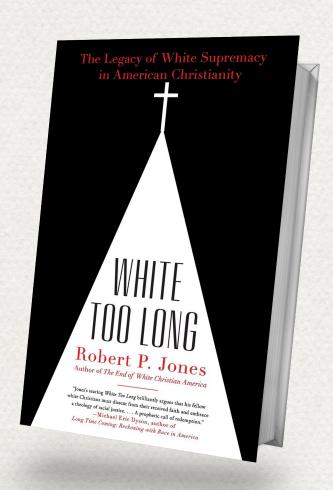
GCORR Book Study Guide

White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity by Robert P. Jones

FOR SMALL GROUP & INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION





HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This book study guide follows the structure of the book:

- Chapter 1 Seeing: Our Current Moment
- Chapter 2 Remembering: Christianity as the Conductor of White Supremacy
- Chapter 3 Believing: The Theology of White Supremacy
- Chapter 4 Marking: Monuments to White Supremacy
- Chapter 5 Mapping: The White Supremacy Gene in American Christianity
- Chapter 6 Telling: Stories of Change
- Chapter 7 Reckoning: Toward Responsibility and Repair

Sessions may be completed each week for a seven-week study. Each session opens with a prayer, scripture verse, or opening quotation from the book. Additionally, each session has only three to four questions due to the dense subject of the text. We invite you to take your time discussing the questions and reflecting on them. Additionally, we invite you to use mutual invitation as the framework for discussion engagement.

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Author Robert Jones, CEO and founder of the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), discusses how the legacy of white supremacy has shaped and continues to shape American Christianity. Jones outlines, through the lenses of both Christian theology and American history, how values of white supremacy were intentionally used by those in white mainline Christian denominations (along with partnering with politicians and community organizations) to propagate whiteness and further black inequality. Jones strategically illustrates the harmful effects of white supremacy on American Christianity by taking readers on a journey from recognizing and seeing the crisis of the present moment to naming how collective responsibility and repair might be possible now.

MUTUAL INVITATION

To ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way: The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, they then invite another to share. The person you invite does not need to be next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person can invite another to share. If you are not ready to share, say, "I pass for now," and we will invite you to share later. If you don't want to say anything, say "pass" and ask another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited. We invite you to listen and not immediately respond to someone's sharing. Instead, there will be time to respond and to ask clarifying questions after everyone has had an opportunity to share.

(From The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb by Eric H. F. Law)

The following video provides more information about Mutual Invitation and can be used in your session to teach people the process.

<u>An Introduction to Mutual Invitation -</u> https://youtu.be/jfDMC9PH3YQ

KEY THEMES

- White supremacist culture
- White supremacy
- Black equality/inequality
- White Christian theology
- White Christian identity
- White Christian nationalism
- Racial injustice
- Structural injustice

Key terms are listed by chapter with their corresponding definitions.

El Roi - the God who sees, as we enter this sacred time, give us moral courage and spiritual fortitude to open ourselves to understand how we have participated in the legacy of white supremacy. Give us clarity to understand how this insidious evil has affected your Church. Prick our minds and hearts so that we may locate the ways Your Spirit calls us to dismantle white supremacy in your Church. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

OPENING THOUGHT

"This book puts forward a simple proposition: it is time – indeed, well beyond time – for white Christians in the United States to reckon with the racism of our past and the willful amnesia of our present."

(Chapter 1, pg. 5)

- 1. Robert Jones quotes writer James
 Baldwin in an epigraph at the
 beginning of the book. Baldwin states
 that the white population is "beyond
 any conceivable hope for moral
 rehabilitation. They have been white,
 if I may so put it, too long" (p. ix). How
 does Baldwin's quote underscore the
 premise of Jones' book?
- 2. What did the link between "political leaders and prominent white churches" (p. 5) create?
- 3. How did secession and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) firmly establish white supremacy in American Christianity?
- 4. What have white Christian churches been complicit in doing, according to Jones?
- 5. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, how might we begin, by our actions, reclaiming the Jesus who cares about the wholeness of the oppressed, the Jesus who said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free?"

CHAPTER 1 TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Chattel slavery (p. 1): the legal system in the United States in which African peoples could be bought, sold, and owned as property forever from the 16th-18th centuries. (Modern Day Abolition – National Underground Railroad Freedom Center)

Secessionist (p. 2): someone who wants to separate from a larger group – particularly a political state; Jones names the Southern Baptist Convention as a "secessionist religion."

Abolitionist (p. 2): someone who is opposed to chattel slavery and desires for it to be abolished.

White supremacy (p. 2): the belief that white people are the superior race and culture and should dominate society to the total exclusion of non-white races and cultures.

