lot of pondering and studying we have to do. And for many of us, we live in a very quick society and everything's like, you know, so the idea of soaking in an idea or pondering is kind of a strange concept for many of us because unless we can say watch a TV program, you know, within 24-hour periods consistently and then we're satisfied and then we move on, we're making choices about what we soak in and what we don't.

So I think it would be interesting to just ask Jesus and say, I don't know how to relate. And reveal those parts of me, the preferences, the prejudices that I do carry to the table. Let's just say you have it.

We have it. And let's just be open to the possibility of being a teachable people. And I think it's also important to know that privilege, I think of the subtext of this on the surface, it might have seemed obvious that we might have been talking about white people.

And over dinner met with some students and somebody mentioned intersectionality, which means that people have multiple identities. And sometimes certain identities are privileged in certain spaces and not privileged in other spaces. So there may be times when it's some other identity that's getting privileged.

So, you know, if you're in a space of color and it's men talking more than women, that's a time where people might want to think about that. It could be class. It could be, you know, lots of different types of situations.

It could be faith. There could be lots of instances where some group has power and another group doesn't. So it wouldn't always make assumptions that, you know, it's always certain people that are always privileged.

Because there are always instances where some people are privileged and some people aren't. It's just that usually there's some people who tend to be privileged more often than other groups are. And that's also an important thing to kind of keep in mind.

I read something somewhere that somebody said away, and this is specifically for white people, and this is a white woman saying this, for white people to understand, get into know people of color, drive through a neighborhood during the daytime, and not the nighttime. And I went, "We're not a zoo." You know, we're not to be sort of gork-tack, you know, as you're driving through, you know, maybe with your feet on the pedal, you know. I thought, "No, I think if I look at scripture again, you know, I don't think, see one time where Jesus denied eating at somebody's home.

We had a fabulous table fellowship, just talking, sharing ideas. I think there's a lot to be said to having meals with folk and sharing stories and really listening to one another. So

I think that's an investment in time.

And I know on a personal level, whenever I harden my heart to a group of people, I like what Nylie said, especially around '91, there was a couple of, there's a terrorism against Muslims that was happening. And you know, I was reading certain newspapers, and I was just like, I thought my heart began to harden. And I thought that, and I went, "You know what? I just, I started to pray through being real with God, and I just said, I felt a sense to don't read those papers, because they're not helping you see the humanity, the fullness of the humanity of a certain group of people.

So I just stopped doing it. It just, it wasn't, and it's so insidious how it kind of creeps in. You know, but I have to be open to my own messes of humanity, that even though I grew up with like 80% Muslim and Hindu and Sikhs in my neighborhood, my heart can still be hardened.

So God tends to put me in places, so I can love, learn how to love, but I have to learn how to love by engaging with folk, and realizing I have a lot to learn from them. Another question? Y'all just killed it with that really long response. Thank you so much.

I was really formative. I guess, it's really hard to put your question, because y'all just killed it. I guess as students, this is one of a text in question, can you expand on how to take advantage of the educational system when it, when even being here, is low key races and very biased, and it requires a high level of assimilation from students of other cultures, and makes it hard to address racism? I'll start on that one, because I have a quick and easy answer for all of you.

Take a class in African American studies and ethnic studies. And I say that not just to plug my own department, which I think is fabulous and amazing, but also because part of the privilege of being here is learning a different discourse. We're in a dangerous time that the, I'm a 90s child, you know what I mean? We talked about race in my generation, and that was part of our colloquial collective discourse, and that's not true in the same way anymore.

So even just to have the language, to have your ideas expanded to wrap your mind around understanding racism and race and social structure in new ways, you have to have access to people who are thinking about it differently, and you have access to some of the best minds in the country around that here at Berkeley. So that's what, I mean, what I would say in terms of taking advantage of being here, take advantage of being here, that you leave here able to talk about and think about race in expanded and more complex and more nuanced and more informed ways. Yeah, as an acting chair in the African American Studies Department, I couldn't agree more.

