

Race: What's the Problem?

Proxe Station Instructions

Purpose:

The proxe station serves the purpose of engaging people evangelistically at the intersection of racial justice and faith traditions. A secondary purpose is to help students see systemic forms of racism and the challenge of trying to work against those systems.

Purpose #1: Explore the intersection of racial justice and different faith traditions

Starting Personally:

1. So what stood out to you?
2. Have you thought much about the intersection of racial justice and faith?
3. Are you of a particular faith?
4. How does your faith (or atheism) deal with issues of racial injustice?
 - a. (If Hindu or Buddhist) On the last slide, there is the option to 'don't desire anything,' which, from what I can understand, is characteristic of Hinduism and Buddhism, and a lot of eastern thought. How does that line up exactly with a desire to fix racial injustice? Wouldn't you need a faith that would want to 'change the world'?
 - b. (If Catholic) Do you know how your faith promotes racial justice?

The Big Picture Conversations

1. *The Internal Question:* Do you think that racism is just one of the manifestations of a deeper evil that's within us? In other words, what if racism isn't *only* learned? What if it's not *just* psychological or social or educational, but that there is evil in human nature that gets expressed this way, among other ways?
 - a. Be prepared to illustrate this personally. For example, when I watched the news about Obama's health care reform, and heard about Sarah Palin's 'death panel' comment, I couldn't help but get mad at 'ignorant, racist white people'. But then I looked more deeply at it. Granted that talk about 'death panels' seemed geared to stir up people's fears, there IS genuine complexity in that the cost of supporting a person in their last 2 weeks of life is staggering, and as a society, we do actually ration health care resources, even in end-of-life cases. Even though I still had an opinion, and while I still think that 'death panel' language was politically over the top, it actually became harder for me to be strictly partisan about the whole issue. So why was it easy for me to respond ignorantly and racially to what I thought was ignorant and racial? Because there is something in me that does that quite easily: a corrupted human nature that needs to be healed and redeemed by Jesus.
2. *The Historical Uniqueness Question:* What do you think about this: At one point, every religion was ethnic. If you were in Egypt, you worshiped the gods of Egypt. So those religions cannot help us deal with racism because it would mostly reinforce racism. But Christian faith is universal and comes through an invitation based on love. That's one of the reasons why I'm still a Christian – everything else shows signs of being crafted by people, but Christian faith seems true because it's universal! To a lesser extent, Buddhism and Islam are universal, and we can talk about that, but only Christian faith is explicitly for all humanity, and meant to engage all humanity through love, not through power.
 - a. *Hinduism* has some practices specific to India (e.g. rites at the Ganges River; pilgrimages to the four holy sites Puri, Rameswaram, Dwarka, and Badrinath; and the Kumbh Mela, one of the holiest of Hindu pilgrimages, held every four years), and because of the caste system, some scholars have observed that it is impossible to truly practice Hinduism outside of India.
 - b. *Islam* regards the whole world as a mission field, but requires you to learn Arabic to read the Qur'an and hence be fully part of the worshipping community. And you have to make the hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. This is more than just a symbolic issue – it is a regular occasion for Mecca and Saudi Arabia as a whole to benefit economically and pedagogically, as it has been promoting its radical form of Islam, known as Salafi and Wahhabism, which insists on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an and is culturally conservative, centered around Arab culture. Thus, if you are an immigrant to an Arab Muslim country, you are treated as a second class citizen. Arab Islam seeks to create a Muslim government and society, so conversion out of Islam often has a civic punishment, and dhimmis (non-Muslims) are taxed at a higher rate and at times, they've been made to wear arm badges of their religion, etc. Hence, Arab ethno-centrism is *de jure* (by law, by principle) and *de facto* (by the fact of the current situation) in Islam. (See Appendix A below for references)
 - c. By contrast, even though *Christian* faith started in Israel, you don't have to learn Hebrew to be fully Christian, nor do you make pilgrimages to Jerusalem, nor are Jewish Christians viewed as having ongoing spiritual privileges, nor is Jewish culture elevated within the rest of the Christian community. Paul's refusal to circumcise the Galatians is an outworking of his refusal to make Jewish culture normative and binding on everyone else. Christianity is completely decentralized, as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, 'No longer does anyone have to worship God on this mountain [Gerizim, in Samaria] nor in Jerusalem, but the Father seeks worshipers who worship in Spirit and in truth' (Jn.4:20 – 25).
 - i. Questions will come up about Jewish particularity contrasted with Christian universalism. Why did God choose Israel? Why not just jump right to Jesus? For help in answering this question, see Mako's paper, *Why Choose a Chosen People?*
 - d. *Buddhism* can be considered to be universal in its practicability, though it is historically tied to ideas of reincarnation and circularity that are rooted in Hinduism in India. For eclectic people who just want Buddhist meditation, but not the larger supernatural context, we can just ask, 'Didn't Buddha assume that reincarnation was true? Meditation was his way out of the cycles of reincarnation.'
3. *The High Ethics Question:* I think Christian faith has the strongest track record of dismantling racism and bringing racial justice. It's because Christian faith combines 'High Ethical Standards' and 'Connects us to a supernatural source of love' and 'A Just God' and 'A Loving God' and a 'change the world' posture.
 - a. *Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism:* They are cyclical stories that have no victory of good over evil. See the Wikipedia article 'The Problem of Evil in Hinduism.' Where's the motivation? Isn't that why these religions lead to a 'don't desire anything' type of spirituality? They were

