



February Membership Resource

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In partnership with:





Stories & History



American historians for years have demonstrated a fallacious representation of history by demeaning and omitting the significant contributions of African-Americans. Institutional racism and oppression such as 243 years of slavery and Jim Crow laws severely damaged the image and perception of the African-American people.

~Deon Price~

About This Resource:

February 2020 is **Black History Month**. Recently, JustFaith Ministries has dedicated resources and time to create new modules addressing the question of racial justice. This monthly resource is an echo to the new modules JFM has released and invites you to enter into the conversation about race and justice during this specific time of year.

“**Black History Month** is an annual observance originating in the United States, where it is also known as **African-American History Month**. It has received official recognition from governments in the United States and Canada, and more recently has been observed unofficially in Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. It began as a way of remembering important people and events in the history of the African diaspora. It is celebrated in February in the United States and Canada, while in Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom it is observed in October.” [Wikipedia]

Instead of focusing on the typical material associated with Black History Month, “people and events in the history of the African diaspora,” this resource offers you the opportunity to focus on how stories are told and how they shape our perceptions of past and present racial dynamics in the United States.



This resource can be used for a small-group gathering to mark our 2020 Black History Month. You can adjust the time, but we recommend 90 minutes to go through the material and leave enough space for discussion. If you prefer, you can also go through the material yourself and simply follow the prompts; instead of a conversation with other participants, we suggest you journal around the questions offered here. This resource provides also two suggestions for additional activities during Black History Month.

In the hope that this resource inspires you to learn more about African-American history, consider our newest 8-week module *Faith and Racial Healing: Embracing Truth, Justice, and Restoration* which introduces the history of racism in the U.S., focusing on the African-American experience. Visit our [website](#) to sign up!

Resources:

[Article](#) by Deon Price “Why Does Black History Month Exist?”

Wikipedia [entry](#) on Black History Month.

Wikipedia [entry](#) on Howard Zinn.

[Article](#) on the importance of Black History Month on the website of the National Museum of African-American History & Culture, by Lonnie Bunch, Founding Director.

[Article](#) in *The Guardian* by Lonnie Bunch.



Stories & History

Material needed:

- Pillar candle with matches
- Laptop and speakers to play videos
- A bible open to Revelation 1:8
- Copies of the attachments A, B, C, & D

1) Welcome and prayer (15 minutes):

Welcome everyone with the following or similar words:

“Welcome to this gathering! Welcome to this year’s Black History Month! Together, we are taking time to reflect on our common cultural context and how it is informed by racial identities and tensions. Black History Month is usually a time when people and events of the African-American community that shaped our national history are highlighted in various ways—media, movies, classes, etc. This resource invites us to evaluate the impact of racial history on today’s experiences. How do you think race influences your life today?”

Silence.

Go around the circle and ask each participant to share briefly about his/her experience with race in his/her context.

Pause and light the candle.

Invite participants to a moment of prayer by sharing the following prayer—Attachment A.

In Times When People Say “All Lives Matter:”

Reader 1: O Holy One, Friend of the enslaved and oppressed,
you did not enter our world in an ethereal, beautiful Body
to excrete a few tidbits of wisdom.

Reader 2: You were incarnated as an enfleshed, exhausted,
and eventually executed human being.

Reader 3: Teach us, Liberator of your Faithful,
to take the side of the oppressed, as you did.

Reader 4: Point us to the example of Moses, of your prophets, of Christ,



who with boldness and truth proclaimed that the lives of the exploited matter.

All: Amen.

—Prayer written by Kenji Kuramitsu, *A Booklet of Uncommon Prayers*.

2) Changing the Headlines (45 minutes):

Introduce this section with these or similar words:

“We are going to listen to a short Ted Talk by Baratunde Thurston, an American writer and comedian, who is looking at current headlines reporting on white people calling 911 on black people. This is a recent phenomenon in the United States context, but Thurston links it to a broader racial history and invites us to transform our outlook. While Thurston presents a very serious topic comedically, the hope is for us to better understand how racial biases and stereotypes can literally be a matter of life and death for people of color.”

Set up laptop and speakers and play Thurston’s Ted Talk (16:42) following this link: https://www.ted.com/talks/baratunde_thurston_how_to_deconstruct_racism_one_headline_at_a_time/reading-list#t-990113

After viewing this Ted Talk, open the conversation with one or two of the following questions:

1. Thurston tells the story of being pulled over by the police and the fear it instills in him as a black man; what instills fear in your life? How often do you find yourself in a scary situation in your town/city?
2. What do you think of the headlines Thurston lists? How often do you pay attention to them?
3. How do you understand white supremacy?
4. “Simply reversing the flow of injustice is not justice.” What do you think of this statement?
5. Have you ever thought of your daily activities being labelled as a crime? How would that make you feel?
6. Thurston ends with a plea for everyone to change the story, make a different choice when confronted to fear—can you imagine a situation where you could create such a change?
7. For White Participants: Thurston talks about how black people are constantly asked to think about the color of their skin; when was the last time you thought of your whiteness? What was the context? What did you think?

Bring the conversation to a close and ask participants to turn to Attachment B. Watch Maya Angelou read her poem “Still I Rise” (2:09): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5lgxayzy_k.



You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.
Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?
Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.
You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise.

Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise.

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise.

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise.

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,



I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise, I rise, I rise.

