In giving us a history of America and the Protestant church, Jemar Tisby has given us a survey of ourselves—the racial meanings and stratagems that define our negotiations with one another. He points courageously toward the open sore of racism, not with the resigned pessimism of the defeated but with the resilient hope of Christian faith. The reader will have their minds and hearts pricked as they consider just how complicit the church has been in America's original sin and how weak a word *complicit* is for describing the actions and inactions of those who claim the name of Christ!

THABITI ANYABWILE, pastor, Anacostia River Church

With clinical precision, Jemar Tisby unpacks the tragic connection between the American church and the countless historic iterations of American racism. Readers are served well by Jemar's refusal to minimize the horror of this history or sanitize the church's hands from its complicity. For this reason and many others, *The Color of Compromise* is an appropriately discomforting volume for such a time as this. May it be referenced and heeded as a prophetic warning for decades to come.

TYLER BURNS, vice president, The Witness

If you want to understand why we remain mired in racial unrighteousness, you need to read this book. Its pages radiate not just historical but also moral insight, as Tisby shines a light on to the dark places of American church history. *The Color of Compromise* tells the truth—and only the truth will set us free.

HEATH W. CARTER, associate professor of history,
Valparaiso University, author, *Union Made*

The Color of Compromise is essential reading for American Christians. By telling the brutal history of white Christians' deliberate complicity in racial oppression, Jemar Tisby confronts the church with its own past. But his is not simply a story of condemnation. If racism can be made, it can be unmade, he reminds us. "There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love," Martin Luther King Jr. once wrote. Tisby's book is a labor of love and, ultimately, a work of hope.

KRISTIN DU MEZ, professor of history and
gender studies, Calvin College

Each individual and society is a compilation of what has come before them, whether they own this notion or not. Tisby's thoughtful work reminds us that you can run from, deny, or remix it, but history will find you out. The American church's history of wanting to hold holiness in one hand and racial stratification in the other has seeded a deeply corrupted tree. The book causes us to examine the implications of the historical trajectory of our theological influences. Yet this book, with the same intensity that it offers historical truth, provides grace. If race can be constructed, racism can be deconstructed. In Christ's name, it must be!

CHRISTINA EDMONDSON, dean for intercultural student development, Calvin College

Christianity in the United States has had problems for centuries as it concerns racial injustice, and most American Christians need what can only be described as remedial education when it comes to understanding the abusive racist history of our faith tradition. In *The Color of Compromise* Jemar Tisby courageously challenges some of our long held collective assumptions and whitewashed accounts of rationalized racism for the church in America. With a thoroughly researched and detailed examination of archival documents and literary sources, he compels readers to focus on hard truths, addresses the realities of American Christianity's past, and does so in a well-reasoned and lovingly direct writing style. Upon reading this book, one will come away having to reconsider how individuals who proudly boast of a Christian way of life in America continue to do so at the expense of others. As a historian and a Christian, Tisby presents truth with accuracy but also with much love and humility. If it is true that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it, then this book is a timely must-read for any Christian seeking justice and mercy, as we learn how problems in American Christianity's past could lead to solutions in our future.

ALEXANDER JUN, professor of higher education, Azusa Pacific University, author, *White Out* and *White Jesus*

Reconciliation doesn't happen without truth telling. Jemar takes us on a historical journey laying out the racial complicity of the church. It's difficult to understand the complexities of the history of racial oppression in America; one must begin to identify the intentional and unintentional blind spots many have. Jemar calls the church to face its tragic history in an effort to build a new future and to save it from repeating past mistakes. The foundation of

reconciliation begins with truth. Tisby encourages us to become courageous Christians who face our past with lament, hope, and humility. History is imperative to understanding the present. *The Color of Comprise* gives us an aerial view of our past with hopes of a Christian awakening. This is a must-read for all Christians who have hopes of seeing reconciliation.

LATASHA MORRISON, founder and president, Be the Bridge

With the incision of a prophet, the rigor of a professor, and the heart of a pastor, Jemar Tisby offers a defining examination of the history of race and the church in America. Comprehensive in its scope of American history, Tisby's data provides the full truth and not a sanitized version that most American Christians have embraced. Read this book. Share this book. Teach this book. The church in America will be better for it.

SOONG-CHAN RAH, Milton B. Engebretson Professor of Church Growth and Evangelism, North Park Theological Seminary, author, *The Next Evangelicalism* and *Prophetic Lament*

In *The Color of Compromise*, Tisby reveals the role that racism has played in the American church and how that has manifested in policy making. Those following the relationship between white evangelicals and President Trump need to know that this union was a long time coming—even before the rise of the Moral Majority, led in part by the late Jerry Falwell, father of one of Trump's most vocal evangelical supporters, Jerry Falwell Jr. Tisby's book gives the historical context that is often missing from the conversation about how so many black and white Christians can be described as theologically conservative but vote so differently on Election Day. *Compromise* helps the reader understand that Martin Luther King Jr.'s assessment—that Sunday morning is the most racially divided hour in America—rings true today and manifests in the voting booths when Christians express their deeply held convictions.

EUGENE SCOTT, reporter covering identity politics for *The Fix* for *The Washington Post*

Some American evangelical Christians are often confused and sometimes frustrated by all the talk surrounding white supremacy and American Christianity. Some think that racism and its deleterious intergenerational, personal, psychological, social, institutional, and systemic effects are of the past and too often exaggerated in the present or that in a certain way

THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE AMERICAN CHURCH'S COMPLICITY IN RACISM

JEMAR TISBY

ZONDERVAN
REFLECTIVE

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

On July 4, 2016, as my social media feeds filled with images of American flags and friends' backyard barbecues celebrating America's independence, I took to Twitter and posted a picture of seven African Americans picking cotton in a field with the following caption: "My family on July 4th 1776."

While the tweet received more than 15,000 retweets and 23,000 likes, there were numerous tweets frustrated by the fact that I chose to post such an image and caption on the day celebrating America's independence. One follower questioned my patriotism; another accused me of making every issue a race issue instead of a gospel issue. From where I sat, I was simply telling the truth about our country's complicated, imperfect history on a day when people were celebrating a simplistic, incomplete narrative about our country.

Though those responses frustrated and grieved me, they didn't surprise me. My work as a black hip-hop artist with an audience in white evangelicalism has shown me the tension that exists between black and white America, specifically when it comes to the history of the white evangelical church in America.

