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Resisting Bias & Reshaping Institutions | David French & Justin Giboney

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The Veritas Forum

Resisting Bias & Reshaping Institutions: A conversation about advancing racial justice in religious institutions, government, and higher education. A discussion between David French of The Dispatch and Justin Giboney of AND Campaign. This conversation was moderated by Stephanie Summers, CEO of The Center for Public Justice, and was hosted by the Veritas Forum at Cal Poly. • Please like, share, subscribe to, and review this podcast. Thank you.

Transcript

Welcome to the Veritas Forum. This is the Veritas Forum Podcast. A place where ideas and beliefs converge.

What I'm really going to be watching is which one has the resources in their worldview to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with. How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are in history, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this in God. Today we hear from Justin Giboney, an attorney and political strategist, as well as the co-founder and president of The AND Campaign.

In a discussion with David French, a political commentator and former attorney, currently the senior editor at The Dispatch, in a talk titled "Resisting Bias & Reshaping Institutions" a conversation about advancing racial justice in religious institutions, government, and higher education. Moderated by Stephanie Summers, CEO of the Center for Public Justice, and it is hosted by the Veritas Forum at Cal Poly. You know, even though tonight's topic of racial justice is part of your professional commitments, it's also an intensely personal conversation for you.

So could we start with your racial justice autobiography? What motivates your commitment to racial justice? And David, I think I'd like to start with you and then we can turn to Justin. Well, first, thanks so much for having us. And it's always an honor to share

a virtual stage with a former Southeastern Conference football player, the only true college football conference.

I think Justin, you and I would totally agree on that. So yeah, my story really begins. I would say a little before 2015, but it really sort of takes rocket, gets rocket fuel in 2015.

So my wife and I, we have three kids. We live in Franklin, Tennessee, a suburb of Nashville, Justin, I'm sure knows it pretty well. And we have three kids.

Two of them are biological. One is adopted. Our two biological kids are in college at the University of Tennessee.

Our youngest is 13 years old and she's adopted from Ethiopia. And we had, you know, I would say my best way of describing the way that I grew up in the South as born in Alabama, raised in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Kentucky is that I was raised by a family that taught me to abhor racism and raised by a family that taught me to have sort of a keen interest in justice, but also I was raised by an educational system and raised in an atmosphere and in an environment that really didn't drill down and focus on those things. I think I might have been in college before I heard an account of the Civil War that didn't, wasn't really steeped in the lost cause mythology, for example.

And so, you know, I think I had this idea about the world that was rosier than it was. Because if you grow up in educated middle class, white America, you're not going to hear a lot of overt racism. You're not going to see a lot of overt racism because even if people around you are racist, they're, it's not socially acceptable.

And so it will be suppressed. But then we began to notice some really odd things once we adopted our daughter that she was having an experience of life that was different from the one my two older kids had. And that included odd interactions with police in the department store.

It included kids at her school who told her that her, their parents wouldn't want her to come to their to that they wouldn't be allowed to come to her house because where she lived is too dangerous. And I'm thinking my house is too dangerous. But you know, you just began to notice these things here that people would single her out as not belonging in places where she clearly belonged.

And you begin to see these sort of everyday incidents. But then in 2015, when my wife and I very publicly criticized Donald Trump, what happened next was just unbelievable. People in the white nationalist and white supremacist community online, the alt-right found her found out that we had adopted an African American daughter and they photoshopped her face into gas chambers.

They photoshopped her face into slave fields. They filled my wife's blog at a pathos, a religious website with images of dead and dying African Americans. It was horrible.

It was horrifying. It was absolutely horrifying. And so when you have that just that smacks you in the face like that and in just the worst in most grotesque ways, I don't know how that wouldn't change a person.

I don't have any idea why that wouldn't impact a person. And then at the same time as that's happening, you're beginning to see things like the shooting of Philando Castile. You're seeing some of these other incidents of police brutality.

And I began to dive into it more and in my biography, I'm a veteran of the Iraq war. I served in D'Ala Province during the surge as a jag officer. I ran detainee operations, did law of armed conflict and laws of war kind of rules of engagement work.

And I began to notice something about American police that in many times they were more apt to shoot in American cities than our own soldiers that I served with were apt to shoot in more stressful situations in a war zone in Iraq. And I began to be more attuned to these issues surrounding police brutality, police violence. Long had understood the excesses of policing for profit, civil asset, civil asset forfeiture, for example, the excesses and systematic violations of Fourth Amendment rights and no-knock raids.

