

The History America Chose to Forget

The lynching of black Americans has been an ugly, forgotten secret in our nation's past. Now, a historic photo exhibit has exposed the magnitude of a horror we can no longer ignore.

As morning dew settled on the almost unidentifiable remains of a Negro whose tragic fate had been sealed at the hands of an angry white mob, black undertaker J.B. Stone removed the ravaged body left hanging from a tree and prepared it for burial.

It was Nov. 3, 1920. A young and determined July Perry had voted in his hometown of Ocoee, Florida. But as word of an "uppity n____r" exercising a right traditionally reserved for decent white people spread like wildfire, a violent rage took over the city, and a racial massacre became imminent.

Badly beaten and nearly shot to death, Perry was taken from his jail cell to nearby Orlando, Florida, where he was strung from a tree and hanged to death. The hate-filled crowd dispersed, and the rest is history.

Today, many of Ocoee's residents would rather forget the stories detailing the lynching of July Perry—an event that has plagued the small Florida community for some 80 years. But for many African Americans, ignoring the atrocities of racism produces hatred and distrust and widens the gap of separation between blacks and whites.

"It is imperative that Christians count the cost and realize that they are the vessels that God desires to use to repair or heal the land," says Randy Skinner, director of the National Criminal Justice Task Force in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) reported 3,436 people were lynched between 1889 and 1922. The practice—dubbed the "black holocaust" by James Cameron, founder of America's Black Holocaust Museum—gained momentum well into the 1960s, with some sources citing 4,730 lynchings between 1882 and 1968. Cameron, 87, who was nearly lynched himself in 1930, says numbers of unreported cases were much higher.

Common were scenes of thousands of people flocking to huge, carnival-like events, with as many as 10,000 "spectators" attending one lynching. America had developed a bizarre pastime that was rooted in the South but spread rapidly through the North.

One lynching involved the brutal killing of Luther Holbert, accused of killing his white employer, and his wife. In *Without Sanctuary*—the groundbreaking, newly released photo compilation by Twin Palm Publishers—contributing writer Leon F. Litwack quotes the Vicksburg Evening Post description of the 1904 killing of the Holberts in Doddsville, Mississippi: "When the two Negroes were captured, they were tied to trees, and while the funeral pyres were being prepared, they were forced to suffer the most fiendish tortures."

"The blacks were forced to hold out their hands while one finger at a time was chopped off. The fingers were distributed as souvenirs."

Characteristic of lynchings were the ritualistic-style executions unlike any other form of brutality in American history, say African American historians. It's proof, says Skinner, that lynchings were a form of human sacrifice—a practice common to occultic worship today. Victims often were burned alive as they were hanged from bridges, trees or light poles. Children would sift through the remains in search of collectibles. Photos of the scene were commonly taken, then made into postcards and sold for a profit.

Many lynching victims were charged with crimes that some experts say were rarely actually committed, such as rape, stealing, "being rude to white people," murder and more.

The Vicksburg Evening Post goes on to say that the ears of the alleged murderers were cut off. Then Holbert was beaten severely, his skull was fractured and one of his eyes, knocked out with a stick, hung by a shred from the socket.

"The most excruciating form of punishment consisted in the use of a large corkscrew in the hands of some of the mob. This instrument was bored into the flesh of the man and woman, in the arms, legs and body, and then pulled out, the spirals tearing out big pieces of raw, quivering flesh every time it was withdrawn."

Few people today realize how many African Americans, like the Holberts, were tortured and lynched in American history. Not many understand the cruelty behind these acts of violence. But a historic photo exhibit and photo history book have finally exposed the horrors of these heinous acts of hatred.

In *Without Sanctuary*, contributing editor James Allen reveals

the barbaric practice of lynching in the United States. The graphic photos have prompted readers, including black and white Christians, to face the history our nation has chosen to forget.