asking: How do you escape the endless cycles of reincarnation and enter Nirvana? Mahavira (founder of Jainism) said it was through asceticism. Buddha rejected asceticism and declared that you reach Nirvana through meditation. Some forms of Hinduism say there is no escape; others say that you can be enlightened.

- b. *The Black Nation of Islam* (with Louis Farrakhan) believes that white people are devils. So they make some people out to be ‘the enemy.’ It’s why Malcolm X left the Nation and became a true Muslim, because he saw more hope there, and at least one biographer (Carl Ellis, *Free at Last*) thinks he was on his way back to the Christian faith he grew up with, because he saw even more hope for America’s race problems in the Christian faith.
- c. *Islam*: Islam in its classical, historical expression seems to care more about spreading over every society and state in the world, but not every person, a characteristic of Christian faith. We can see this because Mohammed was both imam and caliph, whereas Jesus divided what belongs to Caesar and to God; and because Islam proceeded to conquer subjects militarily, sometimes killing those who resist, whereas Christianity spread on a voluntary person-by-person basis.
- d. *Atheism*: Did you know that Enlightenment atheism has a fairly bad track record on race issues?
 - i. Just google “Immanuel Kant and racism” and find the long list of racist things Kant said. For example: ‘Humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians have a smaller amount of talent. The Negroes are lower, and the lowest are a part of the American peoples.’ (Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*)
 - ii. Think about how Western liberal democracies were racist:
 1. The French Revolution was anti-Semitic (and anti-Christian). ‘The Enlightenment and the French Revolution brought a new religious freedom to Europe in the 18th century but did not reduce anti-Semitism, because Jews continued to be regarded as outsiders.’ (*Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*: ‘Anti-Semitism’) ‘This development was due not only to the rising nationalism of the 19th cent., but also to the conscious preservation, especially among Orthodox Jews, of cultural and religious barriers that isolated the Jewish minorities from other citizens.’ (*German Literature Companion*: ‘Anti-Semitism’)
 2. The British Empire: Thomas Huxley (1825 – 95), nicknamed ‘Darwin’s Bulldog’ for contributing to the widespread acceptance of evolution: “No rational man, cognizant of the facts, believes that the average Negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man.” In fact, questions of whether blacks were even of the same species as whites changed to questions of whether or not Africans could survive competition against Europeans. The answer was a resounding no. The African was the inferior because he represented the “missing link” between ape and man, according to the evolutionists.
 3. Germany: Sir Arthur Keith (1866 – 1955), Britain’s leading evolutionary scientist of the mid-20th century: “To see evolutionary measures and tribal morality being applied vigorously to the affairs of a great modern nation, we must turn again to Germany of 1942. We see Hitler devoutly convinced that evolution produced the only real basis for a national policy... The means he adopted to secure the destiny of his race and people were organized slaughter... The German Fuhrer, as I have consistently maintained, is an evolutionist; he has consciously sought to make the practice of Germany conform to the theory of evolution... war is the necessary outcome of Darwin’s theory.” (*Evolution and Ethics*, Putnam, New York, 1947, p. 230)
 - iii. The key question is: How does atheism define the worth and value of each individual person? Secular humanism asserts that each individual is valuable, so there are now secular humanist atheists who stand against racial prejudice, but they do not provide a foundation for that belief.
 1. John Gray, Professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics, said that secular humanism is a Christian heresy. Secular humanism only arises in post-Christian contexts. It does not arise anywhere else. But can it survive on its own? Nietzsche said, ‘If you cut the root, you lose the fruit.’ He was referring to ‘belief in the Christian God’ as the root, and ‘the value of each human being’ as the fruit. Secular humanism is the attempt to have the fruit without the root. I think Nietzsche was right.
 2. Atheist Christopher Hitchens is fond of saying that the basis for individual human value is the how each person is connected to the larger human race. I would say, ‘Yeah, but I am connected to my hair and my fingernails and toenails. But I have no problem