And all of these things are piling on top of each other at the same time. To the point where I began to write about it more and more and more so much so that even as a writer for a national review at the time, when I was there, National Views, the traditional flagship and conservative intellectual journal, I suddenly started being called woke and a cultural Marxist just for writing about these issues. And so, look, one of the things that I've tried to do and tried to say is use my experience to say to others who are like me, who are grew up in conservative and conservative homes and read America and evangelical America to say, listen to some of these stories that you are hearing so that you don't be like me.

Don't be in a position where you have to be smacked in the face with grotesque racism. Just smacked in the face with it for it to fully cause you to dive in and dig into this issue. Hear the stories of other people, believe the stories of other people, and dive in and dig in without having to be hit in the face like that.

And so that's the kind of the reader's digest version of my story. Thanks, David. Justin, how about you? Yeah, well, first of all, I want to thank Veritas.

I'm always happy to collaborate with my friend, Stephanie Summers, and I understand David and I have a good mutual friend, Joseph Williams. So yes, we do. Yeah, that's a good start.

You know, autobiographically, for me, I think I would have to start with being the grandson of a civil rights era preacher. And my grandfather had a significant impact really just on my perspective. Social action was always part of a faithful Christian

witness.

There was no dichotomy between personal piety and social action. And I think my mother, his daughter, had the same spirit. I remember one time just to give you a story.

My mother had come up to the school, something had happened with the administration or a teacher. They had done something really bad. I can't really remember what it was, to be honest.

But as she went up there and kind of addressed the issue, as we were leaving, she told me, she said, Justin, I didn't just do that for you. I want you to understand that I did that also for kids whose parents might not have the time or presence of mind to speak out for them as well. And so that the next time that somebody in power mistreats somebody, they'll think twice about it.

And that conversation and just that posture really shaped my view of the Christian ethic and in the way that we should address justice and stand up for others. In college, I studied social policy, but very much went into the academic bubble as we often do sometimes. When I graduated from law school, kind of transferred into that professional class bubble.

But thankfully, as I moved to Atlanta, really got into politics, running campaigns and things of that nature, I had the good fortune to have some real grassroots mentors and folks who have been in the community for years and years and years that forced me back into the community, that forced me to understand that my academic credentials weren't enough to say that I understood the community, that there was work that had to be done and service that had to be done in the community to really understand. And I think that has shaped the and campaign that shaped my experience to know that you have to be willing to kind of get your hands dirty. You have to be willing to be with the people to really understand what's going on.

And I would also say that I'm motivated very clearly by the struggle of my people historically and present day struggles. I mean, when you think of someone like Meggar Evers who got shot in the head with a high powered rifle after leaving a strategy session that was in a church simply for having the audacity to fight for the right to vote. And this happened less than 30 years before I was born.

It wasn't that long ago that that's really a motivation to me. You know, and the truth of the matter is I probably wouldn't be able to look my elders in the eye if I didn't use the opportunities that they sacrificed for really to keep fighting and to keep trying to make sure that justice comes to this country for everybody. Not just me and my community community but for others.

And so I think that kind of describes my motivation, why I try to stay on it. But certainly

my faith has a lot to do with that as well. And I'm sure we'll get into that a little later.

Yeah, thank you both. It's gifts to be able to hear your stories. We can spend the whole night, I'm sure, talking about more of those things.

I'm going to turn us a little bit to another thing that you have in common. You know, both of you have a professional background in law. And both of you are students of history, right? I know that both of you pay attention to history in a way that lots of folks don't.

Could you talk a little bit from your perspective about the importance of learning the history of institutions and racial justice? Yeah, I can go if you want me to get into it first. I mean, history is important. Past this prologue, we can't understand what, if we don't understand what transpired before us, we can't truly understand the context that we're working in today in any real sense.

And I think unfortunately, some of our institutions have a history that makes them not exactly what they say they are, sometimes what they strive to be. And we need to deal with that, those histories. We need to deal and account for that history in order to move forward in a healthy way.

Because if we ignore it, we may not see, we may not understand some of the blind spots that we may have. And some of the things that we need to secure and rectify. And I know that as college students, as learned people, we can often assume that we know the history of racial justice.

And it's kind of what David was speaking about. It's a very easy assumption to make. But the truth is that in many cases, it's just not true.

We're often unwittingly basing our understanding not on historical facts, not on what actually happened, but rather on cultural narratives. And these are cultural narratives that can be a lot of times with deeper examination can be proven false by objective means. Many times, we try and try to justify ourselves and justify our institutions.