Racism: Still Alive and Well

In 1994, when white and black Pentecostals gathered in Memphis, Tennessee, to repent of centuries-old racial sins and to wash one another's feet as a sign of humility, key leaders considered the gathering miraculous, dubbing the event the "Memphis Miracle." At a glance, it appeared as though the group's push toward unity was the dawning of a new day for reconciliation among Spirit-filled believers.

Black churches swapped choirs with white ministries, and white churches opened their pulpits to black preachers. Their actions lent credence to the belief that racism was a thing of the past. A closer observation, however, by the Rev. Mark Pollard, head of the National Common Ground Coalition, a reconciliation ministry based in Atlanta, suggests the opposite is true.

"We are right where we were 100 years ago," Pollard told Charisma. "These photos reflect the ugly wound that America has yet to deal with."

Pollard and other agents of racial change say the purpose of addressing the motives behind the lynching of literally thousands of black people is to deal with the cancer that remains in the bloodstream of America. Referring to racial

supremacy, slavery and racial prejudice toward African Americans and Native Americans, Pollard and others suggest racism is alive and well in the United States.

During the 1990s, the federal government's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission report revealed 47,000 allegations of racial incidents including church burnings, shootings and the highly publicized dragging of James Byrd of Jasper, Texas.

On June 7, 1998, three white men beat Byrd, slit his throat and chained him to the back of a pickup truck by his ankles and dragged him nearly three miles to his death. Police reports revealed that parts of James' mutilated body, including his head, right arm and torso were found scattered about Huff Creek Road.

Two men involved in the Byrd dragging, John William King and Lawrence Russell Brewer, were found guilty of capital murder by a racially mixed jury and sentenced to die by lethal injection. The other perpetrator, Shawn Allen Berry, received life in prison for his part in the gruesome killing—with no hope of parole for 40 years.

After 25 years of research on the subject of lynchings, James Allen, who owns the photo collection, is not surprised by attacks against blacks. Though many Americans claim that their city or town is the alleged site of "the last lynching," Allen says such claims are false. "The last lynching that will occur in America is the one [still] waiting to happen," he asserts.

According to the mother of Raynard Johnson, a 17-year-old black male who was found hanging from a tree outside his home in Kokomo, Mississippi, on June 16, 1999, Allen's sentiments ring true. "My son's death was a modern-day lynching," says

Maria Johnson, responding to a medical examiner's report that her son's death was a suicide.

"He would have never killed himself," Johnson told Charisma, noting that her son was a model student. Instead, the 47-year-old mother of four adult children believes Raynard's death was racially motivated. "Whoever committed this crime was full of hate," she says.

Douglas Barnes, investigator for the Marion County Sheriff's Department, stands by the medical examiner's findings. "We've closed our case, and the state has closed its case. We haven't been able to prove that his death was not a suicide," Barnes says. Attorney General Janet Reno launched a federal investigation into the teen's death but at press time had not released a summary of the findings.

Thirty-five years ago Martin Luther King Jr. was trying to help America see the pervasiveness of racism even in the church. In a famous commencement address, "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," he concluded that the most segregated time in America was when Christians gathered together to worship: "We must face the sad fact that at eleven o'clock on Sunday mornings when we stand to sing 'In Christ there is no East or West' we stand in the most segregated hour of America."

Many believe King's address, given at Oberlin College, underscores an increasing problem in the body of Christ today.

According to research conducted by Barna Research Group (BRG), the church is divided along racial lines. In BRG's study, "African Americans and Their Faith," findings indicate that

whites and blacks have “relatively little in common” with regard to faith, lifestyles and attitudes toward racial reconciliation.

Results released by the California-based group

suggest that most whites don’t comprehend—among other things—the vastly different approaches to life held by their African American counterparts. And a substantial number of black Americans have very little desire to involve themselves in a multiracial experience.

Says George Barna, president of the research group: “This confusion explains why reconciliation efforts have largely failed in our country. Whites are trying to bring about reconciliation based on a white view of reality and within the context of white lifestyles and goals.”