cutting my hair and nails. We may be connected to other people, but that doesn't mean that we value everyone equally. In fact, practically speaking, we do treat some people as if they are dispensable.'

3. *Isn't that why the liberal campus has such a hard time getting self-centered careerists to care about racial justice and larger issues? There is no moral or otherwise compelling basis for it. That's why 'conversations about race don't happen with the people who need it the most' as the slide says. People just don't come to meetings about race if they don't want to hear it. We wind up preaching to the choir, the people who are already persuaded. And we're getting tired of it. That's also why when there are racial incidents on campus, a lot of people react with outrage, but it's a helpless outrage that resorts to the use of power to discipline the student provoking the racial incident. If you cut the root (God), you lose the fruit (ability to persuade more people about racial justice). But in the Christian faith, each person is made in the image of God and loved by God.*
- e. *Christian faith in the U.S. While we acknowledge how some Christians have fallen into racism, there are lots of counterexamples that we tend not to think about that often.*
- i. *White American Christians:*
 1. Roger Williams in Providence, RI became the leading scholar of Native American culture among Euro-Americans; argued for political pluralism against the theocratic model of John Winthrop
 2. White American Abolitionists, like the Methodists, Billy Sunday, etc.
 3. Christians that were in the Labor Movement
 4. Catholics like Dorothy Day and the Catholic Social Worker movement
 - ii. *African American Christians:*
 1. Too many to list! Martin Luther King, Jr.; James Lawson and the early days of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee; Ruby Bridges being the first black child to integrate the Franz school in New Orleans, Fannie Lou Hamer leading the Mississippi black delegation, etc.
 - iii. *Native American and Latino Christians:*
 1. Queen Liliuokalani, from Hawaii, who said when the U.S. basically seized Hawaii in 1895, 'To prevent the shedding of the blood of my people, natives and foreigners alike, I opposed armed interference, and quietly yielded to the armed forces brought against my throne, and submitted to the [arbitration] of the government of the United States the decision of my rights and those of the Hawaiian people. Since then, as is well known to all, I have pursued the path of peace and diplomatic discussion, and not that of internal strife. By my command and advice the native people and those in sympathy with them were restrained from rising against the government in power. As you deal with them, so I pray that the Almighty God may deal with you in your hours of trial. To my regret much has been said about the danger which threatened foreign women and children, and about the bloodthirstiness of the Hawaiians... They who know the Hawaiian temper and disposition understand that there was no foundation for any such fears...It would have been sad indeed if the doctrine of the Christian missionary fathers, taught to my people by them and those who succeeded them, should have fallen like the seed in the parable, upon barren ground. There may be in your consciences a warrant for your action, in what you may deem a necessity of the times; but you cannot find any such warrant for any such action in any settled, civilized, or Christian land. All who uphold you in this unlawful proceeding may scorn and despise my word; but the offence of breaking and setting aside for a specific purpose the laws of your own nation, and disregarding all justice and fairness, may be to them and to you the source of an unhappy and much to be regretted legacy. I would ask you to consider that your government is on trial before the whole civilized world, and that in accordance with your actions and decisions will you yourselves be judged. The happiness and prosperity of Hawaii are henceforth in your hands as its rulers. You are commencing a new era in its history. May the divine Providence grant you the wisdom to lead the nation into the paths of forbearance, forgiveness, and peace, and to create and consolidate a united people ever anxious to advance in the way of civilization outlined by the American fathers of liberty and religion. In concluding my statement I thank you for the courtesy you have shown to me, not as your former queen, but as a humble citizen of this land and as a woman. I assure you, who believe you are faithfully

