

Why Black History?
“Forgetting What’s Behind” or “Remembrance that Gives Hope?”
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You may have heard objections to Black History Month, or maybe even had these thoughts yourself: “All that was in the past. Why can’t we move to the present? We dealt with all that racial stuff in the 60s. The Bible says we should forget what is behind and press into what is ahead.”

But the Bible is full of admonitions for us to remember the past because it encourages us with hope for the future. Romans 15:4 says: “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” God established Passover as a remembrance of God’s saving power to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, which was fulfilled in Jesus saving us from the devil’s dominion. Communion is commanded so we can remember what God has done, giving us hope to move forward.

A careful study of Scripture reveals much more about how important it is to remember the past than it is to forget it.

This disagreement over the importance of history is one of the primary barriers that prevents us from achieving ethnic reconciliation. And it originates in a cultural difference in how we process events. Blacks and Anglos can watch the same news story and have completely different interpretations about what happened.

In general, White people interpret events situationally and individually. For example, consider this Symbol as an event in your life:

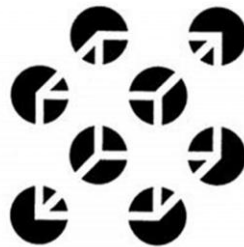


We analyze it as a separate symbol, take it apart, interpreting what it means as a stand-alone, individual symbol. So if your car gets stolen, you look at that event as an isolated event, trying to figure out the circumstances that happened surrounding the particular theft. Did I leave the keys in the car? Who could have stolen it? Will I get the car back?

For example, consider Rayshard Brooks, who was shot by police in a Wendy’s parking lot last year. Anglos look at his situation individually and ask questions like: Why did

he run from the police? Why were the police after him to begin with? Did he have previous history with the police? We analyze his isolated situation, in his specific context.

On the other hand, African Americans generally interpret events historically and collectively. Each event is part of a long history over 400 years. Each event that occurs is added to an existing Cube, in a larger collective pattern.



Each event is a point in the Cube, a link in a continuous chain that forms an overall concept of mistreatment over a long period of time (past and present). Rayshard Brooks' case may have had extenuating circumstances, but that is not the point. His shooting is one of many events that started with slavery, continued with Jim Crow lynchings, extended in daily humiliations since Civil Rights, and persists today in daily life.

The Cube explains in part why African Americans take each egregious event personally. In other words, what happens to another Black person also effects me. So when George Floyd is murdered, Black people feel "that could have been my father or uncle or cousin." When Ahmad Arbery is chased down and killed, Black mothers fear for their own sons, and when Breonna Taylor is killed grandmothers feel the pain as though she was their own.

When White people look at a White person being mistreated, they don't typically relate to that person as "one of us" but tend to think, "She must have been doing something foolish to be arrested or mistreated." We don't feel grief personally for what she experienced because we think: "She brought that upon herself." We process with the The Symbol in mind, not The Cube.

Since Black people feel the pain personally whenever other Blacks are mistreated, they feel grief every time a new report comes out. This is made worse when White people dismiss it or explain it away using The Symbol. When Anglos say, "She was partially responsible for what happened to her," it may be true, but by doing so they communicate a disregard for the pain and humiliation Black people feel and have felt

for generations. When you use The Symbol and ignore The Cube, it only deepens the disunity.

For Anglos, each event is analyzed on its own merits and has nothing to do with me personally (The Symbol). For Blacks, each event is part of a larger chain of events that has everything to do with me and my loved ones (The Cube).



This is why many African Americans suffer from Race-Based Traumatic Stress (RBTS), which is the injury resulting from humiliation, discrimination, or violence. Anyone who has had a traumatizing experience due to their ethnicity will likely have those wounds re-opened when they see another person of color experiencing trauma. Every new report in the news can bring up old feelings of pain.

So if we want to make strides toward reconciliation, it is important for Anglos to invest the time to understand 400 years of RBTS in America (The Cube), as painful as it is to do so. There are several ways to do this (see short list of ideas at the end of this article). You can watch videos, read books, and go to webinars. But by far the best way to understand Black history is to find a trusted friend who will tell you their story; the history of his/her family going back generations. Learn about their cousins and aunts and friends, what they experience today as well as the story of their past.

As you do, resist the urge to discount each story as isolated events (The Symbol). Listen and learn with The Cube in mind. Let Black History Month be a tool God can use to reconcile us through mutual understanding.

If you are a person of color, be patient with your Anglo siblings, understanding that their dismissal of your experience may not be because of privilege, fragility, or supremacy, but simply a difference in how events are processed conceptually. Keep The Symbol in mind, patiently reminding Anglos about The Cube, and asking the Spirit to open their eyes to new understanding.

Videos:

- Eyes on the Prize (stream the series on Amazon or host a Watch Party)
- Why Do White Christian Vote Republican and Black Christians Vote Democrat?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4eS2E-PoGo>

Books:

- One Blood, John Perkins
- Reading While Black, Esau McCauley

Reconciliation Fellowship is a national group of people following Jesus who want to lead the way in bringing ethnic reconciliation in America. We gather on Zoom every three months and also commit to informal small group meetings of 2-4 people to build relationships in between Zoom meetings. Find out more at <https://www.completion.global/get-involved>.