That's why I'm excited that this book by my friend and brother Jemar Tisby is in your hands. Throughout its pages, Jemar carefully surveys the history of the white church in America and its complicity with racism. As a student of history, he's careful with stories and data, seeking to let history speak for itself by boldly telling the truth and helping us connect the dots between events over the past 400 years of our country's history.

In a time when discussions grow heated quickly and narratives

clash as black and white American Christians think about and discuss our country's racial history and its ongoing implications, Jemar's book challenges us to consider the history that has shaped us.

As Christians, when we read the Bible, we recognize that events that happened thousands of years ago are still relevant today. We also see that Scripture never hides the ugly parts of history when it comes to the people of God. The Bible reveals David's adultery, Jonah's selfishness, and Peter's failure of faith. Just as we can't take out the parts of the Bible that we don't like or that make us uncomfortable, we can't celebrate the shining moments of the American church's history and then ignore the shameful aspects of that history. We either fully acknowledge the entire history or dismiss it all. The truth about humanity's heritage turns a mirror on our souls and pushes us to recognize who we truly are and who we are not.

Jemar challenges us to take history seriously and account for it. My brother has done his due diligence in researching and understanding the history of the evangelical church in the United States. He has carefully collected historical records, interviews, and stories and then organized that history in a way that helps us see how the travesty of racism in and from the church deeply impacts our politics, churches, neighborhoods, schools. The account is sobering and challenging

Fortunately, Jemar doesn't simply leave us on our own to figure out next steps. Along with the bleak, heart-wrenching account of the past, he offers thoughtful, constructive action steps we can take to pursue justice and reconciliation in our communities, churches, and country.

Education should lead to informed action, and informed action should lead to liberation, justice, and repair. Through reading this book, we realize that if we built the walls on purpose, we need to tear down the walls on purpose. This demands political, social, and personal action that cuts through theological and political lines. It requires us to hold our Bibles with clarity and strength while correcting our country's broken systems, such as mass incarceration and police brutality.

We live in a country centered around whiteness that disregards how the image of God is on magnificent display in nonwhite bodies

(and histories and theologies, etc.). If we don't take responsibility for what has happened in America, we're not willing to see the image of God throughout the world.

Jemar has done a service to the church through this book. He has traced our country's wicked, racist history and demonstrated how the church has been complicit in that work. Understanding the past isn't simply an end in and of itself; it's also a means to an end. Through understanding our history, we can look to the world around us with new eyes and see ways we can move forward with focus and intentionality to make right what has been wrong so that justice will "roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Lecrae

CHAPTER 1

THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

Four young girls busily prepared for their big day. It was September 15, 1963, the day of the "Youth Day" Sunday service at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and the girls, along with the other young people of the congregation, would spend the next few hours singing songs, reciting poems, praying, and giving encouraging messages in front of hundreds of beaming parents. The girls—Addie Mae Collins (14), Denise McNair (11), Carole Robertson (14), and Cynthia Wesley (14)—had just finished Sunday school and were in the church basement making final adjustments to their white dresses when the bomb exploded.[1] The blast, which killed all four girls and injured at least twenty others, left a hole in the floor five feet wide and two feet deep. It decapitated Cynthia. Her parents could only identify her body by her feet and by the ring she was wearing.[2] A newspaper report at the time indicated that all of the church's stained-glass windows had been destroyed except one. That window depicted "Christ leading a group of little children. The face of Christ was blown out."[3]

Three days later, an integrated crowd of thousands of mourners gathered at Sixth Avenue Baptist Church for a funeral for three of the girls. So many attended that the mass of people spilled out of the sanctuary and into the street.[4] The cover of this book shows the scene of the funeral.

Before the funeral, on the day after the bombing, a young, white lawyer named Charles Morgan Jr. delivered a lunchtime speech at Birmingham's all-white Young Men's Business Club. Of course, he had heard about the tragedy in his city, and this lifelong southerner jotted down some words about racism and complicity that would prove to be a turning point in his life.

Reflecting on the events he said, "'Who did it? Who threw that bomb? Was it a Negro or a white?' The answer should be, 'We all did it.' Every last one of us is condemned for that crime and the bombing before it and a decade ago. We all did it."[5]

Morgan recognized that no matter who had physically planted the dynamite, all the city's white residents were complicit in allowing an environment of hatred and racism to persist. The acts that reinforced racism happened in countless common ways. Morgan explained, "The 'who' is every little individual who talks about the 'niggers' and spreads the seeds of his hate to his neighbor and his son. The jokester, the crude oaf whose racial jokes rock the party with laughter."[6]

Morgan also recognized that Christians bore as much responsibility as anyone for the state of race relations in the city. "It is all the Christians and all their ministers who spoke too late in anguished cries against violence." He then asked a series of rhetorical questions for his listeners to ponder. "Did those ministers visit the families of the Negroes in their hour of travail? Did many of them go to the homes of their brothers and express their regrets in person or pray with the crying relatives? Do they admit Negroes into their ranks at the church?"[7]

Some white Birmingham residents did not receive Charles Morgan Jr.'s speech well. Though many hurled death threats at Morgan personally, the threat that most disturbed him listed every place his wife and son had been on a recent Saturday. Morgan soon closed his law practice and moved elsewhere to engage in a long career of civil rights law.[8]

Although many people from Birmingham and beyond expressed outrage at the murder of these four black girls at church, Morgan's point stands out—the most egregious acts of racism, like a church bombing, occur within a context of compromise. The failure of many

Christians in the South and across the nation to decisively oppose the racism in their families, communities, and even in their own churches provided fertile soil for the seeds of hatred to grow. The refusal to act in the midst of injustice is itself an act of injustice. Indifference to oppression perpetuates oppression.

History and Scripture teach us that there can be no reconciliation without repentance. There can be no repentance without confession. And there can be no confession without truth. *The Color of Compromise* is about telling the truth so that reconciliation—robust, consistent, honest reconciliation—might occur across racial lines. Yet all too often, Christians, and Americans in general, try to circumvent the truth-telling process in their haste to arrive at reconciliation. This book tells the truth about racism in the American church in order to facilitate authentic human solidarity.

In this book you'll read about the American church's sickening record of supporting racism. Many would prefer this history to remain locked away and hidden. But Martin Luther King Jr. gave an important rationale for shining a light on injustice, despite the pain it may provoke. "Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light," he wrote, "injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured."[9] King's words apply to racism in the church. The festering wound of racism in the American church must be exposed to the oxygen of truth in order to be healed.

