

SELECTED RESOURCES ON SYSTEMIC RACISM

"Nothing can be changed until it is faced." - James Baldwin

A Letter to the Royal Oak First Church Family from Joyce Hollingsworth, Director of Adult Discipleship

Pastor Jeff asked me to share about the journey some of us in the church have been on over the past year to explore systemic racism in a series of discussion groups. We have done this in the context of the murder of George Floyd, the growing participation of whites joining with the Black Lives Matter demonstrations across the country this past summer in response to police brutality, and seeing the disproportionate negative impact of COVID 19 on communities of color. Inspired by the racial justice statement our church created in 2020 (found on the next page and on our website) we invite each of you to join us in this exploration by providing, on the following pages, a selected list of book and video resources on systemic racism we have used as the basis of our discussions.

Any one of these resources will give you a big picture perspective on systemic racism in our society that includes ample evidence, examples and suggested recommendations for remedy and transformation. There are no quick fixes to centuries-long systemic racism. We have learned that all of us have contributed, wittingly or unwittingly, to building or silently reinforcing our societal structures, norms, laws, institutions and practices that have the impact of treating people of color unequally. As Isabel Wilkerson says in her book *Caste* –

"We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside, but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, cracks patched but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even. Many people may rightly say, 'I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves.' And, yes, not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joints, but they are ours to deal with now, and any further deterioration is in fact on our hands."

Embedded within each of these resources is a full array of better choices we can make to fix the “faulty foundation” we’ve inherited in the United States. Many of the resources outline specific actions we can start to take - on both an individual and collective level - to change systemically entrenched inequalities in our society. Some of what you will learn in these resources will be startlingly new information – distressing facts and unbeknown deeply embedded public policies that we recognize have often been overlooked or ignored in our history books, civics courses, and public discourse. I suggest we be open, humble and curious as, collectively, we face into what has led us to where we are today, explore the part we’ve played, and grieve the negative impact it’s had on our brothers and sisters of color. Together, we can learn, as the body of Christ working to bring the Kingdom on Earth, how we can join hands with all those involved in constructive efforts to bring about greater justice moving forward.

In Your Service,

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The ROFUM Racial Justice Statement

Unanimously adopted by the Royal Oak First Compass Team and posted on our website in 2020

Below is the full racial justice statement as found on our website at <https://www.rofum.org/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion/>

When God created the world, God looked upon it and called it good. We boldly proclaim and affirm that all of humanity was created in the image of God and that God, through Christ, binds us all together with cords that cannot be broken. Through the Holy Spirit, we are called and committed to embodying the works of Jesus Christ to let justice roll so that we might be the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

We must live by the example of the revolutionary radical rabbi from Nazareth who spent much of his ministry fighting against injustice.

We are a body of believers acknowledging that the call to be the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven is a call to being an unconditionally loving and radically inclusive church of all humanity that stands at the forefront of racial injustice in our community and our world.

Just as Jesus Christ himself saw the humanity of those that were crucified on the cross with him as well as those that placed him there, we must see the humanity of all God's creation.

From that lesson, we must learn from the history of the church and reject the evils of racism and white supremacy that have plagued our church universal and our world. We must affirm that black lives matter and acknowledge our unmerited privilege that distances us from the world as God intended.

We commit to taking action to support and uplift persons of color in our community in the midst of the deafening silence of majority of America.

We commit to continuing to educate ourselves about institutional and structural racism, as well as implicit or unconscious bias, so that we may take targeted actions to dismantle racism.

We commit to continuing to be the hands and feet of the revolutionary radical rabbi from Nazareth who, by his example, protested and worked toward the dismantling of oppressive practices and systems.

We who believe in freedom cannot rest.

Authors: James Cogman, Joyce Hollingsworth, and Krista Conyers

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Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents

(Book published in 2020)

By Isabel Wilkerson

Caste, written by the Pulitzer Prize winning and bestselling author, Isabel Wilkerson, examines the unspoken caste system that has shaped America. Through an immersive, deeply researched narrative and stories about real people, Wilkerson shows how America today and throughout our history has been shaped by a hidden caste system, a rigid hierarchy of human rankings. Linking the caste systems of America, India and Nazi Germany, Wilkerson explores eight pillars or characteristics that underlie caste systems across civilizations. Using riveting stories, she shows the ways that the insidious undertow of caste is experienced every day by people in our culture in our education system, health care, politics, and economy. This timely book provides insightful perspectives on our racial inequities and lets us look at ourselves through a different lens that can lead to breakthroughs in how we address systemic racism and move beyond the artificial and destructive separations of human divisions, toward hope in our common humanity.