And just on a practical level, people notice enrollments, and so when people don't enroll in classes because they think they know it already, sometimes they're people who think,

you know, well, if it's African American Studies or Asian American Studies or Latino Studies, well I'm black, I'm Asian, I'm Latino, I know this already, you don't. Just that there's a way that people sort of discuss and analyze these issues from a systematic standpoint that is going to be richer and broader than any conversation you ever had at your dinner table at Thanksgiving. Yeah, it's like saying, you know, my father was a doctor and I can practice medicine just by osmosis, if you kind of similar, but it's only issues of race and education that people think you can just pick up enough in your regular everyday world.

Yeah, there's a science, there's a science. So your work is really important in this regard because we once went to the den table about how many of you grew up with a concept that you have to be five times better than the average white person to get ahead? How many of you had that? Okay, so I remember somebody giving a testimony about this and they said that they were given this, told this around four or five, and how it just traumatized him, you know, just the weight of that. And I hadn't really thought about it because I just sort of girded myself, I said, okay, that's what you've got to do.

And I think there's a way in which not only are you, ironically, almost dehumanizing yourself in the process because you're trying to reach a level that even as a young child you're not quite sure what that is. And these were sometimes parents who had not gone through the whole education system as well, so you have all of those challenges. So I think it's really important to have those discussions so we can both celebrate those strengths of our culture that really help us to survive, but also to complicate, if you like, and really rethink those strategies that have not been healthy.

Like where there are silences in our culture that we have to start thinking about, how do those silences actually encroach upon my personhood? So there's those kinds of discussions that can be had in those classes. How do you respond to notions that Christianity is a white man's religion used to oppress and euthanize African American people? [laughter] Well, there is nominal Christianity, and then there is real faith in Christ. And so there are lots of people who claim to be Christians, and it says in the Bible, there will be people who say, "Lord, Lord," and the Father will say, "I didn't know you." Now, granted, I think there are some racist people who are legitimately going to heaven, and then God's going to have to tell them about themselves when they get there.

[laughter] Or as my mother puts it, they're going to find out that black people aren't in a corner in heaven that you actually get to kind of walk. [laughter] Agency, agency, there you go. So, yes, there is a cultural Christianity that has been used to jockey for position, particularly in the Western world.

That's not biblical Christianity. And so another saying of my mother is that Jesus has bad PR. And so every time a televangelist does something crazy, I'm just like, "Oh, Jesus has

bad PR." There's people, and what they do, and then there is what Christ did for us at Calvary.

And so there's that idea that I can't love my neighbor as myself. I really can't by myself. I can't not be racist or classist or have any other ism by myself.

I can try, and I can do pretty well, but I'm going to screw up someplace. I can't juggle all the responsibilities that I have by myself. But Christ came to die for me, to restore me to a right relationship with himself so that I could abide in him and so that he could give me the strength to walk through all of the stuff that I have to walk through.

And so that is my relationship with God. That's irrespective of what other crazy people might be doing in the next pew. And that's also different from what society does.

And so as long as that relationship is straight, then I know that that's actually sort of what real Christianity is. It's not the cultural Christianity. It's not the political Christianity that we've seen so much.

I mean, I could start naming names, but politicians who name the name of Christ and lie all the time, like on PolitiFact, like that's deeply problematic. It doesn't serve Christ well at all. But that also suggests that there's something in their personal relationship with Christ that they have to work on.

I went to Ghana a couple of years ago, and there's a doorway that's the door of no return where slaves were. After they went through those doors, they would never come back because they were rammed into slave ships of which some slave ships were actually called Jesus, just saying. But what was interesting was that there was a church on the site.

And in the cellar of that church was where slaves were held. So you had, you know, on the top a worship arena where people would worship God. And then in the cellar, there were slaves who were chained to one another, where there's very little alliance, where they sort of covered their own excrement.

And I think it's a really good physical symbol of the ways in which Christianity, as part of those who have sadly claimed Jesus' Lord, have appropriated Jesus' Lord to do atrocious acts. And I do think part of what we do need to do is acknowledge that. We just need to continue to acknowledge it and say, it happened, and it was real.

And we've abused this gospel for selfish interests, for political reasons. Again, scripture's not in denial of that. I would go so far as to say, there's liberation in theologians who say that Jesus was a revolutionary.

