

March 2021

White Too Long: Christianity or Nationalism?

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White Too Long: Christianity or Nationalism?

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Liberal Arts
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Date of Approval:
March 11, 2021

Keywords: White Christian Nationalism, White Supremacy, American Christianity, Racism

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Abstract

Though racial inequality is ingrained in the history of the United States, recent upticks in violence spurred (and enacted) by individuals and groups that identify themselves as members of some white Christian churches or beliefs have brought new attention to the work of many scholars of religion who have documented and analyzed the relationship between white Christianity and racism in the U.S. This paper specifically looks at Robert P. Jones' 2020 book *White Too Long* to analyze his claim that white Christians are more likely than any other group in the U.S. to hold racist ideologies. Specifically, Jones' conclusion will be compared with data and findings from other religious scholars and sociologists to examine the possibility of a missing consideration of white Christian nationalism as a driving factor of racist attitudes in the white Christian church, as well as how survey creation and classifications themselves potentially obfuscate the reality of non-white Christian groups holding racist beliefs as well. First, I will examine Jones' claim that white Christians are more likely to hold racist attitudes. Then, non-PRRI data and research sources will be analyzed for either support or contradiction of Jones' claim. Based on the data, I propose that not only is the data collection and reporting process itself contributing to a bias in Jones' work, but that he is failing to include the influence of Christian nationalism on white Christian racial beliefs.

Introduction

On January 6, 2021, rioters protesting the results of the 2020 presidential election stormed the United States congressional building. Their goal was to stop the formal recognition of Joe Biden as the next president and keep Donald Trump in power, but their message consisted of much more than just support for the sitting president. Insurgents waved Confederate flags, hung a large noose from a wooden beam on Capitol Hill, and some even carried Christian bibles, crucifixes, or signs that read “Jesus Saves” as they supported an attempted coup. In the aftermath, the U.S. public has expressed outrage and dismay, insisting that “this is not who we are” and that the actions were “un-American.” Unfortunately, these actions are just the most recent (and highly visible) demonstration of a long-running competition between Americans attempting to preserve the white Christian hierarchy and those who are striving for egalitarianism and diversity (Wasow, 2021), with President Trump serving as a figurehead for white Christian Evangelicalism and conservatism while Joe Biden is associated with a more secular or liberal perspective.

The tension and violence being enacted have brought new attention to the work of many scholars of religion who have documented and analyzed the relationship between white Christianity and racism in the U.S. In his 2020 book *White Too Long*, Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) director and religious studies scholar Robert P. Jones states unequivocally that “[i]n survey after survey, white Christians stand out in their negative attitudes about racial, ethnic, and religious minorities (especially Muslims), the unequal treatment of African

Americans by police and the criminal justice system, their anxieties about the changing face of the country, and their longing for a past when white Protestantism was the undisputed cultural power” (Jones 2020, 10). In addition to providing historical and first-hand accounts, Jones makes two major claims: first, that there is a strong correlation between white Christianity and anti-Black attitudes, and secondly, that white Christian churches in the U.S. have actively provided institutional spaces for transmitting and preserving racist ideology. Jones’ most pointed – and perhaps controversial – statement is that white Christians are more likely to be racist than other ethnic or religious groups, and that it is “deeply integrated into the DNA” of white Christianity in the U.S. (Jones 2020, 187).