- fulfilling a public duty, that I shall never harbor any resentment or cherish any ill feeling towards you, whatever may be your decision.’
2. Black Elk, from the Lakota people, who said, ‘There can never be peace between nations until there is first known that true peace which is within the souls of men.’
- iv. Asian American Christians:
 1. Filipino Catholic farm workers who joined with Cesar Chavez and Latino Catholic farm workers to start the Delano Grape Strike and form United Farm Workers; they marched to Sacramento during Lent, carrying a large wooden cross; they arrived at Sacramento on Easter.
- f. Christian faith in the post-colonial world. See Mako’s *The Role of Jesus in Revolution and the Pursuit of Justice*.
 - i. Leo Tolstoy in Russia
 - ii. Ahn Chang-Ho in Korea
 - iii. Gandhi used Jesus’ love your enemy teachings in South Africa and India, though his later life he persecuted Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims in order to wed his version of Hinduism to the Indian nation-state
 - iv. The Black Church in the U.S.
 - v. The Filipino Bloodless Revolution in 1986
 - vi. Solidarity in Poland
 - vii. Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa
4. *The Emotional-Psychological Aspects of Faith*. How we feel and think internally does have an impact on how we talk, act, and sustain efforts towards social justice, even when the going gets tough.
 - a. The Conscience – Heightened or Unburdened?
 - i. It’s absolutely important to heighten our conscience. Some people don’t really know enough or care enough about injustice, including racial injustice. Evil and injustice is an existential problem, not a philosophical one. That is, we participate in the situation and are both partially the problem and partially the solution.
 1. Systemic: We live in a system that is unjust, and participate in its injustice (e.g. the U.S. public school system is unequal, the U.S. consumes more natural resources than other nations, etc.)
 2. Spiritual:
 - ii. But do we want a faith that ‘unburdens our conscience’? Yes and no.
 1. The NO: Just teaching about ‘forgiveness’ to ‘unburden your conscience’ isn’t really good. This is one of the reasons White American Evangelicalism hardly ever engaged with race and justice issues. Instead, they stuck to teaching penal substitution (Jesus took the punishment for our sins so that we could go to heaven and be with God when we die) as the only atonement theory during the 20th century – it led to White American Evangelicals thinking that Jesus takes away our guilt, but not our evil. They focused on ‘getting souls to heaven when people die’ and argued against social justice with platitudes like, ‘Why polish the brass on a sinking ship?’ They hardly ever engaged with race and justice issues, which was the logical fruit of what they taught.
 2. The YES: We need a ‘conscience burdened by love’ because a ‘conscience burdened by guilt’ can’t motivate you very long and very far. A conscience burdened by guilt eventually responds with resentment and anger. Ask, ‘Have you been motivated by guilt to do something? How did that work out? How long did your motivation last?’
 - b. Posture of ‘change the world’ vs. ‘don’t desire anything’: See #2, ‘The High Ethics Question’ above. How you engage the world, and whether you engage the world, What story (both religious and political) you live in. If I tell you I live in ‘The Struggling Immigrant Family Story,’ you basically know what I mean.
 - c. Connected to a supernatural source of love: I do think this is significant. It shows that the Christian faith is not just a matter of ‘morality’ but a living relationship with Jesus, who empowers and guides us.

Training Students Beforehand

- Have them look at the proxe station. Give them the material above, so they can look through it beforehand.
- Do role plays.

Purpose #2: Racism is a systemic challenge

Racism is not just an issue of personal prejudice. It is a system of privileges for some and not for others. Sometimes it's intentional and sometimes unintentional. But it has a huge impact on people based on race.

- The public school system is funded by local property taxes. That's why rich neighborhoods have good schools, and poor neighborhoods tend to have pretty bad schools. In 2005, Jonathan Kozol wrote, *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. The quote on slide 9 (column 3, row 3) is from him. But we tend not to see these realities because we think the system is fair, or purely meritocratic.
- Outbreaks of racism when Obama was elected.
- Why do you think the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? Populist Republican Kevin Phillips writes about this (*The Politics of Rich and Poor, Wealth and Democracy*). And this impacts race relations.

Training Students Beforehand

- Watch Stephen Colbert's episode about Sonia Sotomayor being confirmed by the Senate for the Supreme Court, called "Neutral Man's Burden" on <http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/238783/july-16-2009/the-word---neutral-man-s-burden>.
- Do the 'matrix of marginalization' training to see more examples of systemic, not-intentional racism.