Black inferiority (p. 2): the belief that black people are inferior to the white race and white dominant culture.

American Christianity (p. 3): Christianity infused with American values and ideals primarily influenced and shaped by Europeans who arrived in the 17th century.

Judeo-Christian ethos (p. 8): the idea that Jewish and Christian religious values

have shaped Western values, which has, throughout history, been codified and affirmed by the religious consensus of the American people (e.g., JFK Jr.'s presidential election and popularity as president as the first Catholic leader in office).

Whiteness (p. 19): the construction of the white race, white culture, white privilege, and, ultimately, white supremacy. Jones says the following, "The opportunity and the possibility of becoming white, and thereby being admitted to the privileged class, existed uniquely here; as immigrants landed on this country's shores, the real prize in the land of opportunity was not economic success but the possibility, for some, of becoming white" (p. 19).

CLOSING PRAYER

Note for the group facilitator for ending this session. Consider ending this session by offering a time of silence or spoken prayer by saying the following:

God who knows all, thank you for this time. Thank you for revealing things to us that we need to see. Help us resist the temptation to close our eyes to our current reality and how the legacy of white supremacy has prevented us from seeing others different from us. Restore Divine Sight in us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Mighty God, Good Shepherd, Divine One who leads us, You have been present since the foundations of the world. Make our time together holy. Help us remember that we are not in control. Help us remember that we are not the leaders of our lives or anyone else's. Help us remember it is by your Spirit that we live, move, have our being, and do all things. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

OPENING THOUGHT

"Church involvement and leadership were commonplace in property owners' associations that were organized to maintain neighborhood segregation." (Chapter 2, p. 67)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Why does Jones name Christianity as the "conductor of white supremacy?"
- 2. How did white Christian churches serve as "conductors" of white supremacy?
- 3. How did white worship, in both the American North and South, propagate white supremacy? How does (or not) worship propagate white supremacy in our current ministry contexts? How do our current worship experiences propagate white supremacy?

CLOSING PRAYER

Note for the group facilitator for ending this session. Consider ending this session by offering a time of silence or spoken prayer by saying the following:

God who knows all, thank you for this time. Thank you for revealing things to us that we need to see. Help us resist the temptation to close our eyes to our current reality and how the legacy of white supremacy has prevented us from seeing others different from us. Restore Divine Sight in us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2 TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Reconstruction (p. 25): the period following the Civil War between 1865 and 1877 in which the Southern states and freed black people sought to be reintegrated into the U.S.

Antebellum (p. 25): a term referring to the period before the U.S. Civil War.

White Christian terrorism (p. 27): actions whites took in which they utilized white supremacist Christian ideology as justification for enacting violence against black Americans to take back formal control of institutions and "reassert cultural dominance in the cultural realm." (p. 28)

Segregation (p. 32): the separation of races – specifically white and non-white in the U.S.

Confederacy (p. 37): the group of 11 states that seceded from the U.S. from 1860-61; also called the Confederate States of America.

NAACP (p. 44): National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

White Citizens' Council (p. 45): a network of white segregationist organizations that organized themselves in the South as a response to school integration established by Brown v. Board of Education in 1954.

Jim Crow (p. 53): a system of state and local laws introduced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – during the Reconstruction Era – enforcing racial segregation of white and black people; "Jim Crow" was a racist name created by entertainer Thomas Rice in one of his minstrel shows mocking African Americans and their culture.

White Christian shuffle (p. 56): an action in which white people engage a "subtle two-steps-forward-one-step-back pattern of lamenting past racists sins in great detail, even admitting that they have had pernicious effects but then ultimately denying that their legacy requires reparative or costly actions in the present." (p. 56-57)

Lost Cause ideology (p.57): the belief held by whites – specifically white southerners – that the cause of the Confederate states for entering the U.S. Civil War was heroic and not based on slavery.

Holy Liberator, free us from the ways we believe about You that harm others, dismiss others, deny others' humanity, and disconnect us from You and our neighbor. We believe, Lord. Help our unbelief. Redeem us and free us from theologies of white supremacy. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

OPENING THOUGHT

"I think the fact that white churches produced such a strong sense of safety and security for those of us who were inside the institution is why it is so hard for white Christians to see the harm it did to those who were outside it, particularly African Americans, and the other kinds of damage it did to us, numbing our own moral sensibilities and limiting our religious development." (Chapter 3, pg. 75)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- According to Jones, what are some of the values of the theology of white supremacy?
- 2. What is the primary danger of white Christian theology?
- 3. How does this danger reinforce white supremacy?
- 4. How does the theology of white supremacy absolve white Christians of just action or, as Wesley calls it, social holiness*?