We can romanticize American history in a way that, again, hides the true issues that we deal with then and that we still deal with today that hides that from us. And so I think we all have to sit down and be honest with ourselves and say, do we really know the history? Have we really dug into the history, not just from our favorite sources, not just from kind of generic sources or folks within our sphere, within our circles, but have we really dug in from other sources and other places? Do we really understand the atrocities that ended Reconstruction and what the end of Reconstruction meant for African Americans? Do we really understand the massacre that happened at Black Wall Street and why it happened and the lies and conspiracies that were part of why this was all torn down? Do we really understand the deeds of organizations like the White Citizens Council who might not have been out hanging people or were doing so much damage to

the Black community when it comes to economic things? If you're not aware of those things or if those three things are just named, you can't really dig into them, then you might not know America's racial history as well as you think you do. You may not fully understand that every time African Americans try to create political economic and social capital, their efforts, our efforts were deliberately destroyed and many times in the most dispiriting way possible, really destroyed with the purpose of sending a message and that message being that no matter how hard you try, no matter what you do, no matter how much you save or how much you come together, you will never get out of the position that you're in.

Do you know that there are systems that were set up for us to lose hope? Which speaks to my faith as well. The only reason that I think African Americans have not lost hope is because of faith and I think it is amazing to still have hope when faced with some of the things that happened to us. But we have to understand that if we don't really understand the gravity of the history of it, then we may lose the generational effect that it has on people and how some of these issues still linger within our institutions today.

Thanks, Justin. Dave, do you want to get in here? Yeah, yeah, let me, I would say this, I would say that understanding of history is indispensable and you have to, let me back up just a bit. I think what you have to do is you have to try as much as humanly possible to walk in the understanding of American history free of competing partisan narratives about American history.

And here's what I mean. I think there's an awful lot of people who try to make, they begin with a partisan understanding and then work backwards from history to bend history to that partisan understanding. Like one of the things that we've been talking a lot about in the last, really, since January 6th, this is a phenomenon of Christian nationalism.

Well, what is Christian nationalism? One of the things that Christian nationalism rests upon is a certain idea about American history that is incomplete at best and in some respects materially inaccurate. And I think that when we do walk back and we do look at American history, one of the things that it does is it begins to explain the present a lot. And so I, you know, when I talk to, when I talk to groups about, especially more conservative groups about race issues, one of the things that I try to avoid doing are using words that are kind of contentious words and phrases in contemporary American political discourse.

Like the phrase systemic racism has a kind of an academic accepted meaning and some circumstances and a highly contested meaning and other circumstances. And instead what I'll say is I'll say something like this. What history demonstrates is that for 345 years, we had a by legalized and sometimes legally mandated racial discrimination that was defended by violence for 345 years.

So you have 246 years from 1619 to 1865 where slavery is lawful and parts of the United States. And then 99 years from 1865 to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Do you correct? Do you ameliorate the effects of 345 years of sometimes legally mandated, certainly legally permitted racial discrimination defended by violence in 56 now going on 57 years of very contentious change.

So the answer to that becomes kind of obvious. If you have to, in 45 years of racially, legally mandated racial discrimination, that is going to embed itself. That is the consequences of that will be embedded very deeply into multiple layers of American society.

And so if that is the case, if all of those things are the case historically, that is not coming at you and then saying, well, all of American history is terrible. June 6, 1944 still happened. Americans stormed Normandy Beach.

I mean, seven, the values and the declaration of independence are still valuable. They're aspirational. The values and the and the bill of rights are still virtuous.

Heck, many, many, many generations of those who fought for civil rights appealed to those values to make progress. They said, wait a minute, there's a huge gap between your stated values and the present reality. Can we close that gap? So you don't have to then get into this mode that says everything about American history is sort of awful and terrible.

But you don't want to get into this mode about American history that says everything about American history is rosy and great, but these few minor little detours that by the way, weren't that much worse than any other country. The way I look at it is and the way I've described it is that in many ways, the story of America is the battle between 1619, the year that the first African slaves arrived on American shores in 1776, the year of the great American mission statement that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. There's this battle between 1619 and 1776.

And heck, even the person who wrote the words in 1776 was afflicted by the moral disease of 1619. And so you have this battle between 1619 and 1776. And sometimes you make three steps forward and then we go two steps back and then another step back.

And what Justin said, for example, about American history, nobody knows about the presidential election of 1876 and the compromises that occurred as a result of that disputed election that essentially took generations of Black Americans in the South and consigned them to Jim Crow. And so this is absolutely critical. And when you understand that history, when you understand those 345 years when you understand the 56 now going on 57 years of contentious change, you realize we have work to do.

We have work to do. You don't get rid of the effects of 340. And as a Christian, I believe that, you know, I had a pastor of mine once said one of the job, one of the mission statements of Christian on this earth is to fight against the effects of the fall.

