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Christian Heresy and Economic Justice in the United States

How Restorative and Distributive Justice Take Priority
Over Meritocratic-Retributive Justice

Mako A. Nagasawa

A Vision for Relationship – All Types



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A Vision for Relationship – All Types



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A Vision for Relationship – All Types

- Friendships (brother's keeper, sister's keeper)
- Marriage
- Family
- Economic
- Political
- Involving historic injustice



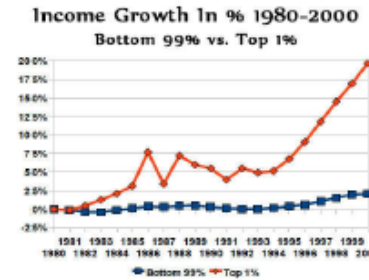
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Which Most Irks You?

Unequal pay for equal work



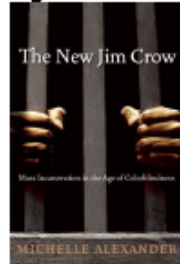
Growing economic inequality



Excessive taxation



Racial bias in the criminal justice system



CEO's being rewarded for failure



Power of lobbyists



No restitution for past rights violations



Infringement on freedom of religion



Under-resourced schools



What Kind of Justice?

Four Types



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- Meritocratic: Reward, punish
- Distributive: Baseline wealth
- Libertarian: Maximize freedom
- Restorative: Vision of relationship

What is the Most Just Way to Treat People? According to...

Select one

Our merits

Meritocratic Justice

Our needs

Distributive Justice

*Our inherent
freedom & liberty*

Libertarian Justice

*A vision for healthy
relationships*

Restorative Justice

What is the Most Just Way to Treat People? According to...

#2

Select one

To Republicans

Our merits

Meritocratic Justice

Our needs

Distributive Justice

*Our inherent
freedom & liberty*

Libertarian Justice

#1 Economic

*A vision for healthy
relationships*

Restorative Justice

What is the Most Just Way to Treat People? According to...

To Democrats

Select one

#3

Our merits

Meritocratic Justice

#2

Our needs

Distributive Justice

#1 Social

*Our inherent
freedom & liberty*

Libertarian Justice

*A vision for healthy
relationships*

Restorative Justice

Why Should Your Definition of Justice Prevail?

Select one

Majority opinion

Minority opinion

Tradition

WE MAKE THE RULES

Theological foundation

Philosophical foundation

There is no "justice,"
only power

I don't care

I don't know

Other

Whose Justice? Which Order?



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- Meritocratic: Reward, punish
- Distributive: Baseline wealth
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- Restorative: Vision of relationship
- How do you order and organize these?

Whose Justice? Which Order?



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- Meritocratic: Reward, punish
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-
- Is your order philosophically grounded, or fundamentally arbitrary?

Why Should Your Definition of Justice Prevail?

Select one

Majority opinion

Minority opinion

Tradition

WE MAKE THE RULES

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There is no "justice,"
only power

For secularists

I don't care

I don't know

Other

The Christian Order of Social Justice



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- Restorative: God's relational order
 - Distributive: Wealth for all
 - Meritocratic: Reward, punish
 - Libertarian: Legitimate concerns, but incompatible premises
-
- Grounded in the historicity of Jesus and his resurrection, with Scripture as a witness

Restorative Before All Others



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- Jesus restores God's original creation order for how we:
 - Forgive and reconcile (Mt.5:21 – 26; 6:12 – 15; 18:1 – 35)
 - Express sexuality and marriage (Mt.19:3 – 12)
 - Share wealth (Mt.19:13 – 30)
 - Share power and honor (Mt.20:1 – 28)



Restorative Before All Others



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- Jesus restores God's original creation order for how we:
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 - Share wealth (Mt.19:13 – 30)
 - Share power and honor (Mt.20:1 – 28)
- God designed relationships for us to fit into
 - 'Have you not read that He who created them **from the beginning**...Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you... but **from the beginning**...' (Mt.19:4, 8)
 - '**In the regeneration**...' (Mt.19:28)
 - Thus, we have specific responsibilities, not just rights

Distributive Before Meritocratic



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Mosaic Israel: Land

- Leviticus 25
 - Deuteronomy 11, 15, 24
 - Isaiah 58
-
- Proverbs 10:4, etc.