In this paper, I will examine Jones’ assertion and the data he uses to determine whether it is white Christian affiliation and identification *itself* that causes a higher likelihood of racist attitudes or if there are other, unaddressed factors missing from Jones’ analysis that problematize his conclusion that “[a]n increase in racist attitudes independently predicts an increase in the likelihood of identifying as a white Christian, and identifying as a white Christian is independently associated with an increased probability of holding racist attitudes” (Jones 2020, 183). Specifically, I will be questioning whether Jones’ conclusion is lacking a consideration of white Christian nationalism as a driving factor of racist attitudes in the white Christian church, using data from various sources and comparing Jones’ findings to that of sociologists Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry in their 2020 book *Taking America Back for God*. I will also be looking at how survey creation and classifications potentially obfuscate the reality of non-white Christian groups holding racist beliefs as well. First, I will examine Jones’ claim that white Christians are more likely to hold racist attitudes. Then, non-PRRI data and research sources will be analyzed for either support or contradiction of Jones’ claim. Based on the data, I propose that

not only is the data collection and reporting process itself contributing to a bias in Jones' work, but that he is failing to include the influence of Christian nationalism on white Christian racial beliefs.

Jones himself does not provide a working definition of racism, focusing instead on white supremacy, which he defines as “the way a society organizes itself, and what and whom it chooses to value” and “a set of practices informed by the fundamental belief that white people are valued more than others” (Jones 2020, 16). For this paper, then, the working definition of racism will be broadly defined as individual or systematic oppression based on race; as public historian Jemar Tisby summarizes, racism is “*prejudice plus power*” (Tisby, 2019, 16). Racist attitudes, therefore, will be considered those that support legal and social systems that perpetuate oppression based on race. Additionally, it should be noted that this paper focuses specifically on white Christianity in the United States; all references to Christianity refer exclusively to American traditions unless otherwise noted.

White Too Long

Drawing from PRRI data and his experience within the Southern Baptist tradition (including an MDiv from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), Jones lays out a historical background of Christian-based racism that has been deliberately woven into the dogma and power structures of the church, from biblical justifications of racism to blatantly segregationist sermons and congregational communities. Further, he traces how this racism has been integrated into – and passed down as – *cultural* norms rather than solely *religious* ones. Focusing primarily on the Civil War and Jim Crow era, Jones acknowledges the “conspicuous absence of religious opposition” (Jones 2020, 30) commonly associated with the church’s role in segregation. The ability to disengage from taking a position on political issues like race is ironically rooted in secularization and the separation of church and state in the U.S.: since there were no direct legal or political consequences in claiming a position, many churches absolved themselves from taking a stance against slavery and other inhumane treatments of minorities. Many churches staunchly defended their inaction by claiming they should not get involved in “political” issues such as racial and social inequalities. However, Jones goes on to detail the less-well-remembered “*proactive* role white religious leaders and white churches played in creating a uniquely American and distinctively Christian form of white supremacy” (emphasis added, Jones 2020, 33). Rather than sitting by passively, Jones claims that many white Christian churches – especially in the South - provided a foundation for networks of powerful white business and political leaders working to prevent – or at least hinder – Black social advancement and protect the economic interests of whites. Jamar Tisby agrees with Jones, generalizing how many white

American Christian churches compromised with racism by permitting systems of violence and oppression to continue without moral or religious obligation and were directly complicit in the perpetuation of these systems, without seeing any contradiction between their racism and their faith. Citing Kevin Kruse's 2005 book *White Flight*, Tisby notes that pastors in 1950s Atlanta supported neighborhood segregation and encouraged congregants to not sell their homes to Black buyers, urging them to "'Keep Kirkwood White' and preserve [their] Churches and homes" (Tisby 2019, 145); by the 1970s, Protestant churches in numerous cities participated in creating "segregation academies" to avoid compliance with the racial integration mandated by *Brown v. Board of Education*; many church organizations – particularly in the South – refused to take a stance on slavery, preferring to stay neutral and letting individual congregations take up their own stance; and many Christians, particularly Protestant and Methodist groups in the South, invoked the Bible to support slavery, either through a select few passages or because "the Bible never clearly condemned slavery and even provided instructions for its regulation" (Tisby 2019, 80). In fact, Tisby argues that while the Civil Rights Movement and abolition are remembered as being faith-based, "In reality, precious few Christians publicly aligned themselves with the struggle for black freedom in the 1950s and 1960s" (Tisby 2019, 132).

