

REPENTING OF
AMERICA'S
ORIGINAL SIN

A Six-Part Discussion Guide
for

AMERICA'S ORIGINAL SIN:

Racism, White Privilege,
and the
Bridge to a New America

by

Jim Wallis



BrazosPress
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

sojourners
www.sajo.net

Contents

How to Use This Guide

[Session 1](#)

America's Original Sin: Acknowledging and Repenting of the Embedded Sin of Racism

[Session 2](#)

The Sin of Historically Systemic Racism and the Idolatry of Whiteness

[Session 3](#)

The Meaning of Repentance and the Beloved Community

[Session 4](#)

From Warriors to Guardians: Reforming the Criminal Justice System

[Session 5](#)

Welcoming the Stranger: Racial Justice and Fixing Our Broken Immigration System

[Session 6](#)

The Bridge to a New America: Having the “New Talk” in Our Schools, Communities, and Congregations

How to Use This Guide

This discussion guide is intended for small groups, Bible studies, book clubs, and individuals who wish to honestly discuss and explore what it will take to achieve racial justice, healing, and reconciliation in their communities and across the country. Organized around key topics in *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* by Jim Wallis, the guide provides public-domain video clips, suggests selected passages from the book to read, poses questions to facilitate conversation and action, and provides a liturgical element (suggested Scripture passages and a prayer for each session) for Christian groups or individuals using the guide.

The guide is divided into six sessions, each focused on one of the major themes or topics in *America's Original Sin*. Resources for each of these sessions are provided, but no specific structure for the sessions is required or recommended, other than arranging the sessions in the order presented here. Within each session, the leader and participants should use their own judgment about how many video clips to watch, whether to read the suggested book passages aloud, whether to use the Scripture readings and prayers, and which discussion questions to tackle. The intent of these resources is to foster rich, constructive conversations and actions, and we urge group leaders to use the resources in whichever ways work best for your group.

SESSION 1

America's Original Sin: Acknowledging and Repenting of the Embedded Sin of Racism

Session Description

Racism is a story that has been with our country since before its founding. This session provides an overview of the major topics covered in the book, with a particular focus on the power of stories, the talk that all black parents have with their children about how to behave around police officers, and the need for a new talk between white parents and parents of color.

Video Clips

1. Introductory trailer for *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGbB792Zei8>
2. Having the Talk: What Black Parents Tell Their Children about the Police: <http://fusion.net/video/55309/having-the-talk-what-black-parents-tell-their-children-about-the-police/>
3. Get Home Safely: 10 Rules of Survival: <https://vimeo.com/116706870>
4. A Conversation About Growing Up Black: <http://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000003670178/a-conversation-about-growing-up-black.html>
5. NewsOne Now—White Evangelical Voices Speak On Racism & White Supremacy In America: <http://newstalkcleveland.newsone.com/2881847/newsone-now-white-evangelical-voices-speak-on-racism-white-supremacy-in-america/>

Selections from the Book

- Preface, pp. xv–xvi (beginning of the preface through the paragraph ending with “moral test of white America’s soul”)
- Introduction, pp. xix–xx (beginning of the introduction through the paragraph ending with “which is essential if we are to make progress toward real solutions”)
- Chapter 1, pp. 5–7 (“The Talk”)

Scripture Passages

- Genesis 3:1–24
- Isaiah 58:1–14
- John 8:31–36

Discussion Questions

1. Did you know about “the talk?” If you have children, have you had that talk with your children? If so, what did you tell them? If not, what have you told your children about police officers? Have you ever discussed “the talk” with a parent or someone of another racial or ethnic background?
2. What struck you the most in the New York Times piece “A Conversation on Growing Up Black?” What statements from these boys could you most relate to? What statements did you find most surprising?
3. Where were you when you heard about the shooting at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina? What do you remember thinking? What was the conversation like with people in your life? Do you have a story about something you heard that really resonated with you at the time, or something you heard that you really disagreed with?

Prayer

Lord, in these times when we are about to lose hope and our efforts seem futile, grant that we may perceive in our hearts and minds the image of your resurrection which remains our only source of courage and strength, so that we may continue to face the challenges, and struggle against hardship and oppression born of injustice.

—Unidentified, Philippines, from *Prayers Encircling the World*,
Westminster John Knox Press

SESSION 2

The Sin of Historically Systemic Racism and the Idolatry of Whiteness

Session Description

Racism is deeply embedded in almost every facet and major institution of our society; while much has changed since the beginning of the civil rights movement, much still has not. The pervasive character of racism especially shows itself in implicit or unconscious bias that almost everyone has, reflected in people's behavior. The very concepts of "race" and of "white people" are social constructs that were created to justify the empowerment of some people and the disempowerment of others.

IMPORTANT NOTE

In preparation for this session, all participants should visit <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html> and click on the button labeled "Race IAT" to take the racial Implicit Association Test. This test will attempt to measure a person's level of implicit (that is, unconscious) bias in regard to white people and black people.

Video Clips

1. Racism Is Real: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTcSVQJ2h8g>
2. Why White Privilege Matters: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGo3_fU1n6s
3. What Is White Privilege? Here's What People on the Street Have to Say: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQK8H0z-irM>

4. NewsOne Now—Rev. Jim Wallis: White Privilege Is the Benefit of White Supremacy: <http://newsone.com/3129495/rev-jim-wallis-white-privilege-is-the-benefit-of-white-supremacy/>
5. American Denial—Implicit Bias Test: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWa09tUzqf4>

Selections from the Book

- Chapter 3, pp. 33–35 (beginning of “America’s Original Sin” section through the paragraph ending with “what they want and fear for their children”)
- Chapter 5, pp. 73–75 (beginning of “Europeans Becoming ‘White People’” section through the paragraph ending “and ultimately their standing before God”)

Scripture Passages

- Exodus 1:8–22
- Luke 4:14–21
- Romans 3:9–26

Discussion Questions

1. In preparation for this session, please visit <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html> and click on the button labeled “Race IAT” to take the racial Implicit Association Test. This test will attempt to measure your level of implicit (that is, unconscious) bias in regard to white people and black people. How did taking this test make you feel? Were you surprised by your results? Do your results help you make sense of any past or present situations or interactions in your life?
2. For participants of color: Can you share with the group some examples of casual or subtle racism that you encounter in your everyday life? What about examples that are not so subtle? For white participants: Can you share with the group some specific examples of how you’ve benefited from white privilege in your life up to this point?
3. Given that white people benefit from white privilege even if they’ve fought their whole lives against racism, what *can* white people who genuinely oppose racism and white privilege do to help dismantle these systems of oppression? What, if any, are some ways in which people of color can help them?

Prayer

In the midst of the ever present stream of injustices
inflicted upon the weak, the poor, and the marginalized,
we confess our complicity in nurturing the status quo
through silence and inaction.
Unlike past and present day prophets,
we stood by while our sisters and brothers suffered
at the hands of the privileged and powerful.
So often, we turned a blind eye to the sufferings of those
who were looked down upon
because of powerlessness, poverty, or the hue of their skin.
We confess our commitment to being the church
where “all are one” and “all are welcome”
so we ask you to make us into the church that intercedes
on behalf of those who are cast aside for the sake of the
establishment.
In Jesus’ name. Amen.

—Rev. Julius Jefferson, Senior Pastor, Heritage United
Church of Christ, Baltimore, Maryland

SESSION 3

The Meaning of Repentance and the Beloved Community

Session Description

In order to achieve real racial justice and healing in the United States, genuine repentance by white Christians must happen. True repentance is much more than saying you're sorry; it means turning around and going in a whole new direction. The church also has a big decision to make in the years ahead: whether to remain a largely segregated institution or to embrace God's plan for a multiracial "beloved community" of believers.

Video Clips

1. N. T. Wright: Repentance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nr0rxEOafMY>
2. The Multicultural Church: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qn9ktOJLpQ>
3. Pasadena Church—Multicultural Churches (Parts 1–5)
 - a. Part 1—Scripture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JN4QKcvTjD4>
 - b. Part 2—Leadership: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUNftWW7CW8>
 - c. Part 3—Cell Groups: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lYUIY6GvMs>
 - d. Part 4—Community Outreach: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7KUrfWF_29Y
 - e. Part 5—Sunday Service and Worship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEVACHY1XvU>

Selections from the Book

- Chapter 4, pp. 59–61 (paragraph starting with “In the New Testament . . .” through paragraph ending with “conversion for white churches on the matter of white racism”)
- Chapter 6, pp. 125–26 (“It’s Our Calling”)

Scripture Passages

- Ezekiel 18:26–32
- Matthew 3:1–12
- Acts 2:1–47
- Galatians 3:23–29

Discussion Questions

1. What does repentance mean to you personally? Can you give any examples of repentance in the true sense, outlined in chapter 4, that you’ve experienced in your own life or seen in someone else’s?
2. How is your church doing in terms of creating a multicultural “beloved community”? In what areas covered in chapter 6 and this session’s videos is your church doing well? In what areas does your church need to improve?
3. What are some common pitfalls or attitudes that prevent churches from becoming more diverse? Research cited in chapter 6 indicates that given the choice, people choose to associate with those that look most like themselves. Do you believe that this is an immutable trait, or can it be changed over time? Does the church have a responsibility to counter that human tendency? How can it best do so?