And the deeply embedded effects of all of that racial discrimination, defended by violence, that's one of the, that's an aspect, a horrible aspect of the fall of man. And it's something that as a Christian, I feel compelled to address. But I often don't even know what to address without that history.

David, you talked about the kind of effects of the fall and really, you know, the brokenness that we see as a result of that is part of what we see when we pay attention to history. You know, you offer the theological frame, which I think is important. Could you both talk about how your own theological understanding drives you to the commitments that you've made to racial justice? Sure.

I mean, I think that the first thing that we have to see, especially for people that have a high view of scripture, I mean, if you, you know, if you go through the scripture, it is very clear that there is a justice imperative. When you look at the prophets, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos, Micah, and so on, they are very clearly calling for justice in the social context. And actually, if you look closely, they are presenting a lack of justice or God's people not being involved in justice as a breach of covenant.

It's not just, you know, we like to, you know, some people times we like to just point out sexual immorality or, you know, idol worship and those things, those things are important and they were there too. But it was also a partiality in the courts. It was also the treatment of the poor.

And so I've said this before, I think it's almost biblical illiteracy to be able to read through the Old Testament and not see a call for social justice, whatever you want to call it. There is a call for justice in the social context. And I think we really need to pay attention to that.

Not just that, but we can look in the New Testament. We look at James, we look at Jesus in Luke talking about the poor, talking about justice. And it's something that Christians can't ignore.

It doesn't have to be and shouldn't be separated from personal piety, from the great commission of us going out and making sure that we're preaching the gospel. These are things that go together. And we know that our works don't save us, but they are indicative oftentimes of what's written on our hearts.

Now, in knowing that the Christian is a justice imperative for the Christian, we do have to make sure that we're pursuing justice within a biblical framework. Because we have a tendency, because of the fall, we have a tendency to distort what God has defined as

good and redefine it for ourselves, for our own flawed purposes. So without a biblical frame, justice sometimes no longer is about just maintaining a standard of treatment based on human dignity.

But it becomes about being a tool of expressive individualism, being a tool of the sexual revolution, being a tool of vengeance. We know that these are, we should know that these are distorted conceptions of justice, because you can't have something can't be just, if something isn't righteous, then its promotion isn't a matter of justice. But unless we have the correct frame, unless we have the right moral anchor and understanding of a full kind of biblical justice, we can really miss that and be led in a lot of different directions.

And we see it all the time, even with some Christian influencers not having the right framework. But again, we do have to be clear that the Bible gives us a justice imperative. And it's not enough just to say I'm not being unjust.

Justice is not a lack of injustice. Justice is something on its own. It's its own substance.

It has its own form. And it's active. And we need to be making sure that we're deliberate about trying to cure things that are within our square our sphere of influence.

You know, I, I think a lot about to Mike is six eight, which I think is it's not just a what, it's a how about Christian engagement in the public square, not in other words, it's not just what should we do, but how should we do it? And it says, what does the Lord require of you? Oh, man, what is good is to act justly. This is exactly what Justin was just talking about. Act justly.

That's an affirmative obligation, but is also to love kindness or love mercy, depending on your translation, which we often and we see this today. We see this today all the time online and elsewhere that when we are seeking justice and we're acting justly, we're often self righteous and harsh and unforgiving. I was listening to a podcast recently and Michelle Goldberg from the New York Times said something that has stuck out me to me for weeks and weeks and weeks.

And she said, there are movements in this country that are more interested in finding heretics than seeking converts. And that has really stuck with me. And part of the whole notion of loving kindness and loving mercy is that you are you are seeking and to embrace people.

You're not seeking to repel, you are seeking to embrace. You're acting justly, you're loving kindness. And then this last one, walking humbly again in this era of, I know it's right.

I know exactly how to achieve what's right. And if you don't agree with me, you're a complete idiot or worse a bigot or a hater. Walking humbly is perhaps the most

countercultural of the three prongs.

You know, one of the things I think that is incredibly powerful is to walk into a room where people are wrestling with an issue, such as how do we deal with, for example, I mean, it's like, it's like peeling an onion of difficulty. How do we deal with, for example, taking issues? I know the best. Dealing with, for example, systematic violations of the Bill of Rights and in marginalized communities in the US, how do we walk in and say, how do we fix this? And one of the things to say is to open, token with is this is hard.

This is hard. And I want to learn. This is hard and I want to learn.

