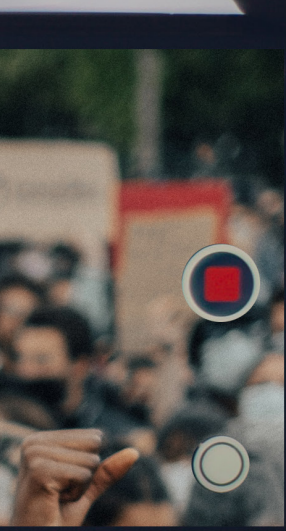


EXAMINE RACISM

Through the lens of human rights, understand personal prejudice, racial attitudes.



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Doctrine and Covenants 162:6a

Racism varies across cultures and time, and depending on where you live and when you lived, racism might take different forms.

The antisemitism of medieval Europe had roots in Christendom, meaning Europe's Christian religion and culture. Christian antisemitism targeted Jewish people as a religious and racial group. The antisemitism of Nazi Germany had clearer modern roots that included eugenics—a disproven form of evolutionary science.

Serfdom, the slavery of feudal Europe, differed from chattel slavery that was practiced in the early modern world. Chattel slavery had clear roots in modern racism. Chattel slavery in the early Americas was the buying and selling of people mostly from Africa.

Under chattel slavery, captured slaves were described as sub-human. African slaves were believed to be part of a race, which required domination by masters to fulfill their purpose. Under early capitalism, these human beings could be traded and disposed of as property. Serfdom in medieval Europe operated under different laws and customs.

Serfdom and chattel slavery differ from the practice of debt-bondage and human trafficking that exist today.

There are other examples of how racism varies. The legal segregation and violence of South African apartheid had different origins and characteristics than the segregation and lynching in the US South and its Jim Crow laws in the twentieth century. Apartheid and US racism practiced legal, economic, and cultural segregation against Africans. Both had roots in European imperialism. Yet, they differed in time and culture.

Racism in Latin America against darker-skinned people of African and Caribbean descent also differs from the racial prejudice against nonwhite US immigrants from Latin America and the Middle East. Immigrants from South and Central America often are discriminated against as "illegals." Immigrants from the Middle East easily are prejudiced as Muslims, at worst "terrorists." Study the racism against Asian Americans, especially since the pandemic, and you will find even a different kind of social discrimination and prejudice.

Why is this important?

Racism shapes—and continues to shape—society and human history. Those who believe racism is only personal attitude or belief about skin color have a narrow and inadequate definition. That definition is, itself, shaped by the effects of racism.

Those who experience prejudice by their skin color likely will believe racism is no more than that. But, historically, racism has many more manifestations and characteristics than personal belief. Racism

concerns power. It affects who has legal, social, and economic access. Racism shapes who has legal, social and economic privileges, and who is disadvantaged. Racism shapes who lives in poverty. Race affects equal and unequal treatment under the law.

Racism endures in religion. Racism shapes religion because race shapes culture. Religion is part of culture. Race and racial characteristics inform our preferences about what is attractive or beautiful, as well as our images of Jesus, God, or the Divine. Race and cultural characteristics also inform what we find to be moral and immoral, acceptable and unacceptable.

If we, in Community of Christ, hope to understand racism, three things can get us started and take us deeper. If race and racism is among the "cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God" (Doctrine and Covenants 163:3b), I suggest the following things we can do.

First, don't settle or stop at dictionary definitions.

I looked up three definitions of race or racism. Each definition emphasized race or racism as a "belief," "prejudice," or "doctrine" about the superiority or inherent difference of one group from another. This is a narrow and potentially unhelpful definition.

It's true that race and racism are human constructs, meaning they are beliefs and ideas created and lived by society. But, racism, like every other "-ism," is much more than a belief, prejudice, or doctrine.

Race and racism shape what it means to live and be human. As I stated, it shapes society, knowledge, laws, and economics. If you are not already familiar, learn the history of race and racism in your own community, neighborhood, or village. Privilege the voices of those who suffer under racism. Race is a lived reality, not just a belief or prejudice.

Second, to understand racism consider your race.