Distributive Before Meritocratic



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Church: Table

- Matthew 6:19 – 34; 19:13 – 30
- Luke 6, 12, 14; Acts 2, 4, 6
- 2 Corinthians 8 – 9
- 2 Thessalonians 3:10 – 12

Libertarian Justice



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- Some legitimate concerns
 - The individual is important
 - Freedom of religious conscience
 - Many concerns can be adequately addressed by restorative justice
- Poor logic with other concerns
 - E.g. Why not sell U.S. citizenship on the open market?
 - Leads to divorce, broken friendships, secession
- Incompatible starting points
 - Individualism → relationships merely social constructs
 - A vision of good relations → restorative justice

Restorative Before All Others



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- Jesus restores human nature to us by his Spirit
 - Our problems are not fixable by a 'hero' outside us (Jesus comes inside us!)
 - Each person must choose 'love,' (i.e. Jesus, love incarnate) in appropriate relationship and appropriate posture



What is the Most Just Way to Treat People? According to...

Select one

To Christians

Our merits

Meritocratic Justice

#3

#2

Our needs

Distributive Justice

#4

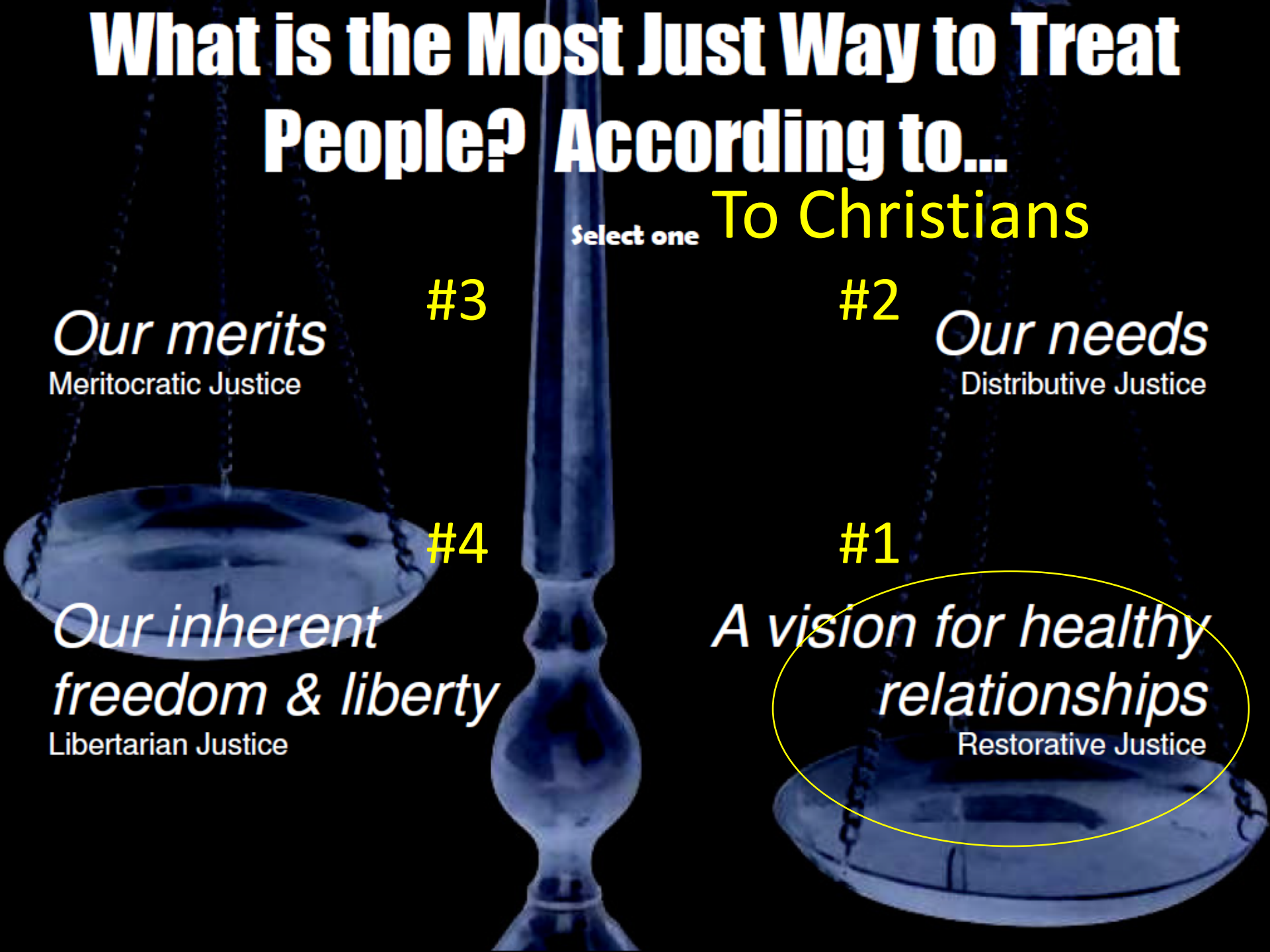
*Our inherent
freedom & liberty*

Libertarian Justice

#1

*A vision for healthy
relationships*

Restorative Justice



Why Should Your Definition of Justice Prevail?