Although activists have achieved a remarkable amount of racial progress at great cost, racism continues to plague the church. One of the reasons churches can't shake the shackles of segregation is that few have undertaken the regimen of aggressive treatment the malady requires. It seems like most Christians in America don't know how bad racism really is, so they don't respond with the necessary urgency. Even when Christians realize the need for change, they often shrink back from the sacrifices that transformation entails.

This book is about revealing racism. It pulls back the curtain on the ways American Christians have collaborated with racism for centuries.

By seeing the roots of racism in this country, may the church be moved to immediate and resolute antiracist action.

CHRISTIAN COMPLICITY WITH RACISM

While many Christian traditions and other religions have varied and valuable narratives, Protestants, especially evangelicals, have written some of the most well-known narratives of racism in the United States. Other religious groups, such as white Catholics, have certainly contributed to racism, but the narrative that unfolds in the following pages focuses on Protestant churches. Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians all have a central, sometimes repressive, place in the story of race in America. No matter which faith tradition or denomination is at the forefront of discussion, racism extends across sectarian lines.

What do we mean when we talk about *racism*? Beverly Daniel Tatum provides a shorthand definition: racism is a system of oppression based on race.[10] Notice Tatum's emphasis on systemic oppression. Racism can operate through impersonal systems and not simply through the malicious words and actions of individuals. Another definition explains racism as *prejudice plus power*. It is not only personal bigotry toward someone of a different race that constitutes racism; rather, racism includes the imposition of bigoted ideas on groups of people.

In light of these definitions, it is accurate to say that many white people have been complicit with racism. Although there have been notable exceptions, and racial progress in this country could not have happened without allies across the color line, white people have historically had the power to construct a social caste system based on skin color, a system that placed people of African descent at the bottom. White men and women have used tools like money, politics, and terrorism to consolidate their power and protect their comfort at the expense of black people. Christians participated in this system of white supremacy—a concept that identifies white people and white culture as normal and superior—even if they claim people of color as their brothers and sisters in Christ.

White complicity with racism isn't a matter of melanin, it's a matter of power. Other nations have different dynamics. Whether society is stratified according to class, gender, religion, or tribe, communities tend to put power in the hands of a few to the detriment of many. In the United States, power runs along color lines, and white people have the most influence.

Historically speaking, when faced with the choice between racism and equality, the American church has tended to practice a complicit Christianity rather than a courageous Christianity. They chose comfort over constructive conflict and in so doing created and maintained a status quo of injustice.

Given the history, *complicity* is a weak word for describing how American Christianity has often interacted with race. As historian Carolyn DuPont describes it, "Not only did white Christians fail to fight *for* black equality, they often labored mightily *against* it."[11] Complicity connotes a degree of passivity—as if Christianity were merely a boat languidly floating down the river of racism. In reality, white Christians have often been the current, whipping racism into waves of conflict that rock and divide the people of God. Even if only a small portion of Christians committed the most notorious acts of racism, many more white Christians can be described as complicit in creating and sustaining a racist society.

WHAT A HISTORICAL SURVEY IS AND ISN'T

Before jumping into the waters of history, it's important to acknowledge the limitations of a book like this one. Every book is an introduction, an invitation to further study. This is especially true with a historical survey.[12] A survey covers a large amount of historical territory quickly. It gives readers a sense of the historical patterns and how they have changed or persisted over time. Yet surveying the history of the American church and racism leaves no doubt that race has exerted an undeniable influence on the way Christianity has developed in this nation.

At the same time, a survey focuses on breadth instead of depth.

A high degree of selectivity goes into a historical survey, and more gets left out than put in. So it should come as no surprise that important leaders, events, and stories may not even get mentioned in this book. This is not to say that the facts left out are unimportant; it is merely an indication of what can be accomplished in a single volume. This book is a doorway into the endless hallways and chambers of American history and makes no claim to be a comprehensive treatment of race and the American church.

The Color of Compromise focuses on prominent figures, precipitous events, and well-known turning points in American history. These stories serve as an entry point to a deeper study of the host of local people and lesser-known narratives with significant historical and social importance. But even though most of history's precipitous events hinge on the actions of numerous people at the grassroots level, certain individuals and their actions symbolize broader movements and sentiments. Widely recognized people, such as George Whitefield and Billy Graham, are highlighted not because their voices matter most but because their stances represent larger cultural trends.[13]

This book focuses on the black-white racial divide in American Christianity. Of course, there are many other intractable conflicts along racial and ethnic lines. These various schisms have their own unique stories and dynamics. It would be impossible to do them all justice in a single volume. Yet justice for one group can open pathways for equality to other groups.[14] The principles outlined in this book, when applied to other racial and ethnic conflicts, can help lead to greater understanding and positive change.

Even though a survey approach poses several limitations, it also offers the opportunity to see long-term trends and change over time. Throughout this journey several themes dot the horizon of history. One notable theme is that white supremacy in the nation and the church was not inevitable. Things could have been different. At several points in American history—the colonial era, Reconstruction, the demise of Jim Crow—Christians could have confronted racism instead of compromising. Although the missed opportunities are heartbreaking, the fact that people can choose is also empowering.

Christians deliberately chose complicity with racism in the past, but the choice to confront racism remains a possibility today.

Another theme this survey reveals is that racism changes over time. Skin color is simply a physical trait. It is a feature that has no bearing on one's intrinsic dignity. As the following chapters show, people invented racial categories. Race and racism are social constructs. As society changes, so does racism. Racist attitudes produced different actions in 1619 than they did in 1919 or 2020. The malleability and impermanence of racial categories help explain how the American church's compromise with racism has become subtler over time. History demonstrates that racism never goes away; it just adapts.

WHY WRITE ABOUT RACISM AND RELIGION?

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love."[15] This study is not about discrediting the church or Christians. I love the church. My concern for the church and for the well-being of its people motivates my exploration of Christian complicity in racism. The goal is to build up the body of Christ by "speaking the truth in love," even if that truth comes at the price of pain.

The church has not always and uniformly been complicit with racism. The same Bible that racists misused to support slavery and segregation is the one abolitionists and civil rights activists rightly used to animate their resistance. Whenever there has been racial injustice, there have been Christians who fought against it in the name of Jesus Christ. Christianity has an inspiring history of working for racial equity and the dignity of all people, a history that should never be overlooked.