Healing for Our Nation

Many supporters of racial reconciliation insist God is using these haunting images of lynchings to pull at the hearts of His people—and to facilitate healing for America. But they say there must be a deliberate attempt on behalf of Christians to help institute genuine change. Skinner and others are addressing the problem head-on. They suggest a step-by-step process to healing the wounds.

Repentance is the first step. Skinner, who has performed extensive spiritual mapping on states such as Mississippi that are notorious for lynchings, says Christians must humble themselves and repent for the church’s participation in slavery and lynchings. He concludes that a true heart of repentance will help heal the pain of the past. Spiritual

mapping—developing a specific prayer strategy for a particular area—and saturating a city in prayer will help break the cycle of generational sin over a city.

Some African Americans are urging Congress to issue a national apology because the government legislated slavery through the constitution. They suggest that a model prayer for bringing blessing to a nation is found in 2 Chronicles 7:14: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (NKJV).

Many supporters believe identifying with the sins of a nation heals old wounds. “Repentance, reconciliation and healing can take place if Christians from the black and white communities join together in identifying the sins and griefs of our forbears,” says John Dawson, founder and director of the International Reconciliation Coalition.

Reconciliation is the second step to healing the scars left by racial hatred. Leaders of the reconciliation initiative say Christians must pursue a right relationship with God before attempting to develop quality relationships with members of a different race. It requires a sincere desire to break from traditional, religious mind-sets in order to foster healthy, genuine relationships with fellow African American brothers and sisters.

“You have to do more than swap pulpits; you have to have true relationship, and it has to be a lifestyle,” Skinner says.

Asking honest questions such as “Why do blacks vote for

Democrats such as Al Gore, who supports gay rights and abortion,” and “Why do whites vote for Republican candidates such as George W. Bush, who don’t seem to understand the issues of justice and poverty” has opened the door for dialogue for some churches pursuing reconciliation.

Skinner, who is white, Pollard and others are paving the way for discussion on issues that bring both races to the table of understanding in an effort to develop a strategic plan for unity. Confessing sin and offering forgiveness, they believe, is critical. “The act of confession is as powerful in affecting the cleansing and healing of nations as it is in individuals,” Dawson says.

Restitution is the third step in the healing process. In recent years, the issue of restitution or reparation has been the topic of much political discussion. Ten years ago, when the question “Should America make amends for slavery?” arose, those who opposed the measure, including some blacks, fought long and hard against it. But today, the issue of compensating African Americans for the injustice perpetrated on their descendants is gaining momentum.

With Swiss banks paying some \$ billion to Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and the United States paying \$16.4 million in reparations to Japanese-Americans for their internment during World War II, some believe it is time to revisit the issue of reparations for slavery.

“People ask how are we going to pay restitution to all the descendants of slavery,” Skinner says. “[But] the government promised slaves 40 acres and a mule, and we know that God is a covenant-keeping God.”

But beyond financial compensation, some leaders insist that black, white and Hispanic churches, among others, must pool their resources to help one another in preparation for a massive revival destined to hit the United States. Some black leaders, however, believe placing financial restitution before genuine reconciliation causes resentment and further separation.

"We shouldn't ask America to pay restitution before we come to a place of healing," says pastor Jack Gaines of Calvary Evangelical Baptist Church in Portsmouth, Virginia. "If we do, real change won't occur."

Gaines, 55, believes lynching photos can produce human sorrow, which is temporal, but he insists that godly sorrow produces lasting change. "God wants us to know that the atrocities we commit against men ultimately are sin against God. And He has paid the price to forgive our sin," he adds.

Several states have started discussing the issue of financial restitution. According to The New York Times, a state commission has recommended that Oklahoma pay reparations to blacks for a massacre in Tulsa in which some 300 people were killed and a black neighborhood was burned. After the violence, blacks were led to detention centers.