And I think that you walk in like that, especially if you're somebody coming from outside a community into a community, I might have a lot of knowledge about Supreme Court case law, for example, about unreasonable search and seizures and how that applies to no knock raids and the exclusionary rule and the Stanger Grand laws and all of the legal factors that went into the killing of Breonna Taylor in Louisville. I've never been on the receiving end of a no knock raid. I've never been in a neighborhood where no knock raids are common.

If I'm going to be talking to anybody in communities that are most directly affected, one of the first things I have to do is just listen, just got to hear it. Instead of walking in and thinking, I have figured out justice, I shall now implement justice and you shall thank me, which is the way a lot of us approach the political, political engagement in the public square when it should be. I have it.

I have a want, I want to act justly. I want to learn how to act justly. And I want to embrace and love people in that process.

And I think that that is an incredibly countercultural approach, which is, which is that Micah, six, eight, those, these interlocking obligations. We can't have one without the other without the other. And it's incredibly countercultural to a American political and activist culture that often soaks its justice and self righteousness and soaks itself righteousness and unforgiveness.

Great. Thanks to both of you. That's I think really helpful and kind of shifts us to the next question.

I do want to let folks who are watching, formulating your questions, that this is going to be my last question and then I'll be turning to your questions in the chat. But you know tonight's topic implies that when we're talking about racial justice, we're not merely talking about say building friendships across race. So could you talk a little bit about what the differences are between the needed changes in the different types of institutions, so government, university campus, the church.

And what's like one thing that students can do to advance racial justice in each of these

institutions? Justin, why don't you start? Sure. I think whatever we do, it has to be deliberate. We have to make sure, you know, sometimes we think as long as we're nice and we smile a lot and we say the right things that that's enough.

But it's not enough. And for a lot of the reasons that we've already named today, there were deliberate efforts for many, many years to hold people back based off of the race. These things were in our laws.

They're going to have an impact on our attitudes, on our systems and our institutions. And we have to be deliberate about going about them. And that's one of the reasons that the kind of why we would like to get maybe to a color blinds so to speak place, we're not there.

And I think it's wrong to pretend that we're there. If I were to break your leg over and over again and then say, hey, let's start over everything's good. It's like, well, I have a limp for a reason now, right? Because you can't act like that's not there anymore.

So we want to make sure we do that. I think when it comes to the law, you know, when it comes to government, we really have to use policy. Policy is a place where we can make changes to make sure that we're looking at some of the disparities that are there.

It is right in the face during the crisis, how African Americans do the healthcare disparities, we're passing away at a higher rate than everyone else. That's just say something to us. I mean, we shouldn't be able to just look over that.

But there are policy fixes to some extent to those things. And so we have to do the hard work of coming together to make that happen. And again, as David said, pulling ourselves away from these partisan narratives, pulling ourselves away from these ideological kind of tribal narratives and really focusing in on the facts of the history and what's going on now.

And then also just greater principles. So I think that's one way to get about it in government. For students when it comes to education, one of the things that I will keep yelling, don't be a part of it.

It's great to be in school, enjoy what you're doing, but you don't have to stay within the bubble. You can go out and you can reach people within your community. And you have some time on your hands to actually learn about the things that we've been talking about, to actually learn about reconstruction.

I mean, read some books on reconstruction. There's a great book called "Capital Men" that talks about what happened in reconstruction and how things like states' rights were used as a reason for folks in the north to pull out of the whole conversation about reconstruction. And basically people saying, you're violating our states' rights by not allowing us to hang people and trying to police what we're doing.

So there's a lot of ways in education that you can learn about it. You can bring in speakers as you guys are doing now to have conversations about it. And you can look at the policies.

You can look around you and who are in your groups. Do you have study groups? Are you inviting people in? Are there people in your dorms who don't feel like they're a part of what you're doing? These are things that make people feel included. And you can always look for opportunities to make people feel included, to bring them into conversations that they might not have been in before.

And that goes a long way sometimes more than you even know. So there's a lot of different ways to go about it. I think when it comes to the church, it is very much a spiritual matter.

But we have to be deliberate about it and make sure that we're also covering the practical issues there. Have you ever been under the leadership of a person of color? And if you haven't been under the leadership of a person of color, why is that? Is there a reason for that? Are you willing to do that? Are you willing to take that instruction or even take that correction from someone who does not look like you who may take you out of your comfort zone? But I think one of the biggest things that we've been trying to do with the ANG campaign is our prayer and action justice initiative. What we're telling Christians is that, hey, it's not enough to just have the Kumbaya moments.

Fellowship is great. Coming together is great. But at the end of the day, it's going to come to actions and actually the sharing of resources.