The black church, in particular, has always been a bulwark against bigotry. Forged in the fires of racial prejudice, the black church emerged as the ark of safety for people of African descent. Preachers and leaders in the church saw the truth of the gospel message even as slaveholders and white supremacists distorted the message to make more obedient slaves. Black churches looked to the exodus of the

Hebrews from Egypt as a model for their own exodus from American slavery. Black Christians saw in Scripture a God who "sits high and looks low"—one who saw their oppression and was outraged by it. Through the centuries, black people have become the most religious demographic in the United States. For instance, 83 percent of black people say they "believe in God with absolute certainty" compared to 59 percent of Hispanics and 61 percent of whites. Additionally, 75 percent of blacks say "religion is very important" to them compared to 59 percent of Hispanics and 49 percent of whites.[16] Through their religious heritage, black people have passed on a tradition of struggle, liberation, and rejoicing to every generation. Black Christians have played a vital role in shaping the history of America, and they have much to share with the church universal.

But the examples given in this book do not present a positive picture. The focus is mainly on racist acts and actors. This emphasis is purposeful. American Christians have never had trouble celebrating their victories, but honestly recognizing their failures and inconsistencies, especially when it comes to racism, remains an issue. All too often, Christians name a few individuals who stood against the racism of their day and claim them as heroes. They fail to recognize how rarely believers made public and persistent commitments to racial equality against the culture of their churches and denominations. Jumping ahead to the victories means skipping the hard but necessary work of examining what went wrong with race and the church. That can lead to simplistic understandings of the past and superficial solutions to racial issues in the present. *The Color of Compromise* undoes the tendency to skip the hard parts of history and directs the reader's attention to the racist realities that challenge a triumphalist view of American Christianity.

WHY *THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE* MAY BE HARD TO READ

The long history of racism reveals that certain people will object to the very premise of this book. The notion that racism has colored the

character of the American church for the past four hundred years will seem incomprehensible to some. As a result, they will voice strenuous and, typically, very public opposition to the claims that racism, especially in its systemic and institutional manifestations, has shaped the church. These individuals are often Christians themselves, but they are not uniformly white; such attitudes cut across the racial and ethnic spectrum.

The people who will reject this book will level several common objections. What stands out about these complaints is not their originality or persuasiveness but their ubiquity throughout history. The same arguments that perpetuated racial inequality in decades past get recycled in the present day. Critics will assert that the ideas in *The Color of Compromise* should be disregarded because they are too "liberal." They will claim that a Marxist Communist ideology underlies all the talk about racial equality. They will contend that such an extended discussion of racism reduces black people to a state of helplessness and a "victim mentality." They will try to point to counterexamples and say that racists do not represent the "real" American church. They will assert that the historical facts are wrong or have been misinterpreted. They will charge that this discussion of race is somehow "abandoning the gospel" and replacing it with problematic calls for "social justice." After reading just a few chapters, these arguments will sound familiar. These arguments have been used throughout the American church's history to deny or defend racism. Other books more pointedly respond to the ways people attempt to explain away or deflect claims of racism.[17] In this book the stories themselves tell the tale of racial oppression. It is up to the reader to determine whether the weight of historical evidence proves that the American church has been complicit with racism.

You may have trouble reading *The Color of Compromise* for different reasons. Your issue may not stem from opposition to the notion that racism pervades the American church; instead, you may have to grapple with learning a narrative that contradicts much of what you have been taught since childhood. Ideas about people who have been cast as heroes of the faith, concepts about systemic injustice and historic patterns of oppression, alternatives to political conservatism as

the only Christian way, insights into the reality of black suffering—learning this information will likely take time to absorb and process. No matter your level of education about race and the church, you may need to pause from reading to reflect or recover emotionally. Such a response is only natural in light of the long and deflating history of Christian compromise with racism.

Reading *The Color of Compromise* is like having a sobering conversation with your doctor and hearing that the only way to cure a dangerous disease is by undergoing an uncomfortable surgery and ongoing rehabilitation. Although the truth cuts like a scalpel and may leave a scar, it offers healing and health. The progress is worth the pain.

Finally, for some of you, news that the American church has often been complicit in racism is not news at all. You have known for a long time that a version of Christianity has bought into bigotry. You may even have written off Christianity, or at least evangelicalism, as a whole. What readers like this may find difficult about *The Color of Compromise* is that very rarely do historical figures fit neatly into the category of "villain." Many individuals throughout American church history exhibited blatant racism, yet they also built orphanages and schools. They deeply loved their families; they showed kindness toward others. In several prominent instances, avowed racists even changed their minds. Moreover, despite the American church's complicity in racism, black Christians have forged a faith of their own. Christianity has been an engine for black progress even as others co-opted the faith to buttress white supremacy. Studying history forces people in the present to view people in the past as complex and contradictory figures.

The goal of this book is not guilt. The purpose of tracing Christian complicity with racism is not to show white believers how bad they are. It is simply a fact of American history that white leaders and laity made decisions to maintain the racist status quo. Even though the purpose of this work is not to call out any particular racial group, these words may cause some grief, but grief can be good. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, Paul says, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation

without regret" (ESV). This kind of grief is a natural response to the suffering of others. It indicates empathy with the pain that racism has caused black people. The ability to weep with those who weep is necessary for true healing.

Though the work of racial justice is difficult and will never truly end in this life, God has provided a colorful portrait of the goal. In a cosmic case of beginning with the end in mind, God pulls back the curtain of eternity to provide a glimpse of future glory. Revelation 7:9 says, "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." In that heavenly congregation, we will finally see the culmination of God's gathering a diverse people unified by faith in Christ. We will not all be white; we will not all be black. We will surround the throne of the Lamb as a redeemed picture of all the ethnic and cultural diversity God created. Our skin color will no longer be a source of pain or arrogant pride but will serve as a multihued reflection of God's image. We will no longer be alienated by our earthly economic or social position. We will not clamor for power over one another. Our single focus will be worshiping God for eternity in sublime fellowship with each other and our Creator.