Revival is another key step to racial healing and unity. As director of a criminal justice task force, Skinner sees an onslaught of violence in the country. This increased lawlessness will position the church in a unique place to minister to a great harvest of unsaved people. "We are going to see an explosion of violence in the suburban and rural areas unless something happens," he believes.

As a result, the body of Christ—regardless of race or denominational affiliation—will unite and give birth to what ministry leaders are calling “cities of refuge”—cities that corporately repent for past sins and lay down their ethnic and spiritual differences through fasting and prayer. Leaders say these safe havens will be a place where unbelievers will find refuge in Jesus Christ before He returns.

They agree the racial mix of a church won’t matter because people are going to flock to churches that see their need and not the color of their skin.

Through repentance, reconciliation, restitution and revival, cities such as Ocoee, Florida, can be healed from atrocities such as the lynching of July Perry. States across the nation can receive spiritual cleansing from their participation in lynchings and other deep-rooted sins.

Skinner believes African Americans will be at the helm of this move of God.

“When suffering comes to America, it will be our African American sisters and brothers who will rise up with authority and an anointing to lead the church to repentance and great revival,” Skinner says. “They know what it feels like to suffer.” *

Valerie G. Lowe is an associate editor for Charisma and Ministries Today magazines. She lives in central Florida. The editors of Charisma invite your comments about the issues raised by this article. Visit our Racial Reconciliation forum at .

A Prophetic Perspective

The Bible calls for restitution when people have been mistreated.

By Mark Pollard

There is a growing interest in the issue of reparations in the United States. Reparations refers to paying back what is lost and restoring to pre-damaged condition when injury and offense occurs.

At the center of this debate is the emergence of leaders seeking reparations for the enslavement of Africans and their descendants. They want an apology and just compensation to make a wounded people whole—beyond the 40 acres and a mule promised to the freed slaves after emancipation.

Every year since 1989, Rep. John Conyers Jr., D-Mich., has sponsored a bill to establish a commission to study reparations. It remains stuck in committee. In June Rep. Tony Hall, D-Ohio, introduced legislation urging the government to simply apologize for slavery. It continues to garner hate mail.

Fifty billion dollars has been paid primarily by the German government in the last 50 years, with another \$20 billion to be paid by 2030 for the Holocaust and Nazi crimes. Are Germans more moral than Americans? Are African Americans less deserving than Jews?

Randall Robinson, a leading reparations advocate, believes not. In his book, *The Debt: What America Owes Blacks*, he writes: "Black people worked long, hard, killing days, years, centuries—and they were never paid! The value of their labor went to others' pockets—plantation owners, northern entrepreneurs, state treasuries, and the United States is a debt here. The issue here is not whether or not we can, or will, win reparations. The issue rather is whether we will fight for reparations."

Should Christians join this fight? The answer depends on whether we believe reparations are biblical.

* Restitution is related to the biblical principle of Jubilee cited in Leviticus 25, and alluded to in Isaiah 61 and Luke 4.

* The admonishments of Exodus 22:3-4 are part of the key portions of Scripture taught in synagogues and Hebrew day schools as the foundation of the Jewish faith. The Mosaic Law on restitution reads that a person who has wronged his neighbor "'shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs, on the day of his trespass offering'" (Lev. 6:1-5).

* The story of Zacchaeus gives a glimpse of the restitution principle. Zacchaeus, a tax collector, was convicted by the presence of the Anointed One and overcome with remorse and repentance for his dishonest business practices (see Luke 19:1-10). He confessed his sins, committed to repay his victims and conceived a new relationship with the offended parties.

Benin President Mathieu Kérékou, a black Christian, recently

called for a historic gathering of spiritual leaders to atone—to Africans of the Diaspora—for the legacy of slavery. His intention was to heal his nation of any economic and spiritual famine caused by slavery, oppression and injustice. As Americans, we should be as eager to see the reversal of curses that plague our own soil.