One Hour and 23 Minutes Video Interview with both Isabel Wilkerson and the film maker Ken Burns about her book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. <https://youtu.be/D-CCB-Tzzw>

The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America

(Book published in 2017)

By Richard Rothstein

The Color of Law is a groundbreaking investigation into how our government in the twentieth century deliberately imposed racial segregation on metropolitan areas nationwide. Richard Rothstein has painstakingly documented how our cities became so divided. Rothstein describes how federal, state and local governments systematically imposed residential segregation: with undisguised racial zoning, red-lining, and public housing that purposefully severed previously mixed communities, offered subsidies for builders to create whites-only suburbs, tax exemptions for prejudiced institutions, and support for violent resistance to African Americans in white neighborhoods. Rothstein demonstrates how police and prosecutors for years have upheld these standards and how such public policies still influence our society today. *The Color of Law* forces us to face the obligation to remedy our unconstitutional past.

One Hour YouTube Video Presentation and Discussion with Richard Rothstein about his book *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* - <https://youtu.be/nrjxc-I6sg>

The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together

(Book published in 2021)

By Heather McGhee

Heather McGhee's specialty is the American economy and the mystery of why it so often fails the American public. From the 2008 financial crisis to rising student debt, to the wealth gap between black and white families, to collapsing public infrastructure, she found a common root problem: racism. But not just in the most obvious indignities for people of color. Racism has costs for white people, too. It is the common denominator of our most vexing public problems, the core dysfunction in our democracy and constitutive of the spiritual and moral crises that grip us all. McGhee embarks on a deeply personal journey across the country tallying what we collectively lose when we buy into the zero sum paradigm – the idea that progress for some of us must come at the expense of others. But in unlikely places of worship and work, McGhee finds proof and actual stories from

across the country of what she calls the Solidarity Dividend: the benefits we all gain when people come together across race to accomplish what we simply can't do on our own.

One Hour Video Interview with Senator Elizabeth Warren and Heather McGhee about her book *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*.

<https://youtu.be/QWMqU44Mll4>

White Fragility: Why It Is So Hard For White People to Talk About Racism

(Book published in 2018)

By Robin DiAngelo

White Fragility is a groundbreaking and timely book that deftly illuminates the phenomenon of white fragility – the defensive moves that white people make when challenged racially, characterized by emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and by the behaviors of argumentation and silence. These attitudes and behaviors prevent any meaningful cross-racial dialogue. DiAngelo, an academic, lecturer and trainer on issues of racial and social justice for more than twenty years, allows us to understand racism as a practice not restricted to ‘bad people.’ In doing so, she moves our national discussion forward with new rules of engagement.

20 Minute Video Presentation on Deconstructing White Privilege by Robin DiAngelo – Sponsored by the United Methodist Church and on the Methodist website. <https://www.umc.org/en/content/deconstructing-white-privilege-gcorr>

How to Be An Anti-Racist

(Book published in 2019)

By Ibram X. Kendi

Kendi, in his book *How to Be An Anti-Racist*, helps readers see all forms of racism clearly, understand their poisonous consequences, and work to oppose them in our systems and in ourselves. At its core, racism is a powerful system that creates false hierarchies of human value. Racism intersects with class and culture and geography and even changes the way we see and value ourselves. The author weaves an electrifying combination of ethics, history, law and science with his own personal story of awakening to anti-racism. This is an essential work for anyone who wants to go beyond the awareness of racism to the next step: contributing to the formation of a just and equitable society.

54 Minute YouTube Aspen Institute Video Interview with Ibram Kendi about his book *How to Be An Anti-Racist* <https://youtu.be/TzuOlyyOlug>

BOOKS ABOUT SYSTEMIC RACISM WITHIN THE AMERICAN CHURCH

The Color of Compromise

(Book published in 2019)

By Jemar Tisby

In *The Color of Compromise*, Jemar Tisby takes readers back to the roots of sustained racism and injustice in the American church. Filled with powerful stories and examples of American Christianity's racial past, Tisby's historical narrative highlights the obvious ways people of faith have actively worked against racial justice, as well as the complicit silence of racial moderates. Identifying the cultural and institutional tables that must be flipped to bring about progress, Tisby provides an in-depth diagnosis for a racially divided American church and suggests ways to foster a more equitable and inclusive environment among God's people. Tisby calls on his fellow Christians to take full responsibility for their complicity in white supremacy, and to commit to changing America.