This picture of perfection has been bequeathed to believers not as a distant reality that we can merely long for. Instead, the revelation of the heavenly congregation provides a blueprint and a motivation to seek unity right now. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Christians have been mandated to pray that the racial and ethnic unity of the church would be manifest, even if imperfectly, in the present. Christ himself brought down "the dividing wall of hostility" that separated humanity from one another and from God (Eph. 2:14). Indeed, reconciliation across racial and ethnic lines is not something Christians must achieve but a reality we must receive. On the cross when Christ said, "It is finished," he meant it (John 19:30). If peace has been achieved between God and human beings, surely we can have greater peace between people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

THE IMPERATIVE FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

Although our eternal peace is secure, a diverse but unified body of Christ will only come through struggle in this life. A survey of the history of racism and the church shows that the story is worse than most imagine. Christianity in America has been tied to the fallacy of white supremacy for hundreds of years. European colonists brought with them ideas of white superiority and paternalism toward darker-skinned people. On this sandy foundation, they erected a society and a version of religion that could only survive through the subjugation of people of color. Minor repairs by the weekend-warrior racial reconcilers won't fix a flawed foundation. The church needs the Carpenter from Nazareth to deconstruct the house that racism built and remake it into a house for all nations.

By surveying the church's racist past, American Christians may feel the weight of their collective failure to consistently confront racism in the church. This should lead to immediate, fierce action to confess this truth and work for justice. Then, perhaps, Paul's words to the Corinthians might ring true for today's church: "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting" (2 Cor. 7:9 ESV).

Progress is possible, but we must learn to discern the difference between complicit Christianity and courageous Christianity. Complicit Christianity forfeits its moral authority by devaluing the image of God in people of color. Like a ship that has a cracked hull and is taking on water, Christianity has run aground on the rocks of racism and threatens to capsize—it has lost its integrity. By contrast, courageous Christianity embraces racial and ethnic diversity. It stands against any person, policy, or practice that would dim the glory of God reflected in the life of human beings from every tribe and tongue. These words are a call to abandon complicit Christianity and move toward courageous Christianity.

CHAPTER 2

MAKING RACE IN THE COLONIAL ERA

The colonial museum in Williamsburg, Virginia, features exhibits detailing the earliest English settlements in North America. Plaques explaining the conditions for Africans in colonial Virginia hang on the walls. One display explains the process by which those Africans became slaves for life. The heading reads, "Key Slavery Statutes of the Virginia General Assembly," and cites a law enacted in September 1667.

On the question of whether baptism would render slaves free, the Virginia General Assembly decided, "It is enacted and declared by this Grand Assembly, and the authority thereof, that the conferring of baptism does not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom." This statute encouraged white enslavers to evangelize their human chattel since baptized slaves would not be freed. In the words of the assembly, "Masters, freed from this doubt, may more carefully endeavor the propagation of Christianity by permitting children, though slaves, or those of greater growth if capable, to be admitted to that sacrament."

The Virginia General Assembly, made up of Anglican men, had been compelled by public pressure to address whether baptism rendered slaves free. It had been longstanding custom in England that

Christians, being spiritual brothers and sisters, could not enslave one another. Yet the economy of the European colonies in North America depended more and more on slave labor. So plantation owners discouraged the enslaved from hearing the Christian gospel and receiving the sacrament of baptism. They did not want to lose their unpaid labor and diminish their profits. At the same time, missionaries exerted pressure on the slave owners to evangelize their slaves.

The Virginia Assembly took the initiative to enact a new law. Despite the established tradition, the assembly decided that baptism would not confer freedom upon their laborers. Instead, these Africans would remain in physical bondage even after their conversion. Missionaries, ministers, and slaveowners encouraged African Christians in America to be content with their spiritual liberation and to obey their earthly masters.

The assembly enacted its law concerning enslaved persons and baptism in the seventeenth century. The law predated the existence of the political entity now known as the United States of America. It was enacted more than 100 years before the Declaration of Independence and more than 120 years before the "founding fathers" drafted and ratified the Constitution. Looking at the history of colonial Virginia uncovers the reality that racism in the church has been a problem from the very first moments of European contact in North America.

To grasp how American Christians constructed and cooperated with racism, one has to realize that nothing about American racism was inevitable. There was a period, from about 1500 to 1700, when race did not predetermine one's station and worth in society. This is not to say that racism did not exist; it surely did. But during the initial stages of European settlement in North America, the colonists had not yet cemented skin color as an essential feature of life in their communities. Race was still being made.

This chapter outlines the early days of European contact with indigenous peoples and the first days of African slavery in North America.[1] It shows how individuals and groups who had power chose dividends over dignity and made America a place where darker-skinned people occupied a limited and inferior role in society. Through a series of immoral

choices, the foundations were laid for race-based stratification. Yet if people made deliberate decisions to enact inequality, it is possible that a series of better decisions could begin to change this reality.

EUROPEAN CONTACT WITH NORTH AMERICA

After about two months of sailing, Columbus and his bedraggled crew stumbled onto the shores of the Americas in 1492. Of course, Columbus and his men did not walk onto uninhabited land. When they arrived, they found a place vibrant with flora and fauna as well as sophisticated communities of indigenous people who had dwelled there since before written memory. Columbus's band was not even among the first Europeans in North America. Centuries earlier the Scandinavians made landfall on the northern Atlantic coast in a failed colonization project.[2] Instead, Columbus's arrival represented the beginning of an era of European colonization, motivated by profit and predicated on unpaid labor.

Race has been so inscribed into American society that nowadays it is hard to imagine another reality. But in the early decades of European contact with North America, the racial caste system had not yet been developed. Race is a social construct. There is no biological basis for the superiority or inferiority of any human being based on the amount of melanin in her or his skin. The development of the idea of race required the intentional actions of people in the social, political, and religious spheres to decide that skin color determined who would be enslaved and who would be free. Over time Europeans, including Christians, wrote the laws and formed the habits that concentrated power in the hands of those they considered "white" while withholding equality from those they considered "black."

The racial attitudes that underlay these ideas formed over time. From the colonial through the Revolutionary eras, the racial caste system remained malleable and uneven. European contact with the indigenous peoples of North America and the importation of Africans to the continent posed questions about how to organize society, and no one had preestablished answers.

Yet while the contours of American society after European contact had not yet been decided, the explorers still arrived with preformed ideas about the inherent superiority of lighter-skinned (that is, more European-looking) people. One of Columbus's early letters back to Spain compared indigenous and European physical features. "As regards beauty, the Christians [Europeans] said there was no comparison, both men and women, and that their skins are whiter than the other [indigenous people]. They saw two girls whose skins were as white as any that could be seen in Spain."[3] Europeans evaluated the people they encountered in North America based on how similar they were to themselves. This is a common human response when interacting with other groups, but the description in Columbus's letter reveals that colonists equated lighter skin with beauty and desirability long before chattel slavery became the norm.