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Early Christian Teaching on Wealth



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Prior to colonialism, Christians everywhere believed God gave land to humanity in common, as a gift (Genesis 1)

- Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (340 – 397 AD) and mentor of Augustine, said, “When giving to the poor, you are not giving him what is yours; rather, you are paying him back **what is his**. Indeed, **what is common to all**, and has been given to all to make use of, you have usurped for yourselves alone. **The earth belongs to all**, and not only to the rich... **You are paying back, therefore, your debt**; you are not giving gratuitously what you do not owe.”

Early Christian Teaching on Wealth



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- Basil, Bishop of Caesarea (329 – 379 AD) said, “That bread which you keep **belongs to the hungry**; that coat which you preserve in your wardrobe, **to the naked**; those shoes which are rotting in your possession, **to the shoeless**; that gold which you have hidden in the ground, **to the needy**. Wherefore, as often as you were able **to help others**, and refused, so often did **you do them wrong.**”

Early Christian Teaching on Wealth



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- Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395 AD), said of Genesis 1: “You condemn a person to slavery whose nature is free and independent, and in doing so you lay down a law in opposition to God, overturning the **natural law** established by Him. For you subject to the yoke of slavery one who was created precisely **to be a master of the earth**, and who was ordained **to rule by the creator**, as if you were deliberately attacking and fighting against the divine command... How [much money] did you pay as a fair price for **the image of God**? For how [much money] have you sold **the nature specially formed by God**? God said, ‘**Let us make man in our image and likeness.**’”

Early Christian Teaching on Wealth



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- John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (340 – 407 AD) said, “Are not the earth and the fullness thereof the Lord’s? If, therefore, **our possessions are the common gift of the Lord, they belong also to our fellows, for all the things of the Lord are common.**”

Early Christian Teaching on Wealth



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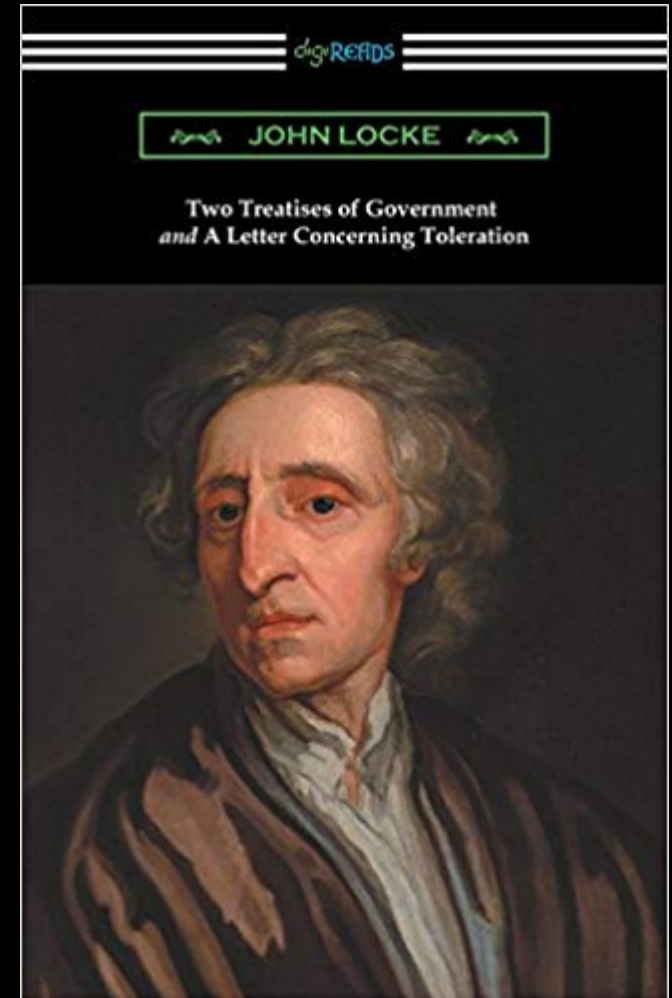
- Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274 AD), said, “In cases of need, all things are common property. There is no sin in taking private property when need has made it common.”