Throughout the book, Jones details relationships between politicians, media moguls, and the pastors and leaders of White Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, and Catholic Churches across the nation that formed (and sustained) a formidable social and legal structure of white power through their applied interpretations of Christian theology. More importantly, though, he illustrates how these racially charged "values" and inequalities were specifically bound up into the larger "Southern identity" that framed racial divisions and imbalances as a natural result of both social and cultural development in the South, as well as the conviction that whites are

naturally superior as a race. In his 2020 article *White Supremacist Ideas Have Historical Roots in U.S. Christianity*, National Public Radio's Religion and Belief Correspondent Tom Gjelton argues that since the South's entire economy and social structure was based on chattel slavery of Black people, it became a major part of Southern culture and was supported by the Christian church in order to stay relevant to their communities. Churches frequently hosted celebrations for national holidays, conflating devotion to God and country (often in the form of the confederacy). As Tisby further notes, "southerners blended Civil War memory and Christian dogma together as a way of confirming their shared suffering and giving their losses divine significance" (Tisby 2019, 94). When the Civil Rights Movement occurred, it was interpreted as a threat to their "regional culture" (including religious beliefs). Even the Catholic Church had to, as theologian M. Shawn Copeland (2017) puts it, "get right with slavery" to be welcomed into the South, which meant Catholics owning slaves – not just individual priests, but specific religious orders of men and women, including the Jesuits of the Maryland Province.

Church endorsement of (or complicity with) segregation and racism was not isolated to the rural South, or to Southern Baptist churches; according to sociologist Gerardo Martí, "White Christian libertarianism" fears that the Social Gospel Movement of the early 1900s would end up "socializing" the United States (and take away white power and wealth) prompted major corporate leaders in the Industrial Revolution like Henry Ford, Walter Chrysler, and Conrad Hilton "to channel big donations toward promoting bible-sourced teachings that endorsed legitimacy for a 'Christian economics';" by the 1930s and 40s, corporations were hiring conservative pastors and other clergymen¹ to craft "a capitalist-friendly faith, feigning an

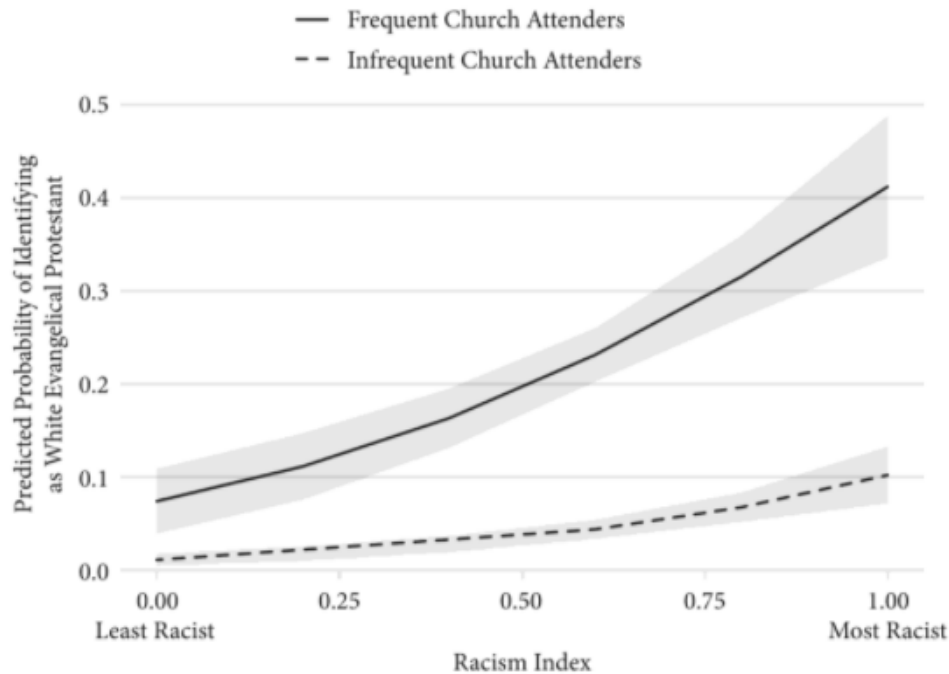
¹For a detailed history of the relationship between Christianity and the growth of U.S. capitalism, see Kevin Kruse's 2015 book *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*.