*Social holiness is a Wesleyan term naming obedience to the Great Commandment of Jesus - "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself."

CHAPTER 3 TERMS & DEFINITIONS

White Christianity (p. 75): an idealized form of Christianity shaped by whiteness in which white institutions and white Christians and their failings are held independent of the Christian religion itself; the belief that "no matter what evil Christians commit or what violence Christian institutions justify, Christianity has been a force for unambiguous good in the world."

Christian protectionism (p. 76): (definition taken from the words of Dr. Eddie Glaude Jr., p. 76) the action of white Christians "protecting their ideology or the Christian religion from the terrible things that occur in its name claiming only good stuff."

Relationalism (p. 97): "White evangelicals tend to see the root of all problems in poor relationships between individuals rather than in unfair laws or institutional behavior."

Antistructuralism (p. 97): "denotes the deep suspicion with which white evangelicals view institutional explanations for social problems, principally because they believe invoking social structures shifts blame from where it belongs: with sinful individuals."

Freewill individualism (p. 96): "For white evangelicals, individuals exist independent of structures and institutions, have free will, and are individually accountable for their own actions."

CLOSING PRAYER

Note for the group facilitator for ending this session: Consider ending this session by inviting each person, through mutual invitation, to reflect on one belief they hold about God and neighbor that has been shaped by white supremacy. After participants have shared their learnings, sit in silence for about one minute. Then, breathe and pray the following together:

Lord of all peoples and all creation, we believe in You. Shape our theologies of harm, self-righteousness, and superiority into theologies of divine love and life through the sanctifying work of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

God of gods and Lord of lords, we often believe we can contain you. We often build idols to mark where we think You are and how we think your Spirit is working. Tear down the idols in our lives. Tear down the idols in our hearts. Tear down the idols in our minds that have become strongholds that keep us from loving You and our neighbor well. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

OPENING THOUGHTS

"In retrospect, the most remarkable thing about my growing up in the Deep South is how massive contradictions somehow evaded serious moral or religious interrogation." (Chapter 4, pg. 117)

"From fall 1983 to spring 1986, the two institutions that most shaped by life, my school and my church, were dominated by Confederate symbols on the one hand and Christian symbols on the other." (Chapter 4, p. 117-118)

- How did white Christian churches' participation in Confederate monument dedication ceremonies serve to further white supremacy?
- 2. What strategies did the United Daughters of the Confederacy use to preserve the Confederacy and its history?
- 3. How were the lectionaries and catechisms of the white Christian church used to further the values and history of the Confederacy? Take some time now to reflect on the Communion liturgy. You may refer to a United Methodist Hymnal or Book of Worship for the liturgy. You may also click on the following link to see a copy: Image Dei Communion Liturgy. How does this Communion liturgy challenge you to see this feast of forgiveness and grace differently?

CHAPTER 4 TERMS & DEFINITIONS

United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) (p. 107): a southern white women's association dedicated to the strategic creation and engagement of the Confederate monument movement.

White aristocracy (p. 111): white, wealthy, landowning men of Richmond, Virginia, who "planned an elaborate westward expansion of the city focused around rich, beautiful new neighborhoods."

Catechism (p. 123): religious instruction used in different Christian traditions, especially for children.

Confederate monument (p. 107): a statue dedicated to the former "heroes" and leaders, after the U.S. Civil War, of the Confederate states.

Confederate flag (p. 112): the official battle flag of the Confederate states; "the chief feature of the design, called the St. Andrew's cross, has northern European and Christian origins."

Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) (p.

119): an advocacy organization founded by attorney Morris Dees to address racial justice by partnering with communities to "dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements, and advance the human rights of all people."

(About Us | Southern Poverty Law Center - splcenter.org)

CLOSING PRAYER

Note for the group facilitator for ending this session: Consider ending this session with about one to two minutes of silence. Then, consider saying the below prayer together: God of righteousness and Love Shake our hard hearts and move us into doing justice.

Empower us to help those
that are devastated by the effects of
war, displacement, poverty, fear, anxiety,
oppression, and racial discrimination.
Give us a heart that moves hearts
and a hand that lifts up your weary people.
A heart that shouts justice
and crushes evil.

We reach your heavenly throne

to rule us and come within us.
Unite us through the power of your Holy Spirit
and surround us with your unifying love
and restorative justice.

Amen.

(Prayer written by the Rev. Kenneth Dulanas Base, Local Youth Pastor at UMC - Mortola St. Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines)

SESSION 5: CHAPTER 5 MAPPING: THE WHITE SUPREMACY GENE IN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

OPENING PRAYER

God, for so long we have walked in the direction of oppression.