Later Protestant Heretical Teaching

John Locke (1632 – 1704) asserted Genesis 1 meant you could take others' land if you were more productive than them. *Locke intentionally misrepresented Native Americans... becoming one of the earliest white people to accuse non-white people of "laziness."*



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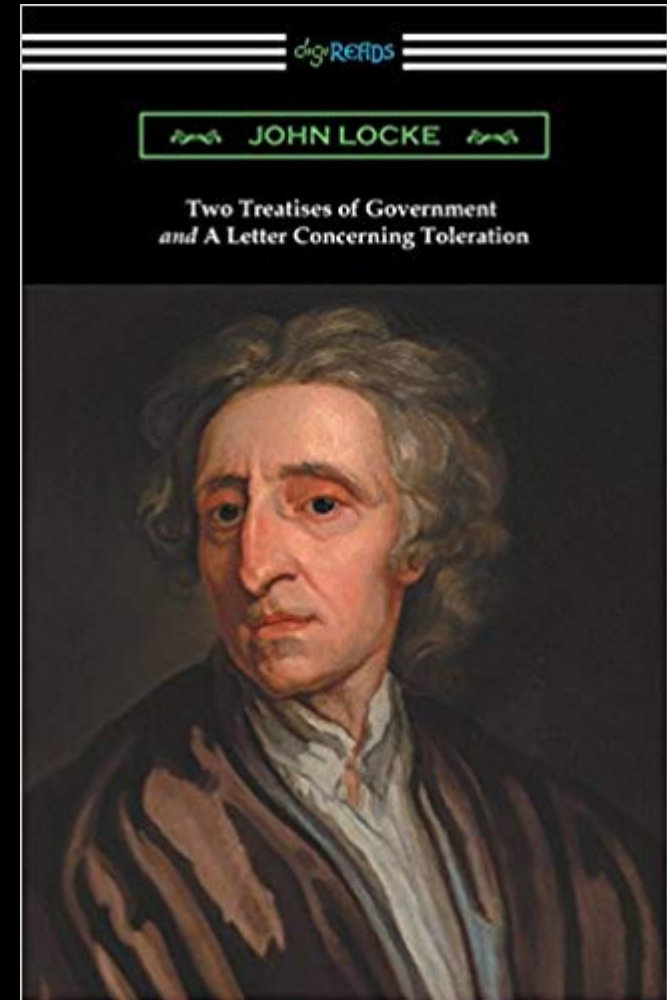
Later Protestant Heretical Teaching



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This contributes to why Americans tend to:

- Fear smarter immigrants/POC
- Have a culture of workaholism
- Believe productivity justifies the destruction of land
- Believe that America is a pure meritocracy when it isn't