apolitical pose while endorsing limited government and the beneficence of a free market” (Martí 2020, 22). At its core, the Social Gospel Movement sought to improve conditions for the poor and working class in urban areas, based on the religious and societal biases of its white Protestant participants, re-enforced racial division by its very notion of what the ideal American looked like, and ultimately fueling the political and economic interests of those in power. Since charity and education efforts were primarily led by ministers and their congregants, the ideal citizen they were trying to produce mirrored their own identities – white, Protestant, congregationally-bound citizens. Historian Janine Giordano Drake points out, however, that the white supremacy displayed in the movement was not a deliberate, intentional effort by individuals or personal biases. Rather, it was a disconnected, segregated view of the world that saw problems through their own racial lens. In this way, “Not only despite but because White Social Gospel teachings often had nothing to do with race, they enforced the fact of White hegemony over African Americans” (Drake 2020, 176). Indeed, as Michael Emerson and Christian Smith noted in *Divided by Faith*, “well-intentioned people, their values, and their institutions actually recreate racial divisions and inequalities they ostensibly oppose” (Emerson and Smith 2001, 1). In addition, Jones notes that many Confederate-era church leaders (primarily Southern, white, and often Baptist) and politicians actively sought to maintain the necessary labor force and power structure to sustain their wealth through religious support for a white capitalist hegemony, based on “a theological bulwark of personal and individual salvation, designed to protect white Christian power and white Christian consciences” (Jones 2020, 40). To illustrate the frequent “collusion by the media, politicians, and religious leaders” (Jones 2020, 43), Jones provides examples such as the intimate, reciprocal relationship between Mississippi governor Ross Barnett and Reverend Douglas Hudgins of the First Baptist Church of Jackson,

Mississippi – calling the church “a place where political influence and religious piety, social engineering and discipleship, white supremacy and Sunday school mixed easily” (Jones 2020, 38). Barnett supported and defended segregation with biblical arguments, garnering the support of the church; in turn, the First Baptist Church of Jackson, Mississippi lent religious legitimization to Barnett’s policies. Beyond this example, Jones argues that “[b]oth white evangelical and mainline Protestant churches served as cultural hubs and moral legitimizers of white supremacy, while the power of the state protected their segregated sanctuaries” (Jones 2020, 43).

The economic and power structures of white Christian supremacy (the belief that white Christians and their cultural values are inherently superior) were part of a larger social project “to protect and sustain a separate southern way of life based on a slaveholding culture and economy” (Jones 2020, 35) that continued long after the Civil War and Reconstruction. When slavery was outlawed, it simply took on new forms: sharecropping, incarceration, and labor contracts during the Jim Crow era; inequality in the white versus Black Social Gospel Movements to improve the lives of those living in poverty; and the practices of racial segregation, unequal access to resources, and police violence that have marked the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Generalizing beyond Mississippi, Jones notes a “link between political leaders and prominent white churches” (Jones 2020, 5), asserting that these prominent white churches provided a “moral underpinning for the entire project of protecting the dominant social and political standing of whites” (Jones 2020, 5). By doing so, however, their “theologically ‘backed assertion of the superiority of both ‘the white race’ and Protestant Christianity undergirded a century of religiously sanctioned terrorism in the form of ritualized lynchings and other forms of public violence and intimidation” (Jones 2020, 5).