We know different steps you have given us to take, and yet we struggle to receive your help, as you seek liberation for every person and community made in your image.

Jesus, for so long we have walked in the direction of evil.

We know different steps you have given us to take, and yet we struggle to step into the shower of your cleansing grace that prepares us to do your good.

Holy Spirit, for so long we have walked in the direction of injustice.

We know different steps you have given us to take, seeking justice together with those who have been defenseless, those who are injured, and those who continue to be cast aside.

Teach us once again in this season to turn in a new direction.

Help us learn and live a true change of heart and mind...such that our feet are forever reestablished on a path that leads not only to an end to racism – but to new ways of building your beloved community, which you created us for from the very beginning.

Let it be so.

(Prayer written by Rev. Anna Layman Knox, Full Elder in the United Methodist Church, GCORR Board Member)

OPENING THOUGHT

"White supremacy lives on today not just in explicitly and consciously held attitudes among white Christians; it has become deeply integrated into the DNA of white Christianity itself." (Chapter 5, pg. 186)

- 1. What three primary questions does Jones list at the beginning of the chapter to frame his discussion of mapping "the white supremacy gene" in America? Do you agree with the assertion that these are 'sensitive, difficult questions to sort out?" Why or why not?
- 2. According to Jones' research, what are the racial attitudes of white Christians today?
- 3. What is the relationship between negative racial attitudes and white Christian identity?
- 4. What is the relationship between Christians in name only (CINO) and racist attitudes?

SESSION 5: CHAPTER 5 MAPPING: THE WHITE SUPREMACY GENE IN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

CHAPTER 5 TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Foreign protectionism (pg. 162): the attitude and belief rooted in "resisting demographic changes in the country and protecting a perceived 'American way of life' from changes by foreign influences."

White Christian identity (pg. 166): Jones' term to describe a more "more general way to sociologically map the genome of white Christianity to see whether white supremacist attitudes have become integrated into its DNA as part of what it means to be a white Christian in America."

CINO (Christians in Name Only) (p. 176): those who have grown up with a Christian identity but do not practice Christianity and have "little connection to Christian churches."

Affirmative action: a concept incorporated by President Kennedy through Executive Order 10925, which required "all covered contractors to implement positive steps designed to overcome obstacles to equal employment opportunity." (https://www.aaaed.org)

CLOSING PRAYER

Note for the group facilitator for ending this session: Consider ending this session by inviting participants, by mutual invitation, to offer up to God and one another an attitude/belief they hold about others different from them for which they need to repent. Then, after the final offering, say the following:

God, forgive us. Help us hold attitudes and practices that reflect Your love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

God of the gospel story and all our stories, thank you for redeeming us. Thank you for giving us the power to change by Your grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. Empower us to turn to our neighbors, see the image of God in them and listen to their story so we may be transformed in You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

OPENING THOUGHT

"Through these recent stories of transformation, we can see how white Christian Americans might begin to face our own personal and family stories and wrestle with the ways in which white supremacy has distorted our sense of reality and ourselves." (Chapter 6, pg. 189)

- 1. How are museums useful vehicles for telling the stories of history stories of evil, repentance, and transformation?
- 2. Why is it important to tell the true, pure stories of the racial history of America? Why is it important to tell "a more complete, and truer, story" (pg. 217) of our own racial histories?
- 3. How did the First Baptist Churches of Christ and Macon use their shared racial histories and current racial experiences to build authentic relationships and catalyze change?
- 4. What are some ways you and your church can tell their racial history? Take time during this question to think about other avenues for you and your church to engage in storytelling to tell your racial history narrative.

CHAPTER 6 TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Freedom Riders (pg. 192): black and white civil rights activists in the southern U.S. in the 1960's who protested segregation laws originally by refusing to abide by them; originally began by riding segregated buses together. (Freedom Riders - Facts, Timeline & Significance - history.com)

Black equality (p. 193): the state of black people in the United States being equal with white people in rights, power, and resources; Jones names the fact that the very presence of the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum is a "testament of hope" due to the museum's honest and raw portrayal of "the terror and violence whites unleashed to protect their dominance."

Secession (p. 194): the action in which 11 southern states withdrew from the Union over the practice of slavery in 1860, which led to the Civil War.

Lynching (p. 197): a form of mob violence rooted in white racial terror in which groups of white people executed black people to maintain white supremacy; Jones explains that, according to the Equal Justice Initiative, there were "more than 4,400 cases of African American men, women, and even children who were 'hanged, burned alive, shot, drowned and beaten to death by white mobs'" between 1877 and 1950.