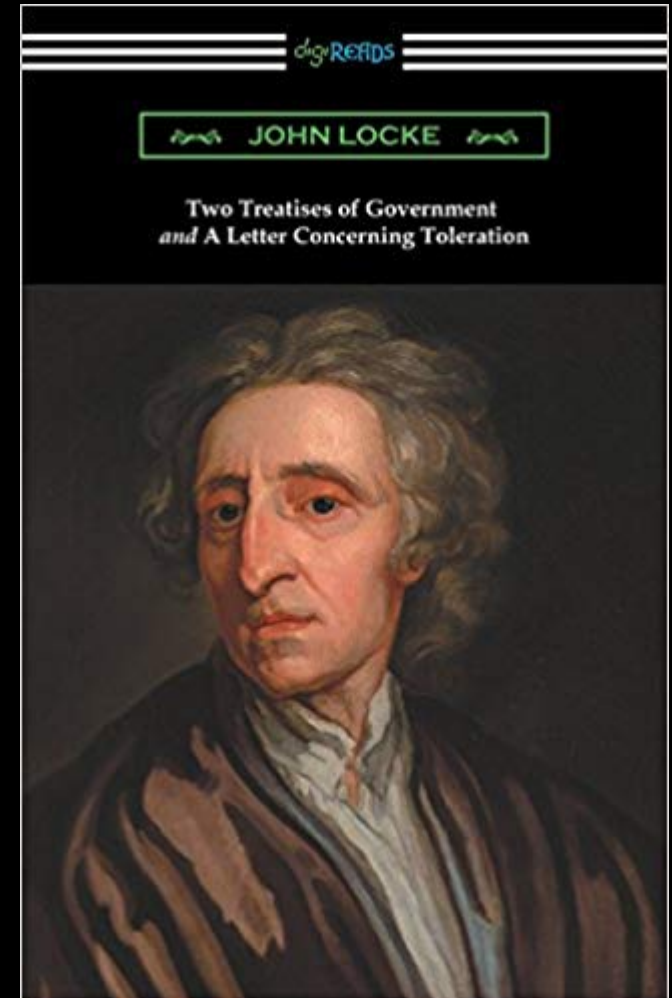


Later Protestant Heretical Teaching

“God gave the world to men in common; but... it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational, and labour was to be his title to it...”
(*Second Treatise*, ch.2, sec.34)



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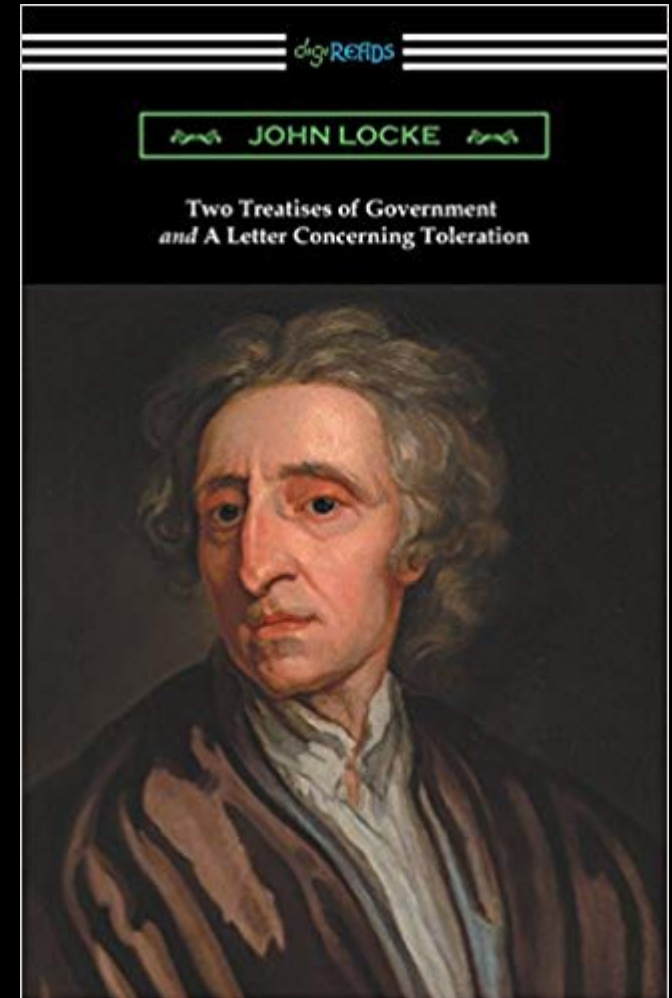


Later Protestant Heretical Teaching

“Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property.” (ch.2, sec.27)



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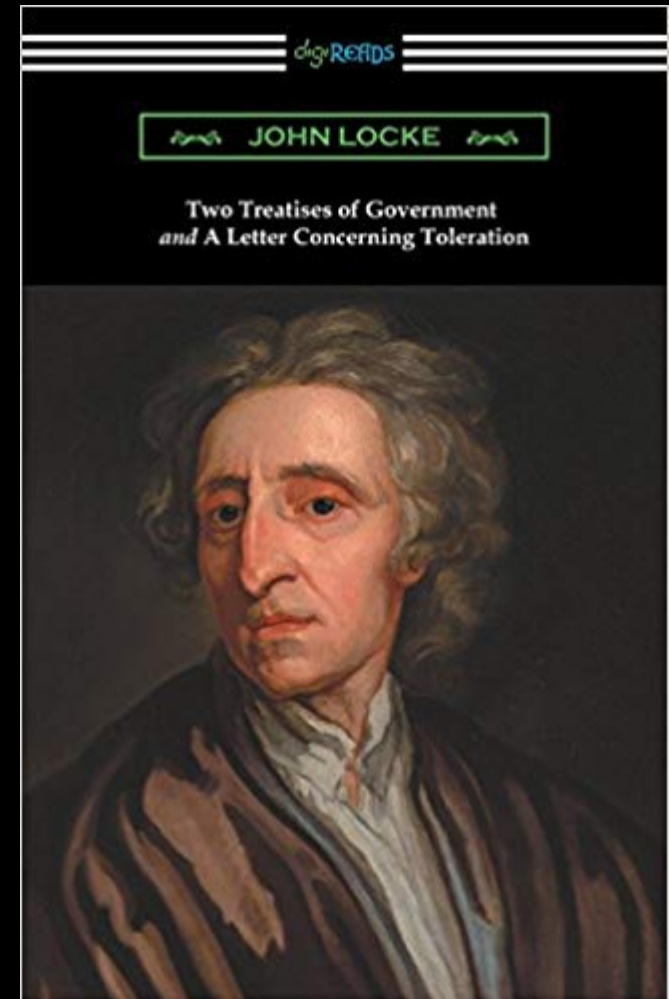