A key component of Jones' claims is PRRI survey data from 2014 through 2019, all gauging various aspects of American beliefs and identities, from political affiliations and religious identity to views on immigration and race. The results of these surveys cumulatively suggest that white Christians are particularly prone to negative and racist attitudes about minorities (be they racial, religious, or ethnic), anxiety about changing national demographics and political ideologies, and disbelief that systemic racism exists in the U.S. It is the internalization of white supremacy within the white Christian church that Jones deems the most dangerous, calling out a deep-seeded desire to "maintain an unassailable sense of religious purity that protects white racial innocence" (Jones 2020, 20). White Christians who *do* address systemic racism tend to work from the belief that advocating for equality is an *altruistic, individually moral* cause rather than a fight against life-threatening, systemic problems that affect the entire nation. When racism is tied to religion and cultural identity, it becomes very difficult to see the true destructiveness of such perceptions. Additionally, as Figure 1 shows, Jones concludes that "Among Americans holding the most racist views (Racism Index = 1), frequent church attenders are 31 percentage points more likely than infrequent church attenders to identify as white evangelical Protestant" (Jones 2020, 178). In *White Too Long*, Jones explores how the propensity for prejudice has flourished in white U.S. churches – especially in Southern states and denominations – and how to begin addressing it.



Source: PRRI, American Values Survey, 2018.

Figure 1: Predicted Probability of White Evangelical Protestant Identity, by Racism Index Score and Church Attendance Frequency

Reproduced from Figure 5.5, *White Too Long*, p. 177

Jones highlights four recurring themes or components of white Christian supremacy: theology, geography, Protestant cultural beliefs, and social power. As previously noted, Jones defines white supremacy as “a set of practices informed by the fundamental belief that white people are valued more than other,” and “involves the way a society organizes itself, and what and whom it chooses to value” (Jones 2020, 16). In the United States, white supremacy is also “typically tied to a concept of the superiority of Protestant Christian culture” (Jones 2020, 80). Jones utilizes data from what he refers to as The Racism Index (Table 1), a scale composed of fifteen questions that gauge perceptions of African Americans and the history of white supremacy; he then combines the answers into a single scale for statistical analysis using the Cronbach’s alpha scoring system for internal consistency.

Table 1: The Racism Index

The Racism Index • Individual Question Wording
<p><i>Confederate Symbols</i></p> <p>Do you see monuments to Confederate soldiers more as symbols of southern pride or more as symbols of racism?</p> <p>Just your opinion: What should be done with Confederate monuments that are currently standing on public property such as statehouses, county courthouses, public universities, or city parks? Should they be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Removed and destroyed;b) Removed but allowed to be reinstalled in a museum or on private property;c) Left in place but have a plaque added that explains their historical context; ord) Left in place just as they are. *
<p><i>Racial Inequality and African American Economic Mobility</i></p> <p>Generations of slaves and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class. *</p> <p>It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites.</p> <p>Irish, Italians, Jews, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.</p> <p>Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve. *</p> <p>Racial minorities use racism as an excuse more than they should.</p> <p>White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin. *</p>
<p><i>Racial Inequality and the Treatment of African Americans in the Criminal Justice System</i></p> <p>Do you think recent killings of African American men by police are isolated incidents, or are they part of a broader pattern of how police treat African Americans?</p> <p>Professional athletes should be required to stand during the national anthem at sporting events.</p> <p>A black person is more likely than a white person to receive the death penalty for the same crime. *</p>

Table 1 (Continued)

Perceptions of Race, Racism, and Racial Discrimination

I am fearful of people of other races.

Racial Problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations.

I am angry that racism exists. *

Today discrimination against whites has become as big a problem as discrimination against blacks and other minorities.