Zacchaeus models for us, and Jesus confirms (see Luke 19:10), that true confession is restitution. But confession is worthless, and forgiveness invalid, where restitution has not been made. America's salvation depends on its willingness to repent, repair and relate. Everything else is empty rhetoric, political diatribes or pious platitudes. Healing is often painful, and some maladies require surgery.

Doing justice and prophetic spiritual work will bring about that healing. Is the cancer of slavery and Native genocide inoperable? I think not. There is still hope. Reconciliation and revival is the key to our nation's future. Repentance, restitution and relationships are the keys to healing the nation. I am looking for partners. What about you? *

Mark Pollard is the president of the National Common Ground Coalition, a Christian organization based in Atlanta committed to Christian unity, racial reconciliation and social justice.

Let Forgiveness Come First

Restitution without reconciliation sabotages the healing process.

By Jack Gaines

Coming of age during the Civil Rights era, I know well the indignities of racism. During my stint as a professional baseball player, there were times when I couldn't eat with the rest of the team because of my color. Later I became one of the first black employees to work behind a desk at Norfolk Southern Railroad in Virginia.

A lot has changed since then. But there was a time in my life when I was bitter because of my experiences. After accepting Christ, I learned what real reconciliation is. Today I realize that racism isn't really about color; it's a sin issue. And because it's a sin issue, the only way to true reconciliation is through the blood of Christ, not through restitution or any other material means.

Unless one deals with underlying sin, one cannot eradicate racism. Horizontal reconciliation is predicated upon vertical reconciliation to God. The only solution is found in a spiritual response to God's work of reconciliation through Christ.

Because Christ reconciled all people, those who believe in Him are equals and have no right not to be reconciled to one another. And contrary to human nature, the victim has to initiate the process of reconciliation by forgiving the

victimizer. This is so because Christ took the initiative in forgiving those who crucified Him.

Such forgiveness exemplifies a miraculous power and overcoming love that God develops in those who can achieve reconciliation. Unconditional forgiveness—combined with the truth that racist oppression is sin—frees the victimizer to genuinely repent and willingly apologize. From such repentance should flow voluntary restitution of some sort.

However, if reconciliation is ever reduced to reparations—if repayment is made the essence of reconciliation—animosity and resentment will result, and the process will be sabotaged. The essence of reconciliation is spiritual, and only a spiritual medium of exchange will suffice: the blood of Christ (see 1 Pet.1:18-19). The victim must be content with that, even if the victimizer never makes restitution in some physical way.

There is no money, no material thing you can give to pay for the horrors of slavery and social injustice. How much do you give for the 9-year-old boy whose eyes were burned out because he was trying to learn to read during the slave era? How do you compensate the descendants of a man whose anal cavity was packed with dynamite and a fuse lit to him?

There is no price, no physical, monetary medium of exchange that can compensate. Therefore we must be content with what Jesus has done and take that heavenly medium of exchange, saying: “You’re forgiven. Nothing is necessary.” But out of a truly repentant heart there will be a desire to make restitution.

In December I helped facilitate a reconciliation conference in

Benin, West Africa, that saw the president of the nation issue a national apology for the role Africans played in the slave trade. By revealing that the root issue of slavery is not skin color but sin—since Africans sold Africans to the European traders—the conference brought forth a display of genuine repentance and forgiveness.

Dealing with this truth according to Christian principles would set people free from hate and prejudice and enable them to finally resolve the race question effectively. And out of a desire to build relationship, President Mathieu Kérékou is working on a plan to foster continued alliance between Africans and Africans of the Diaspora.

By dealing with the race issue through scriptural principles, Christians can finally see an end to the racial divide. And because the reconciliation will reflect a change of heart, it will be permanent. I know, because I'm experiencing it. Through repentance and forgiveness, I have experienced healing. What I have now is peace—and it is available to us all. *

Jack Gaines is missions pastor at Calvary Evangelical Baptist Church in Portsmouth, Virginia. John Hatch, a doctoral student at Regent University, contributed to this report.