Later Protestant Heretical Teaching

“There cannot be a clearer demonstration of any thing, than several nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in land, and poor in all the comforts of life... yet for want of improving it by labour, have not one hundredth part of the conveniencies we enjoy: and a king of a large and fruitful territory there, feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day-labourer in England.” (ch.5, sec.41)



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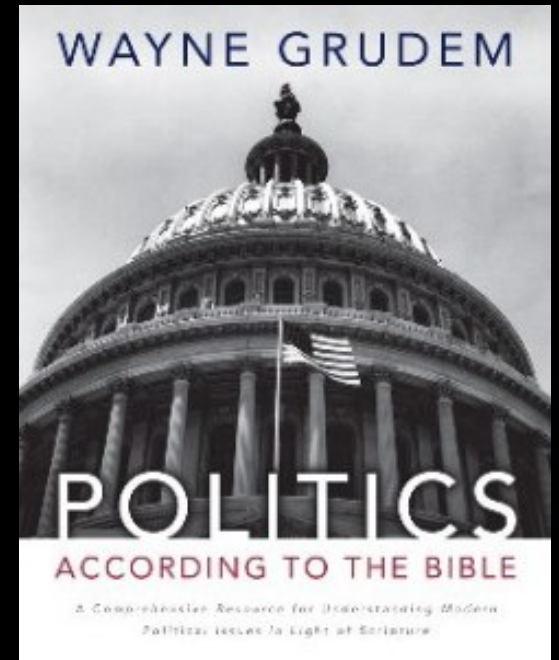
Majority White American Evangelicalism: Property is Individual, Unlimited



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“The Bible clearly takes the side of individual ownership of property. My conclusion is that the estate tax should be permanently repealed.”

Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*
(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), p.309



Majority White American Evangelicalism: Property is Individual, Unlimited



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Compare:

- Genesis 1 in early Christian teaching: wealth is for all
- Israel's land vision
 - Jubilee reset: "The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are aliens and sojourners with Me" (Lev.25:23)
- Wayne Grudem grossly misinterprets Scripture
 - See Mako Nagasawa, "Atonement, God's Character, and Economic Justice (A Critique of Wayne Grudem)"
 - <https://newhumanityinstitute.wordpress.com/2015/09/14/interpreting-jesus-and-atonement-practical-issue-7-atonement-gods-character-and-economic-justice-a-critique-of-wayne-grudem/>

Majority White American Evangelicalism: The U.S. is a “Pure Meritocracy”



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White evangelical Christians are against programs for the poor more than the general population

Sources:

- Julie Zauzmer, “Christians Are More Than Twice as Likely to Blame a Person’s Poverty on Lack of Effort,” *Washington Post*, August 3, 2017
- Chauncy DeVega, “So Much for Christian Charity: Evangelicals Blame the Poor for Poverty, Which Makes Them a Lot Like Other Republicans,” *Salon*, August 10, 2017