So coming out of your comfort zone and actually advocating for policies like juvenile justice reform, which is something we're working on with Stephanie's organization, to say, I'm not, you know, my public witness isn't just about me. It's about the people around me. It's about my brothers and sisters of color and others to bring them up until we can come together and advocate together and share resources.

It's going to be very hard to bring about the racial renewal and racial reconciliation that we need within the church so that we can model that to those outside the church. You asked a fantastic question. And one of the things that I think is it's funny, we can often become so, once a person sort of gets focused on this issue, in a way, we can become so interested in sort of forming a sort of a holistic political ideology about all aspects of racial injustice and thinking about it and sort of believing that we're virtuous for having all of these wonderful and marvelous thoughts and maybe even tweeting about them.

And instead sort of saying, is there one thing I can do like concretely? Like, is there, I can't fix everything, but I can start a journey of thousands of miles with a single step, you know, or a couple of steps or a couple of things, just a couple of things that I can focus on. I hate to keep going back to legal doctrines, but, you know, to what's, you

know, as a lawyer, it's always about law, with a hammer, things, everything's a nail, you know, I'm always thinking about law. So, you know, one of the things that I, when people come to me and they say, how can I focus my concerns about to say this, for example, this big issue of policing, big, big issue.

Well, I say, well, once you start with one issue, one issue, and one that I'll often talk about is this ending qualified immunity, Justin knows what qualified immunity is, but it's incredibly pernicious legal doctrine developed by judges that directly contradicts American Civil Rights law so that people who actually violate your civil rights, people in police officers and public officials who actually violate your civil rights, the law says that you shall be liable, shall be liable in those circumstances, and the law has developed in such a way that the law means typically shall not be, shall not be, usually won't be. And that's one area in which there are people who are suffering injustices and receiving nothing in return from a legal system, even though the law in black and whites is they should. That's a big deal.

That's a big deal. It's one, it's one thing. It's just one thing.

It's not fixing everything. It's not even fixing most things, but it's one thing. And what I'll say to you, if you get involved in one thing, you're going to do, you're going to learn about more things.

You're going to find yourself, as Justin said, you're going to find yourself working for and being under the authority of people maybe you've never worked for or been under the authority of before. You're going to find yourself forming relationships that teach you, that mold you, that shape you, and show you the next one thing and the next one thing. And so I tend to think, I ask Christians, all of us, we have sort of different passions and callings and areas of interest and knowledge.

And I'm not going to try to get everybody to, I don't, there's 151 participants right now. I don't want 151 people tweeting about qualified immunity right away. I mean, what is it that is the thing that you know? You don't have to take my word about qualified immunity.

What are the things that you know? Where can there be one thing, one thing that you can start with? And if that seems too modest, one thing leads to another and another and another and it starts you down a road. But I sometimes think that we overwhelm people and and ask them to sort of feel as if they have to know everything before they do anything. And that's not the case at all.

Good word. I'm excited to be able to move to the questions that have been getting posted on Slido. So let me take a couple of these folks clearly were listening to the things that you said.

These questions are very aligned with the conversation we've been having so far. One question that's gotten a lot of votes is, you know, with the rise of social media activism, what do you think about posting on social platforms? Is this a good way to bring awareness to racial justice or injustice? Yeah, I would just say it can be helpful. It's not a bad thing.

I mean, I've learned many things on social media and gotten some good information. I think we definitely need to make sure that we're checking our sources and going from there. But it's certainly not the same thing is true advocacy and getting out there and changing things.

And that's really what gets us. I mean, you have folks who really have focused their whole effort on what they say on social media. And we just shouldn't take it there.

Just because you've tweeted something that's good or tweeted something that's witty or or hits a certain point, that's not the same thing as getting out there like Fannie Lou Hamer and folks like that who are actually doing the hard work, the stuff that's not glamorous, the stuff that is really boring. A lot of what we do today, and I think it's regrettable, is a lot more performative. The civil rights era, you know, it wasn't all about performance.

It was actually about getting practical things done and making things work. When we're just focused on social media with making sure our hand is in our fist is it looks perfect for Instagram. And we have the perfect outfit on.

We really are missing something there because the hard work is going on with people you don't see and with in places that nobody wants to take a picture for Instagram. But that's the work that really needs to be done. So I wouldn't say that social media is all bad, but it's certainly not where the real work happens and don't be fooled in the thing that it is.

I would say for most people, it's minimally useful and maximally tempting in this sense that, look, I mean, I agree to just in there things that you can do and say that can sort of signal boost good thoughts or new ideas or signal boost and continue to raise awareness on real injustices. Absolutely. What I see happen more often when people get passionate about issues is they get sucked into soul draining and pointless argumentation.