Prayer

O God, may your church discover, then identify, its life with groups of people who suffer injustice and remain unheard. May your church be the church of the voiceless. Let your church struggle with all who struggle and so find the way of your cross, and the way to true responsibility. Amen.

—Emilio Castro, Uruguay, from *Prayers Encircling the World*
(Westminster John Knox Press)

SESSION 4

From Warriors to Guardians: Reforming the Criminal Justice System

Session Description

The United States has a long and troubled history of police violence against people of color. In the last few years, the killings of young black men and women have focused national attention on the issue, and the Black Lives Matter movement has emerged as a powerful voice for racial justice. More broadly, the criminal justice system in this country perpetuates racial injustice at every level, as the statistics on stops, arrests, sentences, and recidivism show. Reform of this system is urgent and necessary for racial justice and healing.

Video Clips

1. HuffPost Live—Rev. Jim Wallis on Ferguson Protests: <http://live.huffingtonpost.com/r/segment/reverend-jim-wallis-ferguson-christianity-/5437df74fe34440995000c8a>
2. Michelle Alexander: Ferguson Shows Why Criminal Justice System of “Racial Control” Should Be Undone: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZrt5GqaqF4>
3. *The Colbert Report*: Interview with Michelle Alexander: <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/ad10bn/the-colbert-report-michelle-alexander>
4. From Prison to Pulpit: <http://summitforchange.com/portfolio-item/elevating-the-issues-mass-incarceration/>

Selections from the Book

- Chapter 2, pp. 29–32 (“The Parable of Baltimore”)
- Chapter 7, pp. 137–40 (“The Clear Data on Racialized Stops, Arrests, Sentences, Incarceration, and Recidivism”)
- Chapter 8, pp. 164–66 (“Restorative Justice”)

Scripture Passages

- Amos 5:6–24
- Matthew 5:1–12
- Philippians 4:1–9

Discussion Questions

1. Tell your group about your experience of Michael Brown’s death and the subsequent Ferguson protest movement. How did you first hear about it? How did you react? Did your perception or attitude change at all as the various media narratives emerged, or as various testimony and evidence was made public? How did the police response to the protests affect you? Did you get involved, either in Ferguson or elsewhere around the country? If so, how?
2. Talk about your personal experiences with law enforcement throughout your life, positive and/or negative. How have those experiences shaped your perception of the state of law enforcement in the U.S. today?
3. What steps, of those outlined in chapter 7 or that you might come up with on your own, do you feel would be most effective at reforming the criminal justice system? What are the main obstacles to making those steps happen, and how can those obstacles be overcome?

Prayer

Oh God, we pray that you will stir the waters, and
agitate the sleepers of our world,
who would rather justify injustice than fight against it.
And give your people—
your young warriors
and crying mothers
and broken fathers—
the courage to accept nothing less than life.
Help us to stand for truth, justice and righteousness.
Give us courage to make our witness against injustice in deep and
abiding love.
Amen.

—Adapted from “A Collective Prayer for Ferguson,” as compiled
and edited by Pastor Renita Marie, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/
pastor-renita-marie-mdiv/prayer-for-ferguson- b_6158192.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pastor-renita-marie-mdiv/prayer-for-ferguson-b_6158192.html)

SESSION 5

Welcoming the Stranger: Racial Justice and Fixing Our Broken Immigration System

Session Description

It's been clear to many for some time that the United States' immigration system is hopelessly broken. The good news is that people across the country—of all racial and religious backgrounds—increasingly support comprehensive immigration reform. Unfortunately, a few dozen conservative members of the US House of Representatives have so far blocked that reform.