Invite the group to pause for one minute of silent reflection.

3) Two Activities for this Month (15 minutes):

All of February is Black History Month. We encourage you and your group if you have a group to take more time during the month of February to explore two additional elements of racial justice in the United States. Present these suggestions to the group and decide if you want to do these activities together. Plan a time for it if you choose to meet again. Hand out copies of Attachment C.

- “Just Mercy” & Sister Prejean:

Read the article by Sister Prejean in U.S. Catholic on white privilege and the U.S. criminal system:

<https://www.uscatholic.org/articles/202001/sister-helen-prejean-says-check-your-white-privilege-31923?fbclid=IwAR2ggpUXctYUS3SDkFQvZPVFVzKowtTPyDQ7SjxWocXUZqHs95IQscJ98o0>

Reflect on the few following key-passages:

“Racism is different from individual prejudice. It’s in structures. It prevents people of color from succeeding. Even our language reflects the deep-rooted racism in this country. White is always pure. Black is always bad. Good cowboys wear the white hat, bad cowboys wear the black hat, and so on. People think that because slavery is over, racism in the United States has ended. They, like I did for a long time, do not understand the legacy of slavery.” How does it echo what Thurston says in his Ted Talk?

“Before a sprout can come up, you’ve got to be in the soil. My first awakening was the realization that Jesus is on the side of poor people, and that’s where I needed to go.” What has been your awakening to justice and injustices?

Keeping in mind what Sister Prejean shares in her interview, go see the movie “Just Mercy” inspired by the life of Bryan Stevenson whose book is used in our JustFaith program. How does the movie illuminate what Sister Prejean has experienced?

“Instead of praying for God to help all the suffering people, that prayer now ignites my own heart. It inspires me to roll up my sleeves and understand myself as the one sent to answer my prayer. We’re called to embody Christ: We are God’s eyes and hands.” How is prayer igniting you in your daily life?



- Howard Zinn and Zinn Education Project

Howard Zinn (1922-2010) was an American historian who challenged the dominant historical narrative of the past. His most famous book, called *A People's History of the United States*, uncovers lesser-known facts about our national history and questioned our vision of the past. Watch a talk that Howard Zinn gave in the late 90s at Carleton College where he talks about the interpretation of history. The sound of the video may be a bit low, make sure you adjust the volume of it for everyone to hear Zinn.

Watch the video starting at 5:30 and stop at 18:30:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CX1vkzD0PBc>.

Reflect on one or two of the following questions:

1. Zinn states that "Everything about the past is about the present and the future." How do you understand this statement?
2. How do you understand what Zinn call "the control of information?" Do you think it affects your understanding of the world?
3. Zinn insists on the fact that one cannot be neutral. Do you agree with this view? How does it modify your understanding of history?

Go back to the video and watch the end of it starting at 46:10 and stop at 51:00. Again, reflect on one or two of the following questions:

1. Zinn is clear that change comes about when people get together and organize. Do you see this happening today?
2. The Zinn Education Project is currently fighting to change textbooks in schools. How important is this struggle? Do you know what textbooks children are reading in your schools? What story do they tell?

Visit the Zinn Education Project website and explore various themes, taking notes of stories that you are hearing for the first time: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/>.

4) Closing Prayer (15 minutes):

Invite people to close this time together with the following or similar words:

"We are on a journey together to change the headlines and transform the stories we hear. This is our call to make sure everyone feels safe and welcome and can walk freely in this world. As we depart, let's pray for God's presence!"

Hand out Attachment D and invite participants to share the closing prayer.

For the Presence of the Holy Spirit

Reader 1: Divine Organizer,
whose Light and Life saturates our world,



through you our very bodies are animated
and agitated for justice.

Reader 2: Soothe us, center us, and drive us forth from comfort
to do the work of your people in the world.
Though we may face the tools of the devil
and bear the scars of excessive force or unjust weapons,
do not let us be overcome.

Reader 3: Let us not be at peace until there is justice in our midst,
that we may bear witness to the transformative power of
Jesus Christ today and always.

All: Amen.

—Prayer written by Kenji Kuramitsu, *A Booklet of Uncommon Prayers*.

Take the bible in your hands and read Revelation 1:8:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is
to come, the Almighty.” (NIV)

Extinguish candle.



Attachment A: Opening Prayer

In Times When People Say “All Lives Matter:”

Reader 1: O Holy One, Friend of the enslaved and oppressed,
you did not enter our world in an ethereal, beautiful Body
to excrete a few tidbits of wisdom.

Reader 2: You were incarnated as an enfleshed, exhausted,
and eventually executed human being.

Reader 3: Teach us, Liberator of your Faithful,
to take the side of the oppressed, as you did.

Reader 4: Point us to the example of Moses, of your prophets, of Christ,
who with boldness and truth proclaimed that the lives of the exploited matter.

All: Amen.

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Attachment B: Poem by Maya Angelou

Still I Rise

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.
Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
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Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like
teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?
Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold
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Diggin' in my own backyard.
You may shoot me with your words,
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But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
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Up from a past that's rooted in pain
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I'm a black ocean, leaping and
wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the
tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and
fear
I rise.

Into a daybreak that's wondrously
clear
I rise.

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors
gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the
slave.
I rise, I rise, I rise.



Attachment C: Two Activities for Black History Month

- "Just Mercy" & Sister Prejean:

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Attachment D: Closing Prayer

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