2 Part Video Presentation by Jemar Tisby about his book *The Color of Compromise*.

45 Minute Part 1: Jemar Tisby Presentation <https://youtu.be/7kWYXXO-Tc4>

54 Minute Part 2 is Question and Response <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwz-Gt4Hkqg&t=0s>

White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity

(Book published in 2020)

By Robert P. Jones

Drawing on history, public opinion surveys, and personal experience, Robert Jones delivers a provocative examination of the unholy relationship between American Christianity and white supremacy. As the nation grapples with demographic changes and the legacy of racism, Jones makes the case that Christianity's role as a cornerstone of white supremacy has been largely overlooked. White Christians from evangelicals in the South to mainline Protestants in the Midwest and Catholics in the Northeast – have been not just complacent or complicit; rather, as the dominant cultural power, they have constructed and sustained a project of protecting white supremacy and opposing black equality that has framed the entire American story from our inception as a country till now. Jones challenges White Christians to acknowledge that public apologies are not enough – accepting responsibility for the past requires work toward repair in the present.

One Hour YouTube Video Interview with Robert Jones about his book *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*. <https://youtu.be/Aj9SVES-6Gc>

STREAMING VIDEOS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF SYSTEMIC RACISM

13th. 2016 documentary on Netflix and YouTube (1 hour and 40 minutes)

13th is about the history, impact and implications of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The 13th Amendment was added to the constitution for the abolition of slavery and states “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.” This film combines archival footage with testimony from activists and scholars, and examines the U.S. prison system and how the country's history of racial inequality drives the high rate of incarceration in America. This piercing, Oscar-nominated film won Best Documentary at the Emmys, the BAFTAs and the NAACP Image Awards. US Rating: TV-MA For mature audiences. May not be suitable for ages 17 and under.

13th is Found on Netflix Streaming Services (Note: The name of the documentary is 13th – not 13 which is a completely different movie.)

The full length documentary, 13th, is also found for free on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/krfcq5pF8u8>

All In: The Fight for Democracy. 2020 documentary on Amazon Prime and YouTube (1 hour and 42 minutes)

The documentary takes a look at the history, and current activism against voter suppression; barriers to voting that most people don't even know is a threat to their basic rights as citizens of the United States. “All In: The Fight for Democracy” slowly builds and enforces its thesis that history is repeating itself. Gone are the days of blatantly unpassable literacy tests and poll taxes prohibiting non-White people from the ballot box. Instead, the new voting prerequisites, drafted by state Republican lawmakers across the country, come wrapped in concerns about fraud. These new voting requirements—extra identification, removal from voter rolls for supposed inactivity and closing of polling places disproportionately impact communities of color.

All In: The Fight for Democracy is found on amazon prime video streaming service

The Black Church. 2020 documentary on PBS (A 4-hour series in 2 parts)

The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song is a moving four-hour, two-part series from executive producer, host and writer Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor at Harvard University and director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research. This film traces the 400-year-old story of the Black church in America, all the way down to its bedrock role as the site of African American survival and grace, organizing and resilience, thriving and testifying, autonomy and freedom, solidarity and speaking truth to power. The documentary reveals how Black people in the United States have worshipped and, through their spiritual journeys, improvised ways to bring their faith traditions from Africa to the New World, while translating them into a form of Christianity that was not only truly their own, but a redemptive force for a nation whose original sin was found in their ancestors' enslavement across the Middle Passage. *Throughout, it traces the history of both the black church and the white church during key turning points in our American history.*

The Black Church - is only available on PBS. Initially it was free to view but now it is only available if you have a paid passport membership to Detroit's Public Television. See the following link for details.

https://www.pbs.org/weta/black-church/?utm_source=youtube&utm_medium=pbsofficial&utm_campaign=blackchurch_2021

For a free 6 minute overview of the series about the Black Church see YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuBNtYGWRyU>