EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

Ever since my first memory, I have witnessed the beauty and strength within our culture. But like every culture, I've also witnessed some of the tragedies that are destroying us as a people. People often ask me why I wrote this book, and the answer is both simple and complicated. To be honest, it started as a simple exercise to relieve stress from witnessing all the blatant racism and hypocrisy going on today. It was out of pure frustration that I decided to express myself through writing simply as therapy. The book began to form as I grew tired of seeing us suffer from problems that I believe could be addressed through knowledge, discipline, intentionality, a shift in perspective, to ultimately force a shift in policy. I grew tired of watching generation after generation start from scratch when someone in the family already possessed the wisdom to move them forward. I grew tired of seeing us celebrate survival while rarely discussing strategy. I grew tired of hearing conversations focused solely on what had been done to us without equally honest conversations about what we could do for ourselves. I grew tired of watching brilliant minds waste their gifts because nobody taught them how to transform talent into legacy. More importantly, I GREW TIRED OF WATCHING US DYING.

On the flipside, I observed many of their communities flourishing. As an inventor, I have always been wired to see connections where other people see separation. Innovation is taking existing pieces and assembling them into something new. I do not look at history simply to assign blame; I look at history to extract lessons. I asked what worked, what failed, and what could be improved. I asked what habits helped communities build wealth, maintain influence, and protect future generations.

Starting at the early age of my late teens / early twenties, I began interacting with them and noticed certain patterns. That's when wisdom started unraveling habits, values, and strategies that contributed to stability and success in many of their families and communities. Of course, not all, but a far greater rate than ours.

I noticed that many of them talked about business & real estate ownership, inheritance & life insurance, career advancements & retirement, investment & portfolios, belonging to prestigious institutions & circles, and much more. They often understood that success was not just about individual achievement but about maintaining and transferring what they had personally built, despite operating in a system that was already created for them to succeed.

Oddly enough, the more answers I sought, the more they were willing to share. Which was perfect for me. Because my inquiring mind did just what it was designed to do – INQUIRE. That's over thirty years of not only doing business with and interacting, but also carefully observing like a science project. From my former in-laws to former business partners, attorneys, doctors, shipmates, friends, exes, church members, etc..., I gathered quite a bit of intel from them about how they think and operate in the construct of America's society.

At the same time, I saw something equally beautiful in us. I saw resilience that could not be taught in a classroom, creativity that shaped the world, faith that carried people through impossible circumstances, communities that turned strangers into family, grandparents who held entire families together, and men and women who made a way out of no way. I saw us survive things that should have destroyed us. Then the question hit me: What if we stopped choosing between the two?

What if we held on to the beauty of who we are while adopting the habits that built them lasting power?

What if our resilience met with a long-term strategy?

What if our creativity partnered with discipline?

What if our faith partnered with planning?

What if our love for family expanded into a commitment to leave behind assets, wealth and wisdom?

What if survival evolved into stewardship?

What if we could act like us and think like them?

This book is my attempt to answer these questions, while providing a road map for doing so. Although no single book, or even several books, could address every concern facing our community, I have filled these pages with the information I believe readers need to make a meaningful difference in their lives. I chose to share it all here, despite advice to save some material for a sequel. I hope this book blesses you as deeply as writing it has blessed me. Enjoy.

My Case Study

Shortly after moving to Atlanta in 2010, I started a guest housing business called RoomsATL, where we converted single-family homes into hotel style accommodations with rooms rented on a weekly basis. At its peak, we operated nearly 60 rooms throughout the Atlanta area. With couples and individuals regularly moving in and out, I interacted with nearly 100 people every week for about six years, before selling my stake in the business.

Initially, my goal was simply to identify products and services our guests might need, whether it was credit repair, tax service, food from vending machines, buying vehicles from my dealership, or any other necessity we could capitalize on. But as I spent more time observing the people coming through our doors, I realized I was unintentionally conducting a real-world case study. I began noticing behavioral patterns based on age, race, hometown, occupation, financial habits, relationships, and other factors.

The observations I made during those six years, combined with my own life experiences, research, education, and conversations with thousands of people, became the foundation for many of the ideas and principles shared throughout this book. Some of the greatest lessons in life do not come from a classroom. They come from simply paying attention.

Create a Plan from this Book

Preparation is one of the greatest advantages we can give ourselves in life. A goal tells you where you want to go, but a plan determines how you're going to get there. I always say, “The difference between a dream and a goal is, one you simply hope for, and one you strive for”. We must turn our dreams into goals by striving to achieve them. Before doing that, we should learn about the environment, understand the risks, identify the resources we'll need, anticipate obstacles, and decide what steps must be taken. Preparation doesn't guarantee victory, but walking into a situation unprepared certainly makes defeat easier. Even opportunities become useless when we're not prepared to take advantage of it.

But planning alone isn't enough. We can have the greatest playbook ever written, but eventually we have to get on the field and run the plays. This book was never intended to be read once and placed back on a shelf. It's a blueprint for action. I encourage you to keep a notebook, journal, or digital document as you read, highlighting the principles that speak to you most to create a plan for your success. Write down the ideas you want to implement, the habits you need to change, the goals you want to accomplish, and the steps you'll take to get there. Knowledge without execution changes nothing.

I remember my basketball coach telling us, “To always keep our eyes on the rim when it’s time to shoot. You can’t hit what you can’t see”. I’ve expanded this to, “you can’t reach a destination you don’t know”. You must first determine where you’re trying to go, entrepreneurship, career, family, spiritually, or life in general. Your notes will become your personal roadmap, turning inspiration into implementation and ideas into results. Don't just read this book. Study it, personalize it, and most importantly, put it into practice. Your future will be shaped not by what you know, but by what you consistently do.

Boiling Point

Throughout American history, our progress has rarely moved in a straight line. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, we made extraordinary gains, electing public officials, opening businesses, establishing schools, acquiring land, and building thriving communities. Yet those advancements were followed by setbacks as Reconstruction ended, federal protections were withdrawn, and Jim Crow laws spread throughout much of the South. Decades later, the Civil Rights Movement brought another wave of progress through landmark legislation protecting voting rights, civil rights, and equal opportunity. Again, periods of advancement were often followed by new challenges, policy shifts, court decisions, economic changes, or social resistance that slowed or, in some areas, reversed parts of that progress.

Many in our community view the current political climate as another pivotal moment in our history. America was once described as a “Melting Pot,” a place where different people could come together, contribute, and feel welcomed. But with the recent attacks on immigration and civil rights, that promise feels less like a melting pot and more like a “Boiling Pot”. Regardless of where one stands, the lesson for us remains the same: we cannot become complacent. Every generation must stay informed, work to build wealth, strengthen families, support education,

and develop institutions that can withstand shifting political winds. Our future cannot depend solely on who occupies public office; it must also rest on what we establish together as a people.

With all the political tension in the air, it is clear that something is brewing. Civil discord and unrest across the country feel as though they are reaching a boiling point. While that is not something any of us should desire, we must recognize the urgency of this moment and use the fire in our belly to push for meaningful change. I am not suggesting that we take up arms or seek violence. However, I do believe we must practice our Second Amendment Rights while staying aware, prepared, and committed to protecting our families. More importantly, through prayer and faith, we must remain diligent about becoming stronger, wiser, and better in every area of our lives. That is the purpose behind this book: to help us grow, think more deeply, and move with greater intention. Please take the time to read, reflect on, and absorb what I am trying to share with us all. And if this book adds value or insight to your life, I ask that you share it with someone else. Thank you.

- MISSING PORTION -

Chapter 2

US

When I hear the title of this book, “Act Like Us Think Like Them”, I don't hear shame in the word "us." I hear pride, survival, and laughter in the middle of pain that creates a cadence that only we can recognize. It sounds like grandma humming gospel songs while cooking Sunday dinner, uncles spewing life lessons on the front porch, cousins playing spades while trash talking each other about who’s the winner. This cadence is church mothers praying over children that don't even belong to them. Barbershops discuss politics, sports, and relationships, while topics get debated like Congressmen. All this from people who have been knocked down more times than they can count and still found a reason to dance at the cookout. That’s the sound I remember. The sound that almost brings me to tears reminiscing.

There's a beauty in acting like us that the world often overlooks because the world has spent so much time studying our pain that it forgot to notice our joy. We know how to celebrate life, while at the same time taking scraps to create soul food that feeds not just the stomach but the spirit. We know how to turn a church service into therapy before therapy was something we could afford. The instruments we used to create jazz were broken instruments no one else wanted. We took hardship and created blues and told our stories on streets through hip-hop. That's our genius, our creativity, our resilience - THAT'S US.

Acting like us means understanding the power of community. When somebody in our family dies, everybody shows up. When somebody graduates, the whole family acts like they got the degree. When a child is acting up, every auntie, uncle, grandparent, and neighbor feels like they got the right, and sometimes the responsibility, to step in and help straighten them out. We might joke about it, but there was a time when everybody's mama was your mama and everybody's grandmother was watching over the block. That's the love and collective responsibility of the village.

Acting like us means having a testimony. It means understanding that your scars don't have to become your identity. We've always been a people who could say, "I've been through hell, but I'm still here." I recall the time my mother lost her job and still shared what little we had with the neighbors. How about all the times we've had to deal with discrimination, disappointment, and heartbreak without letting bitterness completely consume us. No one has mastered the art of getting back up like we have.

There's beauty in our faith too. For generations, our ancestors held on to God when they had very little else to hold on to. Our churches became schools, meeting halls, organizing centers, and sanctuaries. We prayed our way through everything from slavery, segregation, the Civil Rights Movement, to hospital waiting rooms. Even now, you'll hear somebody say, "Baby, all I got is God," and somehow find enough strength to keep going another day.

Acting like us means understanding that laughter is medicine. Lord knows we've laughed at funerals, cracked jokes in the middle of hard times, and found humor in situations that should've broken us. Some people call it denial. But we call it survival. Sometimes laughing is how we remind pain that it doesn't own us.

There's beauty in our style too. No one takes ordinary and makes it extraordinary quite like us. We set trends, create culture, redefine language, influence music, fashion, dance, sports, and entertainment around the globe. Folks imitate our slang, our swagger, our creativity, and our cool long before they understand where it came from. We have a way of bringing flavor into spaces that would've been bland without us.

But the greatest beauty in acting like us isn't the music, the food, the style, or even the resilience. It's our humanity. It's the way we love our children, even when we don't always know how to express it perfectly. It's the way grandmothers become the backbone of families. It's the way strangers become cousins and elders become protectors. It's the way we celebrate each other's victories like they belong to all of us. It's the way we still dare to dream after every reason we've been given not to.

For too long, we've been taught to associate "acting like us" with something negative, like speaking with confidence is a problem or like our culture is something to outgrow once we become successful. I reject that. There is nothing wrong with acting like us. The problem was never us. The problem was that the world often failed to recognize our value.

The answer isn't to abandon who we are. The answer is refining who we are by holding on to our beauty, while letting go of the habits that don't serve us. Keeping that which makes us unique while strengthening our discipline, preserving our compassion and expanding our vision. Because acting like us means carrying the strength of our ancestors into rooms they never imagined we'd enter. Walking into boardrooms without leaving the cookout behind. Doctors who are not afraid of visiting the neighborhood. And successful Black entrepreneurs who reach back and pull somebody else up. Our community needs leaders who understand that success means very little if nobody else benefits from it.

I don't want us to stop acting like us. I want us to remember the best of who we are. I want us to love harder, laugh louder, build stronger, dream bigger, pray deeper, and support each other more intentionally. I want us to remember that before this country ever recognized our humanity, we recognized it in one another.

We are descendants of people who made a way out of no way, people who found beauty in the ashes, people who sang before they had freedom, built before they had ownership, and hoped before they had evidence. So yes, this book may be called “Act Like Us Think Like Them,” but never mistake the title as an invitation to stop being us. Because there is beauty in being us. There is power in being us. There is dignity in being us. And after everything we've survived, perhaps one of the most revolutionary things we can do is refuse to apologize for the beauty of who we have always been.

RISING FROM THE ASHES: BUILDING AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

One of the greatest tragedies of our history is that many of us were never taught just how quickly our people rose after slavery ended. Too often, the story we hear begins with chains and jumps straight to segregation, skipping over one of the most extraordinary chapters in American history. We are taught about what was done to us, but not always about what we did in spite of it. We are rarely told that only a few years after emancipation, we began building schools, opening businesses, purchasing land, entering politics, and creating thriving communities across the South. Against all odds, people who had been legally forbidden to read, owned property, voted, and began constructing institutions.

The Civil War ended in 1865. Slavery had stolen generations of labor, wealth, and opportunity from Black people, yet within a remarkably short period of time, we began making unprecedented gains. During the period known as Reconstruction, we were elected to public office throughout the South. Thousands served in local governments, on school boards, and in state legislatures. More than six-hundred of us held seats in state legislature during Reconstruction. Sixteen served in the United States Congress during that era, including men like Hiram Revels of Mississippi, who became the first United States Senator in 1870 to represent us, and Blanche K. Bruce, who would later become the second. These men had emerged from a society that had once declared them property, yet they helped shape the laws of the nation within a few short years of emancipation.

Our ancestors understood that political freedom meant little without education. Throughout the South, newly freed people pooled their money, donated labor, and worked alongside missionaries and educators to establish schools. Parents who had once risked punishment for teaching their children to read sacrificed everything to make sure the next generation had opportunities they never had. Colleges and universities that continue to educate students today, including many of our Historically Colleges and Universities, expanded or were founded during this period. Education wasn't viewed as optional. It was viewed as liberation.

At the same time, newly freed slaves began acquiring land and building independent communities. Across the country, our ancestors established towns, settlements, and neighborhoods where they could govern themselves, own businesses, and create safe environments for their families. Places like Mound Bayou, Mississippi, founded by formerly enslaved people, became symbols of self-determination. Eatonville, Florida, one of the first incorporated municipalities for our people in the United States, demonstrated that we could build thriving communities with our own schools, businesses, churches, and local governments. Similar communities emerged throughout the nation, reflecting a powerful desire for ownership, autonomy, and dignity.

Entrepreneurship in our communities flourished despite enormous obstacles. Freedmen opened barbershops, grocery stores, restaurants, newspapers, insurance companies, banks, and farms. Churches became more than places of worship; they became community centers, schools, political meeting spaces, and instruments for social support. Mutual aid societies helped families survive illness, death, and economic hardship. People who had begun with almost nothing pulled together resources and created institutions designed to uplift entire communities.

Unfortunately, this progress also produced backlash. As our political and economic influence grew, efforts intensified to undermine those gains. Reconstruction gave way to The Black Code, the Klan, voter suppression and eventually Jim Crow laws. Violence and intimidation became tools used to suppress voting and economic advancements in our communities. White supremacist organizations sought to reverse the progress we had made. Entire communities that represented our success became targets of resentment and destruction. Yet even in the face of these attacks, our achievements remain undeniable.

The true history of our achievements confronts one of the most damaging myths ever told about us, that we lack the ability to govern, build, organize, or succeed. The truth is that when given even limited opportunities, we demonstrated extraordinary capability. Think about it, we built schools while learning to read, entered Congress while emerging from bondage, established towns while recovering from generations of exploitation and even created businesses while being denied access to capital and protection under the law.

This chapter of history reminds us that excellence is part of our inheritance. Our story is not simply a story of oppression. It is also a story of innovation, determination, and achievement under circumstances that would have broken many others. Our ancestors proved that freedom alone wasn't enough. They wanted more and refused to settle for less, even when it wasn't given to them. This better describes us than the narrative that is too often being told.

I personally believe that many of the white supremacists that portray us with negative stereotypes are fully aware of our resilience, ingenuity, and accomplishments. Our past achievements remind them of what happens when barriers are removed and opportunities are expanded. I must admit that I've never sat in on a Klan meeting, but I sometimes speculate that they study or reference our achievements as a reminder to themselves, and their next generation, of what we have accomplished despite oppression, and as a warning of what will happen should racism ever be fully dismantled. In that sense, our progress itself may be viewed not just as history, but as a signal of what is possible when equality is truly realized. This is why they fight so hard from reminding us of who we truly are and what we could truly accomplish with far less than they have. If this is not the case, I challenge anyone for a better explanation for their hatred towards us and the blatant denial of our past progress, while trying to control our future.

- MISSING PORTION -

Chapter 4

TRUTH ABOUT RACISM

One way to understand racism is to view it as being fueled by fear and insecurity. If you genuinely believed you could compete and succeed on your own merits, there would be no need to create barriers that disadvantage someone else. In many ways, the desire to tilt the playing field suggests a lack of confidence in one's ability to prevail under fair conditions. Imagine sitting down to play Monopoly, but before the game begins, one player is given twice as much money while another starts with half. Or picture a race where one runner begins fifty yards ahead of everyone else. Winning under those conditions doesn't demonstrate superiority. It demonstrates the advantage of an unfair head start. Throughout history, discriminatory laws and practices often operated in much the same way, restricting opportunities for some while granting advantages to others. Real confidence doesn't require cheating, changing the rules, or handicapping the competition. True strength is demonstrated by competing on equal terms and succeeding through talent, preparation, and perseverance rather than by tipping the scales before the contest even begins.

If you can't beat em, Cheat em – Pastor Keith Fields / Chicago

I have often compared the system of racism to a river with two swimmers. For one swimmer, the current flows downstream, carrying them toward the lake of prosperity with the assistance of the current. For the other, that same river flows against them, forcing them to swim upstream with every stroke. Both swimmers may start off being strong, disciplined and hard workers. But because the river is designed to make one person's journey easier while making the other one's journey far more difficult, the one swimming against the current would eventually become stronger (i.e. athletic ability, grit and determination, resilience). For many of them, success usually doesn't require greater talent; it usually only requires them to simply get into the water to ride the current. For us, our talents, gifts, discipline, and determination have often been tested against a current determined to slow our progress. And even when many of us overcome obstacles and reach what appears to be the same destination, we often discover that the final destination was never truly equal to begin with.

Here's another layer to that analogy that we must be honest about. Sometimes, when one of us manages to fight our way upstream and reach a certain level of success, that same individual is used against us to argue that the negative current doesn't really exist. It's as if someone standing on the shore points at that one swimmer and says, "See, they made it, what are the rest of them complaining about." What gets ignored is the strength, sacrifice, and struggle it took for that individual to overcome the current, and how many others are still fighting against it every single day and the vast majority that are never able to overcome it. One person's success does not erase the reality of the current. It only highlights just how strong they had to be to overcome it. Yet one of the greatest testimonies to the strength of our people is that we still moved forward despite the current.

The hypocrisy of America

We have a saying amongst us, “You got a lot of nerves.” Which generally means you have the audacity to say or do something without true conviction, remorse, or understanding in it yourself -hypocritical. America, “you got a lot of nerves!” The American Revolution was fought against what the colonists viewed as tyranny. This is the belief that no people should be ruled without representation or deprived of their God-given rights. Yet while those words were being written into the nation's Declaration of Independence, Chattel slavery remained deeply embedded in its economy and society. The founding fathers proclaimed that "all men were created equal", even while many of them owned human beings. That contradiction has become one of the defining moral struggles of American history.

To me, this isn't merely a contradiction, it's a lesson to understand. America was founded upon extraordinary principles of freedom, but those principles were not applied equally from the beginning. It took generations of abolitionists, formerly enslaved people, Civil War soldiers, civil rights leaders, and ordinary citizens to push the nation closer to the ideas it professed. The promise of liberty existed on paper almost another 100 yrs before it became reality for many Americans.

One question has always stayed with me: if the overwhelming majority of Americans truly opposed racism, why has it proven so persistent throughout our history, until today? Considering it is almost impossible for any system, like theocracy, monarchy, authoritarianism, communism, or racism, to survive on the actions of a few extremists alone, how has racism been able to endure in a country that claims to have ended it? That would be like claiming Hitler almost conquered all of Europe only with a handful of soldiers, oppose to the millions who supported him, including all of Germany. The answer is simple; there must still be enough support for racialism today in America for it to persist.

I'm very aware that the very mentioning of the name Hitler may raise eyebrows. This is because it has been so widely accepted that almost any mentioning of the name of the Jewish executioner brings such condemnation that they actually created a word exclusively to describe it, "anti-Semitism." All while at the same time, the harsh reality of slavery is being softened not to offend White people. Do you see the contrast?

Call me crazy, but I believe that lasting change requires more than Whites privately rejecting racism. It requires enough of them, especially those with influence, to consistently challenge it, speak against it, and refuse to tolerate it in any form. Only then can the injustice of racism lose the support that allows it to endure. However, regardless if racism vanishes or not, our efforts to unify for progress must remain diligent at all cost.

The Construct of Race

The concept of "race", as we know it today, is not an ancient or natural way of dividing humanity. The modern concept of race evolved alongside the rise of the transatlantic slave trade and European colonial expansion. Writers, philosophers, scientists, and political leaders developed theories that divided humanity into racial categories and placed those categories into a hierarchy, to which they considered themselves superior with the need to tame the salvage races to save them from becoming extinct. They literally believed they were saving our ancestors from themselves, thus making them our saviors.

Before these ideas were formalized, people certainly recognized differences in language, culture, religion, and nationality, but the rigid racial categories of **"Black"** and **"White"** had not yet taken the form they would later assume. The Portuguese chronicler Gomes Eanes de Zurara played a significant role in shaping early anti-Black ideas by describing Africans as “savages” and “beastlike,” and portraying our ancestors as incapable of governing themselves. These descriptions were not harmless opinions. They helped provide a moral justification for the capture, enslavement, and exploitation of our people by framing them as naturally inferior and in need of being “civilized.” Once a people can be convinced that another group is less than fully human, oppression becomes much easier to justify. In many ways, these early writings laid the foundation for centuries of racist ideology that continued long after slavery itself. These ideas helped provide a moral and intellectual justification for slavery, segregation, and the unequal treatment of African people and their descendants. Over time, those classifications became embedded in law, education, politics, and American culture.

You see, the roots of racism was not some natural order where one group was simply meant to rule over another, but was something man-made, built out of fear and the desperate need to hold on to power. When those in power felt their dominance being challenged, instead of embracing equality, they created narratives about our inferiority to justify keeping us in our place. They painted us less intelligent, more dangerous, less deserving, and somehow less human. But it was never really about our capability. It was about control. It was about protecting privilege, protecting access, and preserving a system that benefited some while exploiting others.

We could further understand the definition of racism after distinguishing the difference between race and ethnicity - along with the sole purpose for creating race. Ethnicity refers to a person's cultural background, like language, nationality, ancestry, traditions, and shared history. Race, on the other hand, is a broader classification often based on physical characteristics such as skin color. Throughout history, people identified themselves primarily by their ethnicity, not race. An Irishman was Irish. An Italian was Italian. A German was German. A Nigerian belonged to a specific ethnic group and Ghanaian belonged to another. However, they were comely referred to as Africans.

As European colonization expanded and the transatlantic slave trade grew, new systems of classification developed. Over time, people from many different European ethnic backgrounds increasingly came to be grouped together under the label "White," while Africans from hundreds of distinct cultures, languages, kingdoms, and ethnic groups were grouped together under the label "Black." One consequence of this system was that it encouraged many different European ethnic groups to increasingly benefit from being recognized as part of a broader majority with shared institutions, voting power, economic cooperation, and legal protections that often reinforced their collective identity.

In many respects, that broader identity became a source of strength because it encouraged people who once viewed themselves as separate to recognize common interests, primarily the transatlantic slave trade. Meanwhile, Africans brought to America came from countless nations, languages, and ethnic backgrounds, yet slavery stripped many of them of those original identities. Families were separated. Languages were lost. Cultural traditions were disrupted.

When we study American history, we see more than the creation of racial categories. We see the creation of systems designed specifically to benefit one race over another. Once race became embedded in law and society, policies and institutions often determined who would have easier access to opportunities and who would face greater barriers. The end of slavery did not automatically end every system of forced labor. The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery and involuntary servitude except as punishment for a crime. That exception became significant during the years following the Civil War. In many Southern states, new laws often called the Black Codes, were enacted that criminalized behaviors such as vagrancy, unemployment, or other minor offenses. These laws disproportionately affected those who were newly freed from slavery, and many who were convicted were leased to private businesses through what became known as the Convict leasing.

Our ancestors were stripped of their names and assigned new names or inventory numbers because they were treated as property rather than human beings. In a similar way, the penal system strips away a person's identity by replacing their name with a number. And under convict leasing, prisoners were hired out to plantations, mines, railroads, lumber camps, and factories. Historians have documented that conditions were often brutal, with little incentive for companies to protect the health or lives of leased prisoners because they could be replaced. For many of our ancestors, this system represented another form of coerced labor that followed the abolition of slavery.

From the plantation to the courthouse, from the cotton fields to corporate boardrooms, racism became one of America's most effective tools of divide and conquer. During slavery, we built wealth that we were never allowed to enjoy. An entire legal and economic system was designed to maintain that arrangement based solely on the "construct of race". After emancipation, Black Codes and Jim Crow laws stepped in to preserve the same hierarchy under different names. When we built thriving communities, they were often sabotaged or destroyed. When we sought education, voting rights, housing, and economic opportunity, barriers appeared. The methods evolved, but the objective remained remarkably consistent: maintain the racial order and protect existing power.

Under the Cloak of Faith

As a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, one of the most painful truths I have had to wrestle with is that the same Christianity that gave many of my enslaved people hope was also used by some to justify their oppression. Throughout the era of slavery, certain slaveholders and religious leaders selectively quoted Scripture, twisting passages out of context to argue that slavery was ordained by God and that some people were destined to serve. They preached obedience while ignoring justice, submission while overlooking compassion, and order while denying the humanity of those they enslaved. The Gospel that taught love, mercy, and the equal value of every soul was manipulated to protect economic interests and social hierarchies. During Jim Crow, some churches remained silent in the face of segregation, while others openly defended racist practices as part of the natural order.

"Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves." – 1 Peter 2:16

Even now, many people have expressed concern that faith continues to be distorted to justify prejudice, exclusion, or indifference toward the suffering of others. For some of us Christians, the strong support that many of the evangelicals gave to this administration - despite Trump's rhetoric and policies that were racially divisive and inhuman towards minority communities - became another painful example of how political loyalty can overshadow the Gospel's call to justice, compassion, humility, and truth. While many evangelicals supported Trump for reasons such as abortion, religious liberty, judicial appointments, or economic policy, they completely ignored Jesus calls to help the poor, love thy neighbor, forgive, consider the widow, embrace strangers / foreigners and more. This is why many see their support as an endorsement of a broader agenda that tolerated or empowered racial resentment and deepened existing divisions. The tension revealed an ongoing struggle within Christianity over whether faith will challenge injustice or accommodate it.

Yet the story of Christianity to us is not only a story of misuse; it is also a story of liberation. The same Bible that some used to defend slavery inspired others to fight against it. The story of Moses leading the Israelites out of bondage gave hope to enslaved people longing for freedom. The teachings of Jesus about loving your neighbor, caring for "the least of these," and proclaiming liberty to the oppressed became the foundation for abolitionists, civil rights leaders, and countless ordinary believers who challenged injustice. Men like Frederick Douglass exposed the hypocrisy of a Christianity that blessed slavery while claiming to follow Christ, and leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called America to live up to the true principles of the Gospel.

"Therefore, everything you would like men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." - Matthew 7:12

One thing I've noticed is that Jesus is not recorded directly addressing the issue of homosexuality or abortion. Instead, His teachings consistently focus on loving God, loving others, caring for the poor, showing mercy, welcoming strangers, forgiving, and serving those in need. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask if Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus said, "the blind could see, the lame could walk, the sick were healed, and the good news was shared with the poor". Jesus thought so much about the poor that He mentioned them as a declaration to prove He is The Messiah. This raises an important question for the modern Church: if we

claim to follow Christ, shouldn't His teachings be at the center of our lives and agenda? Yet, the evangelicals only focus on the issues aligning with their political agenda, like stating it's our "God-given" right to own guns. But contrary to this belief, Jesus taught, those who live by the sword shall die by the sword. I haven't met a Pastor or Christian yet to justify the Second Amendment. Which I'm not against, only declaring God ordained it. Yet, plenty of them dispute immigration and helping the poor. Too often, political views seem to take priority over the compassion, mercy, justice, and love that defined Jesus' ministry.

The lesson for us should be that it depends on the heart of the person yielding God's sword, it could be used to cut down a person's moral, dignity and humanity for oppression, or used to cut the chains of bondage. The challenge for believers today is to remain faithful to Christ above political parties, cultural identities, or personal interests, ensuring that our faith reflects the love, justice, mercy, and dignity that Jesus extended to all people.

As believers, we understand that our deliverance from slavery was not achieved solely through the efforts of the people or this nation. The oppressors held nearly all the power, and Lincoln had publicly pledged that he would not abolish slavery. So, what changed? How did a president who had not initially sought emancipation and a predominantly White nation, come to risk so many lives and endure a conflict that nearly destroyed the country? To me, the answer could only be - Divine Intervention! God orchestrated our deliverance from slavery. Just as prayer and faith sustained us through every other form of oppression, we must continue to trust in God, even when faith is distorted and misused for harmful purposes.

Policing In America

We also cannot talk honestly about racism in America without talking about the origins of law enforcement. In many parts of the South, some of the earliest organized forms of policing grew out of slave patrols. These groups of men were tasked with tracking down runaway enslaved people, monitoring their movements, searching their homes, and enforcing the slave system through intimidation and violence. Their purpose was not simply public safety as we understand it today; it was the protection of property and the preservation of a racial hierarchy built on human bondage. The origins of this task force existed to catch, control, and discipline enslaved people and to suppress any threat to the institution of slavery.

When slavery ended, the mindset and structures of control did not simply disappear overnight. The uniforms changed, the laws changed, and the language changed, but many of us continued to experience law enforcement as an institution that too often treated us with suspicion rather than protection. During Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, we were arrested under vague laws, forced into convict leasing systems that resembled slavery by another name, and subjected to unequal treatment under the law. In more recent generations, many in our communities have experienced over-policing, racial profiling, stop-and-frisk tactics, harsher sentencing practices, and the persistent assumption that our skin itself makes us a threat.

For many of us, this history shapes everyday conversations. Too many of our parents have had "the talk" with their children, not just about birds and bees, but about how to survive an encounter with law enforcement. Keep your hands visible. Don't make sudden movements. Be respectful. Say "yes, sir" and "no, ma'am." Don't argue on the side of the road. Come home alive. That is a burden many Americans from other communities never have to carry, and it reflects a reality rooted in generations of experiences in our community.

We know what it feels like to walk into a store and be followed. To get pulled over and wonder whether this traffic stop is really about a broken taillight. To be viewed as intimidating before we've even opened our mouths. We know what it's like to have to prove our innocence, our intelligence, and our humanity repeatedly. Sometimes you can do everything right, dress right, speak right, earn the degrees, build the business, raise your family, and still be met with suspicion. That's exhausting. That's trauma. And if we're being honest, sometimes it makes you angry. Sometimes it makes you tired. Sometimes it makes you ask, "How much more do we have to do just to be seen as human beings with the same emotions, desires, wants and needs as them?" Our frustration is justified!

But here's the truth: racism survives because of lies. It survives when people believe that superiority and inferiority are facts instead of inventions created by man. It survives when fear goes unchallenged and when people refuse to examine the systems they inherited, along with the assumptions they were taught. Racism also thrives because America’s history has been sanitized and the uncomfortable truths about its past are ignored.

Knowing that racism was built on a fragile lie should strengthen our resolve. No one is inherently superior, and no one is inherently inferior. The lie only works if people keep believing it. This chapter is both a reckoning and a reminder. The roots of racism lie in fear: the fear of losing power by sharing opportunity and the fear of confronting uncomfortable truths about the past. I get it! Facing our past isn't always easy. But it's needed for meaningful progress to take place. Acknowledging the sins of one's ancestors does not make a person guilty of those sins; choosing to repeat or defend them does.

Understanding that some of the earliest forms of law enforcement in this country were tied to the capture and control of enslaved people does not require us to condemn every individual who wears a badge today. It requires us to tell the truth about history so that we can build institutions worthy of public trust and equal justice. Neither does racism requires us to generalize everyone in their community as a racist. No group of people is monolithic. Just like we are made up of a diverse group of individuals with different mindsets, so are they.

I'm only highlighting the fact that once exposed, the root cause of racism, **FEAR**, can be challenged. It can be dismantled through knowledge, courage, honest conversations, justice, love, and truth if the other side is willing to listen. If not, it can be defeated with unity. And the truth is this: despite everything we've endured, we're still here. Still standing and believing that America can become what it has always "claimed to be", if it finally has the courage to face its own reflection.

Rules of Thee and Not for Me

A frustrating double standard in America is a popular coin-phrase, "rules for thee, but not for me" mindset. When a person from our community commits a crime, joins a gang, or makes a poor decision, it is often portrayed as evidence of a systemic problem in our community. The actions of one are too often used to judge the many. But when the roles are reversed, the standard suddenly changes. We're then told, "Do not judge all of them by the actions of a few." Somehow, individual responsibility applies only in one direction for them, but collective responsibility applies to us.

Think about how society discusses crime. The vast majority of serial killers who have committed some of the most horrific crimes in American history are of a particular race, yet no one concludes that serial murder is a systemic problem in their culture. The overwhelming number

of mass shootings committed by offenders from their community are not generally described as proof that they're inherently violent. A dishonest business executive doesn't become a symbol of poor business ethics on their part. Instead, those individuals are usually treated as exactly what they are: individuals responsible for their own actions. They have even coined a popular phrase for violent crime in our community as **"Black on Black Crime"**. Yet, studies show that the vast majority of violent crimes committed are amongst people of the same race. I've never heard of "White on White" crime to describe any crime, even though I just explained how certain crimes are committed far more frequently by them.

Yet, for generations, we have often been judged by a different standard. One person's mistake can become a reflection of our entire race. News stories, political debates, and public conversations have frequently framed the failures of individuals as failures of our community itself. The burden of representation has rarely been equal. We are often expected to answer for people we've never met, while others are afforded the grace of individuality.

Real fairness requires one standard for everyone. If we reject stereotypes when they are applied to one group, we should reject them when they are applied to every group. If we believe that one person's actions do not define an entire race, then that principle must be applied consistently. Otherwise, we're not dealing with justice. We're dealing with a double standard, where the rules change depending on who is being judged. The opioid epidemic exposed what I see as another example of "rules for thee, but not for me."

During the crack cocaine era, our communities experienced aggressive policing, mandatory minimum sentences, and a national "War on Drugs" that emphasized punishment over rehabilitation. Years later, as opioid addiction increasingly affected many in their backyard, the national conversation shifted toward a "public health crisis" to be managed. The focus became treatment, prevention, counseling, recovery programs, and expanding access to rehabilitation centers. Addiction was increasingly discussed as a disease requiring compassion and care rather than solely as a criminal issue. To me, the contrast raises an important question: Why did the national response appear to change so dramatically depending on who was most affected? No need to answer. It was a rhetorical question, in which we all know the answer.

- MISSING PORTION -

Victimnism

An effective strategy used to defend racism has been to portray those with greater historical power as the true victims. Rather than confronting the legacy of discrimination, those opposing it generally frame efforts to address inequality as discrimination against themselves, using phrases like "reverse racism" or "reverse discrimination" or accuse us of “playing the race card”, even after we’re racially attacked or profiled. And we cannot forget the infamous “White women tears” after creating a volatile situation due to racist behavior. As a form of racism, “Victimnism” (as I call it) is taking the role of a victim and “weaponize” victimhood to shift the focus away from the original injustice to garner sympathy for those who have historically benefited from inequality. It's a form of projection that recasts the conversation so that the people seeking greater opportunity are portrayed as the aggressors, while those resisting change present themselves as the ones under attack.

Victimnism has been used throughout American’s history to claim alleged offenses against their community, particularly White women, to justify violence against us. In the cases of Tulsa's Greenwood District, Rosewood, and many individual lynchings, accusations that a Black person had assaulted, disrespected, or even looked at a White woman were frequently used to inflame public outrage and legitimize acts of terror. In many instances, those allegations were later shown to be false, unsubstantiated, or grossly exaggerated, yet they became the pretext for mob violence, the destruction of prosperous Black neighborhoods, and the murder of innocent Black people.

ILLUSTRATION: Whenever I taught or lectured, including a megachurch, my leading statement was, “If I ever teach or say something without showing clear proof, dismiss it as an opinion.” Here is what I see as clear proof of the power of White victimnism. In a recent and tragic case, a jury deadlocked in the trial of Lindsey Clancy, a White woman who killed her three children while experiencing postpartum psychosis, after a single Black juror declined to acquit her. The display of victimnism became very apparent when the female jurors criticized him for not viewing Clancy as they did - a victim! I believe they found it easy to identify with her because they saw themselves as potential victims in one form or another, which they’ve stated in interviews. One juror publicly defended Clancy by saying,

“We know she killed her kids. That’s not the question. Forget that for a moment! But she’s the victim!” The racism became more obvious when the Black juror was unlawfully doxxed by the press, harassed, threatened, and even accused of breaking the law for fulfilling his duty as a juror. HE WAS TRIED IN THE PUBLIC, FOUND GUILTY AND TREATED WORSE THAN THE WHITE WOMAN WHO KILLED HER CHILDREN. The racial hypocrisy is further illustrated by the case of Latarsha Sanders, a Black woman who was convicted by the same judge in the same state after her psychiatric records were excluded from evidence, while Clancy’s psychiatric records were admitted during her trial. If this is not victimnism compounded with blatant racism, I welcome another explanation.

Even in the likelihood some of the offenses claimed in the past were true, the catastrophic response of destroying entire communities for the action of a single individual were completely unjustifiable. This demonstrates the true intent of these actions were to maintain dominance through fear and intimidation. If one dares to step out of line, all will suffer. All this is done while perpetrating themselves as the true victims of injustice.

It plays out today in the justice system with officers using the “I feared for my life” excuse to justify shooting unarmed Black people, while many times allowing White perpetrators to escape with their lives. With centuries of practice, they have truly mastered the art of playing the victim to their advantage. Therefore, we shouldn’t expect an end to it anytime soon.

Compassion Not Required

A misconception in our community is that our progress depends on a change of heart from those who may oppose us or benefit from systems that disadvantage us. The truth is that compassion may never come. Understanding may never come. Apologies may never come. Some people may never see our struggles the way we do, and some may never support our advancement. But history teaches us that our freedom and progress have never depended solely on changing people's hearts; it has depended on changing policies, laws, rules, regulations, and systems that create barriers to opportunity.

Another thing I have learned is that we must never allow ourselves to be “complimented into complacency.” Most of us have encountered a smooth talker who can make you believe they have your best interests at heart, even while they are robbing you blind or breaking your heart. Politicians, corporations, and leaders may speak eloquently about what they value, what they plan to do, or how much they care about our community, but words alone do not create opportunity. We must judge people by their actions, not their promises. Real progress is measured by policies enacted, resources invested, opportunities created and lives improved. Kind words may sound encouraging, but lasting change is found in consistent action. Our focus should always be on results, not their rhetoric.

Slavery did not end simply because the nation suddenly developed compassion for enslaved people. One theory is that the North realized that the institution of slavery only benefited the wealthy. It eliminated the need for paid labor, suppressed wages, and created unfair competition for working families who depended on earnings to survive. Thus, threatening their economic and political interest. It was generally the fear of slavery advancing further north, as it had already begun, that caused them to finally take arms to stop it. According to this theory, emancipation was not driven by moral conviction; it was forced by self-interest. The lesson for us is clear: lasting change rarely comes from waiting for sympathy, compassion, or understanding. It comes when people organize, apply pressure, and force systems to change.

- MISSING PORTION -