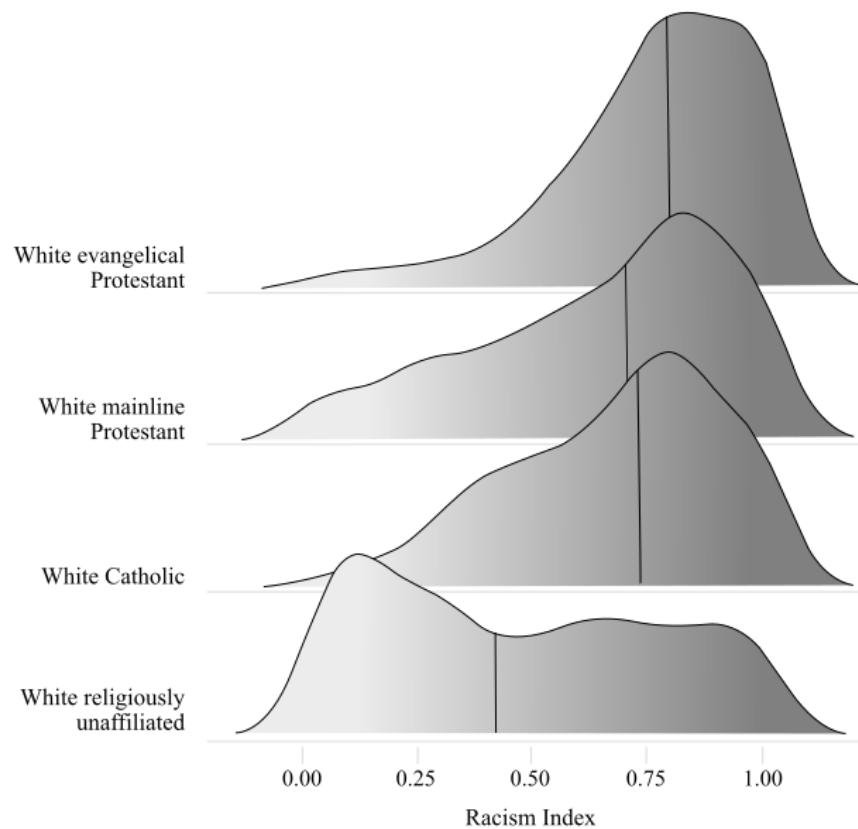
*Note: Response options for these questions were reverse-coded so that they run the same ideological direction as other questions in the scale.

SOURCE: PRRI, AMERICAN VALUES SURVEY, 2018.

Reproduced from *White Too Long*, p. 167-8

The goal of The Racism Index is two-fold for Jones: firstly, “by combining these questions into a single scale, we can ensure that we are measuring a more general underlying sentiment rather than what might be an outlier response to the specifics of a single question,” and secondly to test for “the possibility that the correlations between racial attitudes and white Christian identity are explained by some other intervening variable” (Jones 2020, 165). Jones employs a multivariate analysis that controls for alternative explanations, stating that “the correlation between holding racist attitudes and white Christian identity may be coincidental or even spurious. But if this relationship holds up in statistical models that account for these other possible explanatory variables, we gain confidence that this relationship is real – in other words, that holding racist attitudes is directly and independently linked to white Christian identity” (Jones 2020, 165).

Analyzing the survey results, Jones found that “[t]he more racist attitudes a person holds, the more likely he or she is to identify as a white Christian” (Jones 2020, 175). As seen in Figure 2, “White Christian” in this study primarily comprises three broad denominations: of white



Note: Median lines shown.
Source: PRRI, American Values Survey, 2018.

Figure 2: Distribution of Racism Index Scores among White Religious Subgroups

Reproduced from Figure 5.3, *White Too Long*, p. 169

Evangelicalism, white mainline Protestantism, and white Catholic. Utilizing a multivariate regression model and controlling for gender, age, political party affiliation, household income, education level, region, home ownership, residency in metropolitan versus rural areas, and frequency of church attendance (Jones 2020, 172), he concludes that “[b]eing affiliated with each white Christian identity is independently associated with a nearly 10 percent increase in racist attitudes” (Jones 2020, 182). Racist attitudes documented in the study include negative views of ethnic, racial, or religious minorities, disbelief in inequalities facing Black and Brown people in the criminal justice system, and support for Confederate monuments. These results line up with

findings both by previously mentioned PRRI data, as well as other scholars of religion such as Douglas Hartmann, that document a white Christian fear of changing demographics and longing for return to a white Protestant dominated culture. Indeed, it is has been well documented by sociologists that as groups feel threatened with loss of power and privilege, they entrench themselves even further into traditional (and often conservative) identities.