Early reports of European contact with indigenous people demonstrate that the Europeans had missionary ends in mind, but their means and motivations were questionable. During his first voyage Columbus wrote, "[The indigenous inhabitants] should be good servants and intelligent, for I observed that they quickly took in what was said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, as it appeared to me that they had no religion."[4] To Columbus and his followers, the people they encountered would make "good servants." Indigenous people were not considered intellectual or social equals but were valued based on their ability to do the will of Europeans.

Further, in the mind of Columbus and others, indigenous people did not have the sophistication to develop their own religious beliefs. Europeans failed to acknowledge the longstanding, well-developed religious beliefs and practices of the people they met. Instead, they viewed indigenous men and women as blank slates on which Christian missionaries could write the gospel. This paternalistic view of evangelism permeates American church history.

For the next century and a half, European colonists struggled to establish settlements in North America. They faced new climates, diseases, starvation, and a short supply of people. For a while, European hegemony over the land's original inhabitants was far

from a foregone conclusion. For instance, historian Richard White refers to the "middle ground" between cultures when "whites could neither dictate to Indians nor ignore them."[5] Native Americans often resisted encroachment upon their lands through diplomacy and warfare. But vulnerability to European pathogens, frequent betrayal, and constant warfare decimated the indigenous American population. Slowly Europeans established towns and cities. They began raising crops and families. In turn, European countries demanded more raw materials from their colonies. To meet the growing European demands, the North American colonizers increasingly turned to slavery.

THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

Over the next 300 years, the transatlantic slave trade transported more than ten million Africans to the Americas in a forced migration of epic scale. About two million people perished on the voyage. The human cost in terms of suffering, indignity, and death caused by this commerce can never be fully comprehended, but the experience is often misunderstood or downplayed in the present day. The appalling nature of Christian cooperation with slavery cannot be understood apart from a description of bondage and its effects on Africans.

The process of enslavement began with the European desire for products that needed raw materials from the Americas. Ships would sail from England, France, Spain, Portugal, and other nations to the western coast of Africa. There, the Europeans would either barter with local African tribes for slaves captured in war—a common practice at the time—or kidnap their own slaves.[6]

Enslavers marched their captives sometimes hundreds of miles to the western coast of Africa. The slaves were tied together or had their necks clamped with wooden yokes. Many died of starvation or exhaustion. Some committed suicide along the way. Those who survived were taken to structures called "factories." These were fortress-like facilities designed to hold African slaves until they were loaded onto ships. Slave traders separated families and tribes so the Africans could not band

together and rebel. Finally, sometimes after months of waiting, the slaves shuffled onto ships called "slavers" bound for the Americas.[7]

Though the process of dehumanization began at the moment of capture, it took on new dimensions on the ship. Slave traders often shackled Africans together to prevent them from jumping overboard or rebelling. African slaves endured a horrific journey, the so-called "middle passage," from their native land to South America, the Caribbean Islands, or North America. It normally took two or three months to cross the Atlantic, but for some the journey lasted up to six months.

Olaudah Equiano published an autobiography in 1789 called *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa* to record his life as a slave and eventually a free man. He was born around 1745 as part of the Igbo tribe in modern-day Nigeria, and slave traders kidnapped Equiano and his sister when he was about eleven years old.[8] Years later Equiano wrote about the traumatic experience of being packed into a slave ship as a piece of cargo. In one particularly stomach-churning recollection, Equiano described the heat, smell, and human waste that accompanied slaves as they languished below deck. "The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time." He continued, "This produced copious perspirations, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves of which many died." Finally, he told of the tubs which held human excrement "into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated."[9]

By the time he wrote his autobiography, Equiano had converted to Christianity. As he reflected on his life, he viewed his experiences through the lens of his faith and commented on the hypocrisy of slave traders who claimed to be Christian. Recollecting on the repeated rape of African women by slave traders aboard the ship, Equiano wrote that it was a "disgrace, not only of Christians, but of men. I have even known them to gratify their brutal passion with females not yet ten years old."[10]

On the kidnapping of unsuspecting Africans and their separation from family, Equiano asked, "O, ye nominal Christians! might not an African ask you, learned you this from your God, who says unto

you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you?"[11] Black people immediately detected the hypocrisy of American-style slavery. They knew the inconsistencies of the faith from the rank odors, the chains, the blood, and the misery that accompanied their life of bondage. Instead of abandoning Christianity, though, black people went directly to teachings of Jesus and challenged white people to demonstrate integrity.

These depredations occurred before the slaves had even arrived in the Americas. The inhumanity of bondage began as soon as kidnappers snatched the Africans from their tribes, and most often the cruelty continued until the African's death, unless one happened to secure freedom.

John Newton, born in England in 1725, is best known for penning the hymn "Amazing Grace," and his life is remembered as a story of redemption. A lifelong sailor, Newton served as captain of a slave ship for a time. He marks March 10, 1748, as his Christian conversion. He did not stop his involvement in the transatlantic slave trade immediately, however. He continued slaving until he suffered a major stroke in 1754 and retired from the sea. After years of waiting and several attempts with different denominations, Newton was finally ordained as an Anglican priest in 1764 and became famous for his ministry at a church in Olney.

More than three decades after he retired from sailing, Newton wrote a pamphlet called *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*. He wrote it as both an encouragement for English politicians to abolish the slave trade and as a personal confession. "I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was, once, an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders," he wrote.[12] Newton, a celebrated example today, stands out because he eventually repudiated slavery. If Newton had simply remained a slave trader, he would have been so typical that it is likely no one would remember his name.

Even after surviving the middle passage, Africans were only beginning to experience the horrors of slavery. Ships usually landed at a port in the Caribbean—Barbados or Antigua, for example. Then slaveship captains did their best to sell their cargo as quickly as possible.

Sometimes buyers would purchase an entire ship's cargo. But they purchased enslaved people a few at a time. Slave captains would then sail from port to port looking for buyers. Sometimes the captains used the "scramble." With all the slaves corralled into one pen, potential buyers would rush into the pen, grabbing as many slaves as they could afford in a chaotic spectacle of greed and brutality.[13]

Upon purchase, the newly arrived Africans were "seasoned" to prepare them for their lives of bondage and labor in the Americas. Seasoning involved adapting to a different climate and new foods. It also involved teaching the Africans a new language, usually French, Spanish, or English. Africans were trained for their work, which was typically agricultural and involved plowing, hoeing, and weeding from sunup to sundown. This acculturation took a toll. As many as one-third of African slaves died within their first three years in the Americas.[14]

Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807 and outlawed slavery in Britain and its colonies in 1833. Much of the momentum for these changes came from Christians. For example, William Wilberforce was influenced by John Newton, who encouraged the young Parliamentarian to remain in his post and fight to end slavery.[15] Yet abolitionism did not arise from purely altruistic motives. The decline of slavery in Britain coincided with the rise of the Industrial Revolution. The factory became the urban farm that produced most British goods. The poet William Blake called factories "dark Satanic mills." Men, women, and children worked twelve-hour days in stifling heat tending whirring, steam-powered machines that could slice off a finger or crush a skull in the blink of a sleep-deprived eye. Although British slavery declined around this time, the rise in industrial productivity fed an astronomical demand for raw materials. The demand for cotton grew twentyfold in the decades after the turn of the nineteenth century.[16] North American slavery supplied the ravenous international appetite for cotton.

THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE IN NORTH AMERICA

In 1619, a Dutch trading ship landed off the coast of Virginia with "20. and odd Negroes."[17] The arrival of these enslaved women and men

was a matter of economic convenience. The British colonists had not requested slaves, but the Dutch ship had stolen the Africans from a Portuguese slave trading ship called *São João Bautista*, or *Saint John the Baptist*, and were looking for a place to sell their "cargo." As historian Gregory O'Malley explains, "The arrival of African captives had less to do with planters' demand for enslaved laborers than with the privateers' desire for a market in which to vend stolen Africans."[18]

Prior to the arrival of Africans in the British Virginia colony, Europeans had been transporting enslaved Africans to the Americas for more than a hundred years. Haiti and Jamaica, as well as South American countries such as Brazil, used millions of Africans to work on farms producing rice, sugar, and coffee. In fact, these other regions received far more enslaved persons than North America ever did. An estimated ten to twelve million slaves were brought across the Atlantic, and the majority ended up in the Caribbean or South America.[19]

Enslavement was different in South America and the Caribbean than in North America. The labor-intensive crops and enormous plantations meant that Africans usually outnumbered Europeans. The Haitian Revolution broke out in 1791, and its success was due, in part, to the population discrepancy between enslaved Africans and European landowners.

The harsh working conditions on sugar plantations and deadly diseases resulted in a high mortality rate. Deaths outnumbered births, so it was more cost-effective for plantation owners to replace slaves rather than to invest in keeping them alive. This led to a gender imbalance as slaveowners preferred male slaves who they could literally work to death. North America, by contrast, developed more gender parity, so a growing population of the enslaved came through birth, often referred to as "natural increase." Slave women in North America had an average birthrate of 9.2 children, twice as many as those in Caribbean colonies.[20]

In North America, slavery developed differently but no less cruelly. At first, some Africans were treated as indentured servants—workers bound to an employer for a certain time, usually to pay off a debt. Indentured servants could marry, save money, and eventually work

themselves out of servitude. The women and men who arrived on the Virginia coast in 1619 had names like Angelo and Pedro and were likely Catholic. After a number of years, they may have gained their liberty. As early as 1623, two Africans, Anthony and Isabella, married. They had a son, William, who was baptized as an Anglican and likely born free.[21]

By the mid-seventeenth century, some Africans lived as free people and worked in a variety of professions. A few, like Anthony Johnson, became wealthy enough to own land and buy enslaved Africans themselves. The life of an indentured servant was not a desirable one, but it was not always permanent, nor was it limited to Africans. Indigenous people and Europeans could become indentured servants too.

Although many Africans arrived as enslaved persons, colonists sometimes permitted them certain rights, such as earning their own money, purchasing their own and their family's freedom, and learning skilled trades. Edmund Morgan writes, "While racial feelings undoubtedly affected the position of Negroes, there is more than a little evidence that Virginians during these years were ready to think of Negroes as members or potential members of the community on the same terms as other men and to demand of them the same standards of behavior."[22] As Morgan indicates, colonists may have initially seen Africans in America as laborers just like any other and patterned their economy and politics to allow for their full inclusion. American history could have happened another way. Instead, racist attitudes and the pursuit of wealth increasingly relegated black people to a position of perpetual servitude and exploitation.

The practice of indentured servitude gradually gave way to slavery, and Europeans preferred Africans as laborers over other Europeans or the indigenous Americans. With the success of tobacco in the colonies and the increasing demand for the crop in Europe, agriculture became big business. A larger appetite for cash crops meant planters needed more labor. The indigenous population in America had been decimated by war and disease. Additionally, indigenous people proved to be difficult to control as enslaved workers because they often knew the landscape better than their European masters and could escape or

count on help from their tribe. Africans, divorced from their homeland and potential allies, emerged as more vulnerable targets of enslavement.

The shift toward slavery over indentured servitude happened gradually over the last few decades of the seventeenth century. Conflicts such as Bacon's Rebellion (1676) had alerted the Virginia gentry to the ongoing threat of a disgruntled population of white indentured servants and African laborers. Much of the transition to slavery, though, had economic roots. In the early days of colonization, European and African mortality rates were both extremely high. The chance of living five years or more was about fifty-fifty, which made it more financially feasible to use indentured servants rather than enslaved persons, who had a higher up-front cost. As life expectancy increased, lifelong labor became a more lucrative investment. Tobacco, the most profitable crop in Virginia at the time, required less capital and less punishing labor than producing a commodity such as sugar, which was popular in the West Indies and parts of South America. Enslaved men and women thus lived longer making lifetime bondage even more attractive. A scarcity of labor also led to slavery. Fewer Europeans were moving to the colonies, and the indigenous population continued to decrease. Wealthy colonists looked to imported Africans as a steady supply of labor.[23]

As slavery became more institutionalized, more rules regulated its practice. By the mid-seventeenth century, colonies began developing "slave codes" to police African bondage. The codes determined that a child was born slave or free based solely on the mother's status. They mandated slavery for life with no hope of emancipation. The codes deprived the enslaved of legal rights, required permission for slaves to leave their master's property, forbade marriage between enslaved people, and prohibited them from carrying arms. The slave codes also defined enslaved Africans not as human beings but as chattel—private property on the same level as livestock.

As reliance on slave labor increased, sticky questions about Christianity, race, and bondage began to emerge. Slave-owning colonists and European missionaries often clashed over the issue of proselytizing. Christianity had inherent ideas of human equality imbedded in its

teachings. If slaves converted to Christianity, would they not begin to demand their freedom and social equality? How could missionaries preach to the slaves when their owners feared the loss of their unpaid labor? Over time, Europeans compromised the message of Christianity to accommodate slavery while also, in their minds, satisfying the requirement to make disciples.