Video Clips

1. Jim Wallis: “Race Is at the Heart” of Immigration Roadblock: <http://www.msnbc.com/changing-america/watch/jim-wallis--race--fear-roadblock-immigration-403550275570>
2. White House White Board—Why Immigration Reform Is Good for the Economy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVS51HPAvjU>
3. CNN—Faith Groups Push for Immigration Reform: <http://www.cnn.com/videos/bestoftv/2014/07/09/salguero-on-immigration.cnn>
4. 100 Women 100 Miles—A Call for Immigration Reform: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAu8cU02-rw>

Selections from the Book

- Chapter 9, pp.172–73 (“The Bible Tells Me So”)
- Chapter 9, pp. 184–85 (“Urgent and Unfinished”)

Scripture Passages

- Deuteronomy 10:12–22
- Luke 10:25–37
- Hebrews 13:1–3

Discussion Questions

1. How does the debate over immigration and immigration reform resonate for you personally compared to the debate over criminal justice reform? How are they related to each other? How are they different? What are some concrete things that people of all races who want to fight racial injustice and white privilege can do to stay united in that fight and not be divided?
2. How have your church and/or your community been involved in and affected by the immigration debate? What are some of the successes you're most proud of in your community on this issue? Where has your community fallen short?
3. What does comprehensive immigration reform look like to you? What should it include, and what should it not include? What can people and communities of faith and conscience do that they haven't yet done to ensure that comprehensive immigration reform finally succeeds? Which of the current tactics, including those discussed in chapter 9, have been most effective? Which have been least effective? What new strategies or tactics might be effectively employed to make progress on this issue?

Prayer

Blessed are you, Lord Jesus Christ. You crossed every border between divinity and humanity to make your home with us. Help us to welcome you in newcomers, migrants, and refugees. Blessed are you, God of all nations. You bless our land richly with goods of creation and with people made in your image. Help us to be good stewards and peacemakers, who live as your children. Blessed are you, Holy Spirit. You work in the hearts of all to bring about harmony and goodwill. Strengthen us to welcome those from other lands, cultures, religions, that we may live in human solidarity and in hope. God of all people, grant us vision to see your presence in our midst, especially in our immigrant sisters and brothers. Give us courage to open the door to our neighbors and grace to build a society of justice.

—Pax Christi, in “Collected Prayers for Immigrants,” compiled by Interfaith Worker Justice, <http://files.www.iwj.org/resources/a-prayer-for-immigrants/CollectedPrayers4Imm4.131.pdf>

SESSION 6

The Bridge to a New America: Having the “New Talk” in Our Schools, Communities, and Congregations

Session Description

By the year 2045 at the latest, the majority of Americans will be descended from African, Asian, or Latin American ancestors. For the first time in our nation’s history, white people will be a minority of the overall population. This bridge to a new demographic future should be seen as an opportunity and a blessing, not as a threat. But in order to ensure a future where people of all ancestries live in greater harmony and community with one another, we need to change our racial geography and build meaningful relationships with one another in our schools, sports, congregations, and more.

Video Clips

1. The Changing State of US Ethnicity: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-20187325>
2. U.S. Will Have No Ethnic Majority by 2043: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/12/census-hispanics-and-black-unseat-whites-as-majority-in-united-states-population_n_2286105.html
3. Melissa Harris-Perry—The Change in Demographics of Race in America: <http://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry/watch/change-in-demographics-of-race-in-america-281024579760>
4. Jackie Robinson Breaks Barriers: <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/jackie-robinson>

Selections from the Book

- Chapter 10, pp.188–90 (“Where Do We Go from Here?”)
- Chapter 10, pp. 212–14 (“Sports”)

Scripture Passages

- Matthew 25:31–46
- Revelation 7:9–17
- Hebrews 11:1–40; 12:1–2

Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel about the United States’ ethnic future? Hopeful? Apprehensive? Eager? What opportunities do you see ahead for a nation with no majority racial group? What will the biggest challenges be?
2. In chapter 10, Jim Wallis talks about “changing our racial geography.” How can we best do that as a nation? Do you have any examples that have worked in your community? Where do debates about urban planning, affordable housing, economic justice, and the reality of urban gentrification fit into this picture? Where do these conversations need to go if we wish to build communities where people of all ethnic backgrounds mingle and have meaningful contact with each other in everyday life? What would racial inclusion look like in your community?
3. Have you experienced some of the conversations and relationships that Jim Wallis says need to happen in our schools, sports, and congregations? If so, can you describe those experiences or interactions? What lessons did you take away from those experiences? Do you have any ideas for how to facilitate more of those interactions and experiences in your community, congregation, schools, and sports teams? What are the major barriers, and how can they be overcome?

Prayer

Yes, Jesus,
I want to be on your right side
or your left side,
not for any selfish reason.
I want to be on your right or your best side,
not in terms of some political kingdom or ambition,
but I just want to be there
in love and in justice and in truth
and in commitment to others,
so we can make of this old world a new world. Amen.

—*Martin Luther King Jr.: A Documentary . . . Montgomery to Memphis*,
ed. Flip Schulke (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1976)