White racial terrorism (p. 197): a term used by Jones to describe the ways in which white people controlled black people and instilled fear by committing violent acts against them to maintain white supremacy; these actions were "not confined to a single region."

CLOSING PRAYER

Note for the group facilitator for ending this session: Consider inviting participants to take five minutes to reflect on their own family stories. Then, by mutual invitation, invite participants to answer the following reflection question: "How did your family stories distort your view of yourself and others?" Finally, end the time by praying the following together:

God of the gospel story and all our stories, like a new pair of glasses, correct our vision of You and how we see You in the other.

Amen.

(Pray Isaiah 58:9b-12 together.)

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

- 10 if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.
- 11 The LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched places and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never fail.
- 12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;

you shall be called the repairer of the breach,

the restorer of streets to live in. (Isaiah 58:9b-12)

OPENING THOUGHT

"The etymology of the word reckoning highlights two branches of historical meaning: one more narrative and one more transactional. On the Old English side, reckoning means to give a full verbal account of something, but its Dutch and

German roots connote notions of economic justice, a fair settling of accounts. In religious terms, these meanings could be translated to confession and repair, and sustained forms of both will be necessary to move toward health." (Chapter 7, pg. 227)

- What is the difference between seeing and acknowledging the racial history of America and moving towards taking personal responsibility to repair (and repent of) generational damage in our own communities?
- 2. Jones provides some examples through story - of defense mechanisms used to protect the dismantling of white supremacy. What are they? Have you seen these defense mechanisms at work today? If so, how?
- 3. What does Jones name as the primary challenge in moving toward social action in the fight for racial justice and healing and wholeness? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- 4. How can white Christians "reckoning with white supremacy in American Christianity" (p. 227) move them toward healing and wholeness and intentional action in the fight for racial justice?

CHAPTER 7 TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Reckoning (p. 227): "to give a full verbal account of something, but its Dutch and German roots connote notions of economic justice, a fair settling of accounts; in religious terms, these meanings could be translated to confession and repair, and sustained forms of both will be necessary to move toward health."

Repentance (p. 228): "restitution and repair"; taken from the Greek word 'metanoia' meaning "having a change of mind."

Reconciliation (p. 227): restoration of amicable relations between enemies; according to Jones "when we throw around the word reconciliation, especially as white Christians, white people, we're betraying our desire to just kind of move through all the hard stuff just to get to the happy stuff."

Justice (racial) (p. 227-229): Jones' challenge to white Christians to do the hard work of asking the "much stickier questions of what has been lost and what is owed"; encompasses lamenting, confession, and repentance trying to "understand the ways in which racism and the ideology of white supremacy have shaped white and black peoples' relationships to each other – and, for members of the white church, how it has distorted their own self-understanding and their faith."

CLOSING PRAYER

Note for the group facilitator for ending this session: Consider ending this session praying the following prayer:

God of grace and God of justice, I lift my eyes to you this day.

There are so many examples of humanity failing to uphold your vision of the beloved community. Our world contains so many systems, organizations, and structures that separate your human creation. With all of these "big" things causing your beloved children to feel less than equal, that is not the repentance I come to you today seeking to proclaim. I come, O Creator, to repent of the ways I am complicit in furthering systems and structures of racism around me. I repent of the microaggressions and outright racism I portray in my daily interactions. God of all creation, I recognize and repent that it is not enough to say, "I am anti-racist," but I must live a repentant life that embodies what my mouth professes.

God of love, forgive me in all the ways I have fallen short in the work of dismantling racism in my community and life. Give me your Spirit this day, that I might have the courage to not only repent to you, O God, but to those I have harmed in my actions and words. Help me to see how complacency and apathy have harmed my siblings who long to live in a world free of racism, and to declare my involvement in these actions. May this prayer of repentance be a continuous way of life

SESSION 7: CHAPTER 7 RECKONING: TOWARD RESPONSIBILITY AND REPAIR

for me from this day forward and may your creative vision for humanity drive me to be more engaged in the work of dismantling racism in my places of influence. In Christ's sacrificial love, I pray. Amen.

(Prayer written by Rev. Zach Anderson, Elder in the Great Plains Conference, GCORR Board Member)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING & REFLECTION

- White Supremacy Culture (Minnesota Historical Society via www.thc.texas.gov)
- James Baldwin and Paul Weiss Debate
 <u>Discrimination in America (https://youtu.be/hzH5IDnLaBA)</u>
- American Christianity's White-Supremacy Problem (The New Yorker)



Give GCORR your feedback on this resource here:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/whitetoolongbookstudy

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www.r2hub.org/book-studies