In *The Baptism of Early Modern Virginia*, historian Rebecca Anne Goetz explains how Europeans on the Atlantic coast of North America developed religious and racial categories in tandem. At first, colonists debated whether Africans were capable of becoming Christians. They adhered to a concept that Goetz calls "hereditary heathenism."[24] Just as parents passed down physical characteristics to their children, they also passed down their religion. Hereditary heathenism tethered race to religion. From their earliest days in North America, colonists employed religio-cultural categories to signify that European meant "Christian" and Native American or African meant "heathen." Over time, these categories simplified and hardened into racial designations.

Many Europeans initially held an optimistic view of their capacity to convert the indigenous peoples to Christianity. These Christians adhered to a "monogenesis" theory of humankind, meaning they believed that all people descended from Adam as described in Genesis. So according to European Christians, indigenous people had at least the potential to receive salvation, which meant colonists had a duty to teach the Scriptures to these so-called heathens.

The effort to convert indigenous people to Christianity was always tied to ideas of European colonization. Europeans evangelized non-Europeans with the intention not only of teaching them Christianity but also of conforming them to European cultural standards. One of the most well-known illustrations of how Europeans conflated religion and culture is in the marriage of John Rolfe and Metoaka (or Matoaka), better known as Pocahontas.

John Rolfe was an Englishman hoping to achieve fortune and notoriety in the new English colony of Virginia. He arrived in Jamestown in 1610 and eventually became a member of the Virginia General Assembly. He met an indigenous woman named Metoaka,

the daughter of Chief Powhatan. Metoaka converted to Christianity in 1613 and received the "more Christian" name of Rebecca. She and Rolfe were married and had a child together. They only had a brief marriage, however. On a visit to England in 1617, she became ill and died abroad.

Although it lasted only briefly, Metoaka's marriage to Rolfe inspired hope in some English colonists. "For the English, Metoaka's marriage symbolized heathen submission to proper religion and to English gender norms," wrote Goetz.[25] The English colonists' goal was to evangelize and assimilate the indigenous peoples. Metoaka's conversion to Christianity, taking on a common English name, and bearing a son to an Englishman signified the possibility of making indigenous Americans into "respectable" English persons. Rolfe and Metoaka's marriage also meant that, according to English custom, their son would be born into Christianity. To the English colonists, hereditary heathenism could be interrupted by marrying into the "better" spiritual lineage of English Christians.

Of course, most indigenous people did not see it this way. European missionaries made few converts because converting to Christianity included European cultural assimilation and the loss of tribal identity.[26]

Europeans thought Africans, like indigenous peoples, could be "civilized" through cultural conformity and conversion to Christianity. European missionaries, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, attempted to preach Christianity to the slaves. It must be noted, however, that Europeans did not introduce Christianity to Africans. Christianity had arrived in Africa through Egypt and Ethiopia in the third and fourth centuries. Christian luminaries like Augustine, Tertullian, and Athanasius helped develop Trinitarian theology and defended the deity of Christ long before Western Europeans presumed to "take" Christianity to Africans.[27] African people also had a rich history of practicing Islam and tribal religions, a history that Europeans disregarded in their evangelistic fervor.

Even though European missionaries sought to share Christianity with indigenous peoples and Africans, social, political, and economic

equality was not part of their plan. Missionaries carefully crafted messages that maintained the social and economic status quo. They truncated the gospel message by failing to confront slavery, and in doing so they reinforced its grip on society.

In 1701, Anglican church leader Thomas Bray helped found the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG).[28] As the name suggests, the primary purpose of the SPG was to spread the Anglican version of Christianity, primarily in the English colonies. But SPG's motivations were more complex than that. While many officials had an interest in sharing the gospel with non-Europeans, they were not interested in sharing power or promoting equality. Instead, the SPG, like many European missionary endeavors in North America, preached a message that said Christianity could save one's soul but not break one's chains.

SPG's missionary Francis Le Jau illustrates their philosophy of evangelism well. The SPG sent him to South Carolina in 1706 where he stayed until his death in 1717. His journal entries from the time show his sincere desire to convert indigenous peoples and Africans. He even spoke out against British exploitation of the indigenous population.[29] However, his outrage had limits. To circumvent slave owners' opposition, Le Jau emphasized obedience instead of liberation among the slaves.

When Le Jau was able to persuade African slaves to adopt the Christian religion as their own, he confirmed their profession by baptizing them. The vows he made the slaves recite show how European missionaries maintained a strict separation between spiritual and physical freedom. "You declare in the presence of God and before this congregation that you do not ask for holy baptism out of any design to free yourself from the Duty and Obedience you owe to your master while you live, but merely for the good of your soul and to partake of the Grace and Blessings promised to the Members of the Church of Jesus Christ."[30]

Le Jau was more ardent than many European missionaries in his desire to convert indigenous peoples and Africans. He labored to convince slave-owning men that people of color were not mere beasts without souls. To make his case, he had to assuage fears that slaves

would demand emancipation once they became Christian. So from the beginning of American colonization, Europeans crafted a Christianity that would allow them to spread the faith without confronting the exploitative economic system of slavery and the emerging social inequality based on color.

(DE)CONSTRUCTING RACE

This chapter began with the premise that race was constructed. It has shown how in the wet cement of early European colonial society the racial boundaries had not yet been traced. It took decades for patterns of unfree labor to harden into a form of slavery that treated human beings as chattel and dictated a person's station in life based on skin color. In European North America, Christianity became identified with the emerging concept of "whiteness" while people of color, including indigenous peoples and Africans, became identified with unbelief.

Christianity served as a force to help construct racial categories in the colonial period. A corrupt message that saw no contradiction between the brutalities of bondage and the good news of salvation became the norm. European missionaries tried to calm the slave owners' fears of rebellion by spreading a version of Christianity that emphasized spiritual deliverance, not immediate liberation. Instead of highlighting the dignity of all human beings, European missionaries told Africans that Christianity should make them more obedient and loyal to their earthly masters.

But if racism can be made, it can be unmade. Like a house with a crumbling foundation, it is more difficult to change an existing structure than to build a sound one from the beginning, but it is possible. "The fierce urgency of now," to borrow a phrase from Martin Luther King Jr., demands a recognition of the ways Christians, from before the founding of the United States, built racial categories into religion.[31] That knowledge must then be turned toward propagating a more authentically biblical message of human equality regardless of skin color.