

Divided by Faith, chapters 1-5

Argument: White evangelicals are against racism, but because of the way they think about racism, they end up perpetuating it rather than working against it.

“This book is a story of how well-intentioned people, their values, and their institutions actually recreate racial divisions and inequalities they ostensibly oppose. It is a narrative of how some of America’s core values and assumptions and its reliance on market principles contradict and work against other esteemed values.” (p. 1-2)

The U.S. is a racialized society: “a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.”

“[R]acial practices that produce racial division in the contemporary United States ‘(1) are increasingly covert, (2) are embedded in normal operations of institutions, (3) avoid direct racist terminology, and (4) are invisible to most Whites.’” (p. 9)

Evidence: intermarriage rates, residential segregation, income and wealth gaps, health and health care differences, life expectancy, religious affiliation, and so on.

History of evangelicals and race (1700-1964)

Early provincial period (1700-1730): Little effort to convert slaves

The Great Awakening (1720s-late 1740s): Challenging status quo was viewed as hindering evangelism

New Nation (1770-1830): Many evangelicals favored gradual end of slavery through revivalism

The Nation Divides (1830-1865): Evangelical abolitionists were outnumbered by Northern gradualists, who held similar racial views as Southerners

Southern Evangelicalism (1830-1965): Southerners used Bible to defend slavery

Post-Reconstruction (1877-1950): White evangelicals didn’t oppose segregation, believed blacks were responsible for their own problems

Civil rights era (1950-1960s): Black evangelicals heavily involved in civil rights movement; whites viewed racism as individual-level problem.

Since late 1960s, a number of evangelicals became involved in a racial reconciliation movement, which includes structural issues

Four steps to achieve racial reconciliation: (1) cross-race primary relationships, (2) recognizing social structures of inequality, (3) whites must repent of “their personal, historical, and social sins,” and (4) blacks must forgive whites who repent.

However, the popularization of reconciliation involved a shift to individual reconciliation.

White evangelicals view racism as an individual-level problem

“For them, the race problem is one or more of three main types: (1) prejudiced individuals, resulting in bad relationships and sin, (2) other groups—usually African Americans—trying to make race problems a group issue when there is nothing more than individual problems, and (3) a fabrication of the self-interested—again often African Americans, but also the media, the government, or liberals.” (p. 74)

In making sense of race, evangelicals draw upon their subcultural tools: “accountable freewill individualism,” “relationalism,” and antistructuralism. Racial isolation contributes to reliance on these tools.

Survey data shows white conservative Protestants are less likely than other whites (and Black conservative Protestants) to explain racial inequality in structural terms.

In interviews, white evangelicals blamed racial inequality on cultural and motivational causes (e.g., lack of hope and vision, relational dysfunction and lack of responsibility).

Many white evangelicals were irritated to be asked about racial inequality and most were not bothered by it.

White evangelicals with some contact with blacks are less individualistic and more structural.

“By not seeing the structures that impact on individual initiative—such as unequal access to quality education, segregated neighborhoods that concentrate the already higher black poverty rate and lead to further social problems, and other forms of discrimination—the structures are allowed to continue unimpeded... For the reasons discussed in this section, evangelicals’ application of their cultural tool kit, in the context of intergroup isolation, unwittingly contributes to the reproduction of racial inequality.” (p. 112-113)