This will be uncomfortable for some of us, even many of us who are privileged. You might react to the idea that you have a race or that race matters. You might bristle at being labeled, categorized, or put "in a box" of race. There's good reason to be. You might even be upset that someone in your church has asked you to identify your race.

If you are part of the dominant racial group or the privileged, I invite you to become vulnerable.

Being part of the racial majority or dominant group means your race is less visible. That's the privilege of being in the dominant race. The dominant race generally is treated as "normal." In some cases, the dominant racial group is a minority, but it holds most of the power. Therefore, it is treated as "special."

Those in the nondominant race or racial minority, therefore, stand out as racially different. Your racial difference shapes how others view you. You may have the privilege of being treated as an individual instead of a minority group. Therefore, you may struggle against being stereotyped in your racial group. Those in the minority group also feel this way.

Whether you or I identify with a race or not, most of us are given a racial identity by our nation, culture, and environment. Race operates often unconsciously. The social science on race and implicit bias are well documented and proven. Our racial identity shapes how others perceive us, how we perceive ourselves, and how we are treated by others. How much race affects us changes as we move from home, marketplace, work, and social media. How race affects us also can change as we move between communities and neighborhoods.

If you live in a community with many others of the same race, go spend time in a community or village where you're a racial minority. If you are in the racial minority, reflect again at how it feels to be in community with others of the same race.

Considering your own race helps each of us become more self-aware. Our race, ethnicity, and national-origin shape where we live, who lives around us, as well as the norms we're used to. Race shapes our economic access and legal protections. Our racial similarity and difference from others affect our feelings of control, comfort, safety, and familiarity. Race and racial identity shape who we are, regardless of whether we intend it or not.

Our race even shapes how we view race and racism.

Third, start (or continue) to pay attention to how race and racial identity affect human rights.

Human rights are not protected or defended equally. I invite you to consider how human rights are not defined equally among racial groups.

Attention to race and human rights forces us to look beyond personal prejudice or racial attitudes. It requires us to examine how systems and cultures define race and treat people of different races differently regardless of how we individually believe.

Race and human rights introduce us to systemic racism. What is systemic racism?

- Systemic racism names observable facts. It describes how systems and cultures define racial difference and affect people identified with racial difference unequally. For example, those who are in minority racial groups are often disproportionately poor and disadvantaged.
- Systemic racism is challenging and complex to define and study. It's essential to study, however, because systemic racism accounts for the ways race and racism shape our world over time. It helps

us define how past racism shapes race and racism today.

- Systemic racism names how laws and social institutions, technology, economics, and culture affect race and treat people of different racial groups unequally. Championing equal human rights points us to the problems of systemic racism.

THE CALL OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RACE

A prophetic people will see the inequities of systemic racism. Prophetic people recognize how systemic racism creates injustices God does not intend or affirm for creation. Doctrine and Covenants 162:6a speaks directly to the problems of systemic racism and declares God's will for us. It states:

The One who created all humankind grieves at the shameful divisions within the human family. A prophetic people must work tirelessly to tear down walls of separation and to build bridges of understanding. You hold precious lives in your hands. Be gentle and gracious with one another. A community is no stronger than the weakest within it. Even as the One you follow reached out to those who were rejected and marginalized, so must the community that bears his name.

Race and its many forms remain a shameful division of the human family.

Recognize the injustices of systemic racism and champion equal human rights. Why? Facing the injustices of systemic racism and championing equal rights aim at fulfilling human dignity and God's will for the human family. Championing human rights means privileging those who suffer under systemic racism. Equal human rights mean actively pursuing equal treatment under the law, in schools, in our businesses, in our neighborhoods and villages, online and in our churches.

World Conference Resolution 1184 declares that Community of Christ affirms "all people have essential rights." It was passed at the same World Conference Section 156 of the Doctrine and Covenants called forth the ordination of women and the building of the Temple dedicated to the pursuit of peace. For me, the Temple, pursuit of human rights, and pursuit of peace are clearly entwined.

So long as racism and its inequities appear in society, Community of Christ has a mission.