He was as a peacemaker, and he wasn't. I think in terms of Lactet, the Christian hip-hop artist, he wasn't anomaly. And he doesn't fit well with anybody's thinking.

Because every time you say, Jesus was this, Jesus will go, "Mmm, actually, I'm going to talk to this person." So deal with that. You know, or Jesus said this, and went, "Mmm, actually, there's this. Messy.

Very complicated." But sadly, it's one of the things, God, what's your wisdom of having this word? Because honestly, it can be so appropriated to really hurt people, to wound people, to malign people. And yet, for me, it's incredibly liberating and for so many other people. But I live with that tension very much so.

And I think you could, I mean, just, the question was about Christianity, but I'm feeling as a non-Christian in the room. I want to create this space for other ideas. And I mean, I guess I would just expand what you all are saying.

And I believe in all of the prophets, right? And so what Muhammad brought, what Jesus brought, what Buddha brought, and that that message, that fundamental message is the same in each case. What people do with that message, kind of as soon as the body is cold, is try to make the message about the person. And not about all of this ways in which God sends people to help us come closer, right? To keep us from kind of spinning out into the world of our own egos and our own greed.

And that that message is kind of consistent across prophets. Thank you for sharing that. Another question from text is, "Why do you think that society emphasizes that African Americans must remain nonviolent? But the perpetrators of police brutality are justified in their violence against black bodies.

What social factors promote this double standard and how do we internalize this double standard?" Okay, so I mean, that message goes back to long history, where stereotypes about blacks have long been that they were brutish, hard to control, needed to be corralled. And so the notion of the black body, especially the black male body as a brutish body has been one that's long kind of been there. And so the idea that black bodies need to be corralled, the idea that people can't control five-year-old kids who are misbehaving because they're black, so they're super bad.

Even when Darren Wilson referred to Michael Brown as Hulk Hogan and I felt like a five-year-old, I was like, "You're six foot four and two, twenty, whatever." Those kinds of things, but the fact that he could get away with saying that was because that trope has been around for years, generations. And so I think in part, the civil rights movement, as we knew it was a kind of conservative movement with very narrow aims because that was what people could agree on. And there are people who are persuaded by these arguments that it was largely targeted to allow for middle-class blacks to fully integrate into American society and less so for those who were less advantaged socioeconomically.

And so there was very much a politics of respectability element that was going on there.

And it was because they were responding to these negative stereotypes that said that black people are on couth and don't know how to act. But we refused to see the instances where other people behaved the same way because it's human.

So this goes back to just long-standing tropes in American popular culture that we've all internalized in many ways. So that idea of if somebody sees a black man in an elevator, they grab a purse. It's because you've seen too many stories and been conditioned too much to assume black man equals must rob me or do something that's going to endanger me.

And we're just going to have to un-teach ourselves. This is what I love about the nation of Islam theology, the idea that part of what they did is just turn that on its head. Now white people are devils, blue-eyed devils.

And on the one hand, you know, that's not okay. But part of the function of that was to turn these stereotypes on their head. Like who is it that's greedy? Who is it that's selfish? And you see this, I think that Malcolm X was masterful at providing a different frame, a different set of ideas, and again just flipping those stereotypes so you can kind of see it from a different perspective.

Wow, thank you guys so much for your responses. Like I got to go re-examine my life. So this is the last question of the name.

Professor Nissier, you mentioned that race doesn't really exist. You care to expand and conclude in the same time with, I mean this is open for everyone but you know, low key conclude? Yeah, I think what I meant by that, what I had in the back of my head was the kind of scientific evidence that race is not a real thing. And the American Anthropological Association in like the late 90s put out a statement to say race as a biological characteristic doesn't exist.

It does exist as a social construction, it's a very powerful social construction. So I don't mean to, that's not, I'm not pushing towards a colorblind, like if we just pretend it's not there, it won't be there. It's kind of like it makes me think about young children, you know, that when they cover their eyes, they think you can't see them.

It doesn't quite work that way. This is when you're still here, race is still here, operating, but it operates as a social construction. But a social construction with a long and powerful history that won't be, will not be easily undone.

Can you join me in applauding these two brilliant scholars and their insights? Thank you. Find more content like this on veritas.org. And be sure to follow the Veritas Forum on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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