This is especially true on Twitter. I think it's, you know, I don't know, maybe somewhere in the mission statement of Twitter buried in the terms of services, you know, introducing soul draining and pointless argumentation to America since 2006 or whenever Twitter started 11, whatever it is. But so be careful about it.

Just be careful about it. And I'm coming to you in all humility as somebody who's been burned by this. I have this kind of rule that I really try not to get into Twitter arguments.

And every single time I violate my own rule, I regret it. But yeah, I will use Twitter. I use it as a platform to signal boost good thoughts.

I used it the other day to amplify something that Justin said that I thought was really wise and good. I try to use it as much as possible as an instrument of encouragement of good ideas. I try to be more selective in when I'm going to call out bad ideas because that's the whole culture of the place.

But yeah, I mean, Justin's absolutely right. This is, that's a spare time hobby. If you got extra few minutes kind of thing to do, it is not a object or focus of what you do.

And it shouldn't be. And maybe one day if you build up a huge Twitter following or Instagram following, then those words will have resonate far beyond, far beyond you and really adjust and influence arguments. But there's a lot of people who spend a huge amount of time on social media to, to an effect that you can't measure with an electron microscope.

Whereas if you get involved in a local community, like with a local school district, with activists dealing with a local police department, you can actually get stuff done. Because the number of people who actually get off their rear ends and do something is really small, really small. And you can be a major force multiplier in your community and, and irrelevancy on social media.

Great. Thanks. Okay, so I want to move into another one.

This, we had some students give us some questions ahead too. So this one, you know, is asking about political ideology in the church. So, you know, the question is, do political ideologies in the church influence or inhibit the pursuit of racial justice? Yes.

Yes, to both. Say more. I would say, I would say this, I think that one piece of advice that I have to students is not is don't shun political involvement.

There is that is an instrumental way of, of, acting justly. It's an indispensable way of acting justly. There are many ways to act justly, but don't shun political involvement just because you've seen political involvement be toxic.

But what I would strongly urge people to do is shun what I call the partisan mind. And the partisan mind, it means I've put the red jersey on or I've put the blue jersey on and everything that flows for my engagement is either to advance the blue jersey or the red jersey. And in that circumstance, I'm just going to tell you all what you're going to sign on to, what you're going to sign on to if you sign on to the partisan mind is something called package deal ethics.

And essentially what package deal ethics means is you're signing on to a program that you may not agree with at all. But to advance the blue jersey or the red jersey, you're

going to end up spending some time arguing for things you don't care about. And truth be told, truth be told, may not be right, may not be right.

But you're rationalizing it by saying, well, if I don't defend the things that I don't care about and may not be right, I won't get a chance to do the things that I do care about in our right. And this is how we've rationalized all kinds of compromises with poor character, all kinds of compromises with bad policy. I mean, think about this, y'all, the group of people in the United States, most likely to agree with the Trump administration family separation policy was were white evangelicals, the American subgroup, most likely.

And they would, and it might be because they reflexively defend the red jersey. It was the red jersey at implementing the policy and they're going to defend the red jersey. But be careful about that.

Be careful. Engage. Yes.

Don't lose your moral independence and don't and especially don't take your eyes off biblical justice and biblical ethics. Because I guarantee you neither one of these parties political platforms is divinely inspired. Yeah, I'll second that.

I would just add that we don't have to be afraid of ideology, right? Sometimes ideology can help you flesh out some things and understand certain things. But we do just have to order it properly. We might have to make sure that it is undeg, it goes under our theology and that whatever we, you know, whatever ideologies that we're looking into our systems or theories that we're looking into, that they undergo biblical scrutiny and not the other way around.

I think too often we allow our political affiliation to become religious in nature. We kind of conflate our ideology and our theology and we're believing things that are purely ideological and unbiblical, but think that they are tied to theology. I think one of the worst things that I've seen going around in the Anne campaign gets a lot of criticism for this is the idea and it goes along with what David was saying is you should just choose a side.

If you don't choose a side, then you must be in the squishy middle and you're really not doing anything. You're just trying to please everybody. That is the most simple and one of the most ridiculous ideas that I've ever heard.

When you have two sides that may not be equivalent, when you have two sides that are as far on the extremes as we have to fall somewhere in the middle is not squishy. There's nothing squishy about it. You may just happen to be there.

But we have to understand that even if you do think one side is altogether worse than the other, you still have to correct it. I often say if I have an infection in my right leg

that's a little more advanced than the infection in my left leg, well guess what? I still am going to have to do something about both infections. I can't just leave them there.