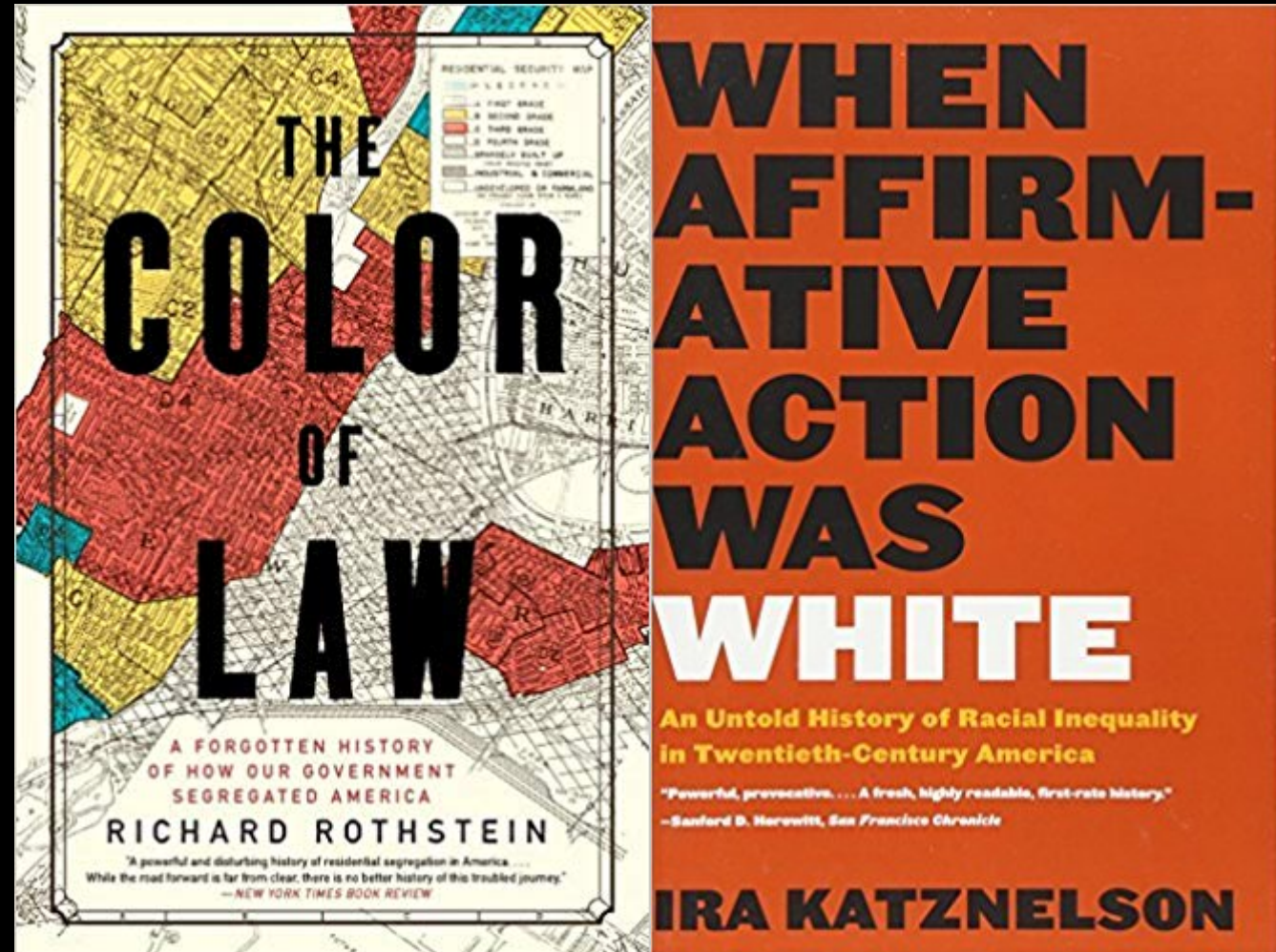
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From 1934 – 1968, the U.S. government funded loans to white families to move to white suburbs

- How much difference does a house and zip code make to a family?
- See The Anastasis Center’s *A Long Repentance* blog series and discussion guide