So don't run away from partisanship. Don't run away necessarily from ideology altogether, but order it properly. Make sure that it's going through biblical scrutiny and that you're not outsourcing your opinions to conservatism or progressivism or the parties.

That's what's important. Make sure that your frame, as we talked about earlier, that your framework is a biblical framework and not a framework based on those other things. Great.

The next question goes back to our discussion about history. So the questioner asks, I heard that German educators have a very serious and realistic approach to World War II history. Is there something uniquely American that impedes this type of approach to racial history? Man, that's a good question.

So I'll say this. Growing up in South, I think I'm very well aware of the movements and the impulses that led to the whitewashing of American antebellum history. And what ended up happening in one of the things to think about American history is so you have really beginning after 1876.

And Justin knows all this and can tell it probably 10 times better than me. But the South was just kind of left to it. It was just like, we're done.

We're done after the Civil War and the first halting efforts of Reconstruction were done. And so in essence, the power structures that were in place prior to the Civil War began to return and came back and forced. And so there's this old statement that history is written by the victors.

Well, in the case of the American South, history was written by the losers, who eventually became sort of quasi victors during the Reconstruction and in the history and the accounts and really not even just the loss cause mythology, but just sort of the minimizing, the relegation, the rationalization of the history, the racial history of the American South just permeated the whole system in just these really profound ways. And so I do think there was just this weird, this, it wasn't weird, it wasn't strange, it wasn't hard to understand, but it was still a quirk of our history that in a giant chunk of the American nation, history was actually written by the losers. And it was written by the losers of the Civil War.

And that has infected an awful lot of American, awful lot of American history, in part because the losers of the Civil War also happened to be the most obsessed with the topic. Much of the North as you know, immigrants came flooding in to the United States with no history with the Civil War at all, we're moving on, we're moving on, and there

was a region that was not moving on, and there was a region that was very, very focused on this. And this is one thing that I think has some sort of partial explanation for this, but it is an interesting quirk.

Yeah, I'm no German history expert, but I think there was a reckoning there after, you know, with World War II and all that, there was a very clear reckoning and having to deal with the mistakes that were made. I don't, to what, to just add to what Dave was saying, I don't think there was a full reckoning in the South, it was started with reconstruction, but then that ended prematurely and actually took several steps back, and the South was just kind of allowed to do whatever they wanted to do. Folks who were supposed to give their properties up, got their properties back.

Folks that weren't supposed to be in office got to take their offices back, whether the majority of the people in the district would have voted for them or not. There just wasn't a full reckoning, which goes back to what we were talking about earlier, we have to deal with the histories of our institutions, we have to have this racial reckoning, not to stay there forever, not to just place the blame, but to really deal with what happened so that we don't get in a situation to where we can't move forward, because we haven't really dealt with the issues in whole. And I think that's part of, without knowing all the history of Germany, my guess is that that might have something to do with it.

Great, I'm going to give you each 30 seconds to answer this last question, because I think it's a really important one, but we're almost up against our time. How do we influence, how do we help influence policy changes? So the person who's asking this question says, which organizations can we come alongside to support what is already being done to change policies? Well, whoever asked that question, I think they did a good job of asking the questions, because I think the key is institutions. You cannot just do it by yourself.

You need to support and join institutions like the Center for Public Justice, like the ANG campaign and others to work as a body to get changed. Yes, we vote by ourselves, but generally, the political process is not an individual endeavor. It's an endeavor that's done in community and through institutions.

I would say, well, first, I mean, institutions, Justin, Justin just mentioned his ANG campaign, the ANG campaign. Look, keep this in mind. A lot of us have our gaze fixed on Washington, D.C. It's easy to understand why you would have your gaze fixed on Washington, D.C. I mean, it's a powerful central government has an immense amount of influence, but you're going to have the least influence in Washington, D.C. and you're going to have the most influence down the street.

And don't take your eyes off of that fact. And you can change lives getting engaged with the institution down the street. You can be part of a big, big, big movement in D.C. And I'm not saying don't neglect, I'm not saying don't neglect D.C. Forget about D.C. Don't

think about D.C. But I'm saying, if you want to focus on real change, just remember, you're going to have very little influence there and you can have a lot more here.

And there's this old statement that pastors use it. What is it? 20% of the people do 80% of the work. I think that's overly optimistic.

I think it's like 10% of the people do 90% of the work. And if you can resolve to be one of those 10% in whatever institution you get involved in, you're going to have influence in relatively short order beyond what you could be beyond what you anticipated. If you like this and you want to hear more, like, share, review, and subscribe to this podcast.

And from all of us here at the Veritas Forum, thank you.

(gentle music)