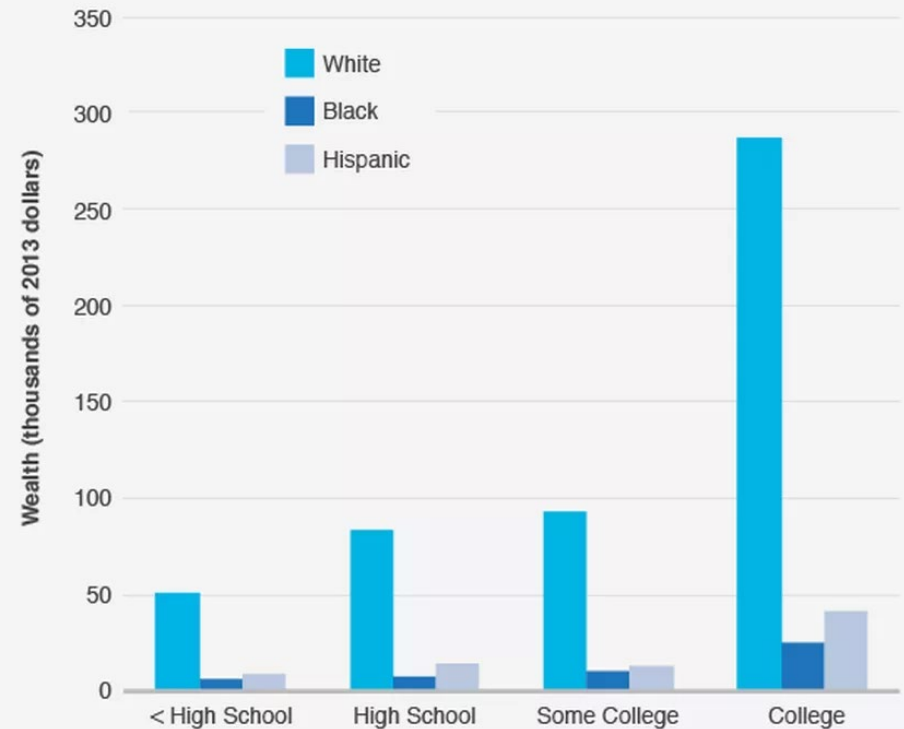
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- Racial segregation leads to very different experiences of schools, opportunities, police, health, etc.
- Does this reflect a true “meritocracy”?

Median Wealth By Race & Education
(2013)



Majority White American Evangelicalism: Climate Change Denial



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“As a Christian, I believe that there is a creator in God who is much bigger than us, and I’m confident that, if there’s a real problem, He can take care of it.”

Michigan Congressman Tim Walberg (R-MI)

Sources:

- Steve Hanley, “Why White Evangelicals Don’t Care About Climate Change,” *CleanTechnica*, April 5, 2018
- Lisa Vox, “Why Don’t Christian Conservatives Worry About Climate Change? God.” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2017
- Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Why So Many White Evangelicals in Trump’s Base Are Deeply Skeptical of Climate Change,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2017

Majority White American Evangelicalism: Climate Change Denial



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Only 28% of evangelicals believe human activity is contributing to climate change – the least out of any religious group.

Source:

- Cary Funk and Becka A. Alper, “Religion and Views on Climate and Energy Issues,” *Pew Research Center*, October 22, 2015

Majority White American Evangelicalism: Climate Change Denial



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Compare:

- Scripture on Creation-Care as Other-Care
 - ⁶ If you happen to come upon a bird's nest along the way, in any tree or on the ground... ⁷ let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, in order that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days. (Dt.22:6 – 7)
 - ¹⁹ When you besiege a city a long time, to make war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees... ²⁰ Only the trees which you know are not fruit trees you shall destroy and cut down... (Dt.20:19 – 20)
- The “Garden” theme from Genesis to Revelation!
- The “Communion” theme of “you are what you eat”

Majority White American Evangelicalism: Corporations Are People (but Predatory)



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Corporate Limited Liability (NY, 1811): Shareholders are not fully responsible for corporate behavior like polluting, abusing workers, poisoning customers (privatize the gains; socialize the losses)

Sources:

- Larry Elliot, 'Plc: The Prerogative of the Unaccountable Few: Adam Smith Argued for Free Trade and Self-Interest, But Not This Kind of Capitalism,' *The Guardian*, July 9, 2007
- Rachel Maizes, 'Limited Liability Companies - A Critique,' *St. John's Law Review*, Summer 1996
- Philip Mattera, 'The Buck Doesn't Stop Here: The Spread of Limited Liability Companies,' *Corporate Research Project*, September 2002
- Marie-Laure Djelic, 'When Limited Liability Was (Still) An Issue - Conflicting Mobilizations in Nineteenth Century England (paper)', May 2010
- Stephanie Blankenburg, Dan Plesch, and Frank Wilkinson, 'Limited Liability and the Modern Corporation in Theory and in Practice,' *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, September 2010

Majority White American Evangelicalism: Corporations Are People (but Predatory)



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Compare:

- Do not steal (Ex.20:15; Dt.5:19)
 - Do not steal *someone's health*: “take care of him until he is fully healed” (Ex.21:19)
- Do not lie (Ex.20:16; Dt.5:20)
 - Do not lie by omission about *your trustworthiness and safety*: “When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you will not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it.” (Dt.22:8)