The white Christian propensity for holding these racist attitudes is also explored in other analyses of PRRI data, including the 2016 American Values Atlas (AVA). In their analysis of the AVA data, *Who Sees Discrimination? Attitudes on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Immigration Status*, Daniel Cox et al. (2017) find that only half of white Americans believe Blacks face a lot of discrimination, while almost as many (47%) disagree; conversely, a majority of non-white Americans believe Blacks confront a great deal of discrimination. Interestingly, white women are significantly more likely than white men to agree that Blacks experience a lot of discrimination (54% versus 46%, respectively). Analyzing the 2015 PRRI *Religion News Survey*, Jones and Cox also reveal that while most Americans believe protesting unfair government practices is beneficial, “fewer than half (48%) of whites say the same when asked about black Americans speaking out against and protesting unfair treatment by the government” (Jones and Cox 2015). They also looked at the overall belief in “God-given” U.S. exceptionalism, finding that around 62% of Americans believe the country has a special, God-given role in history. Religious conservatives are almost twice as likely to agree with this statement than more liberal religious individuals.

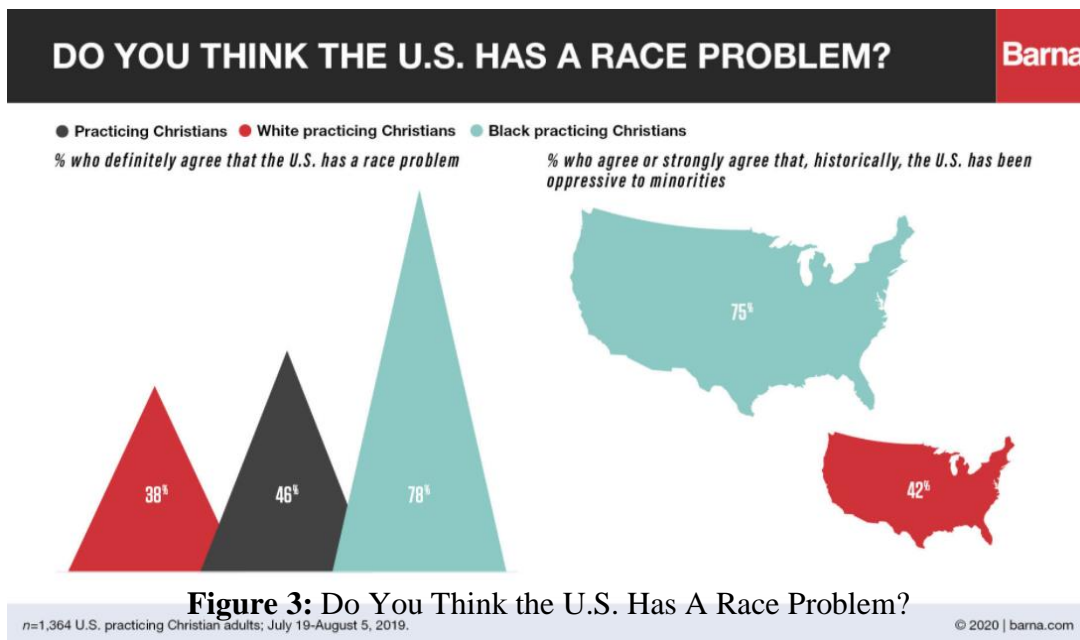
Jones summarizes the cumulative PRRI data in a July 2020 article, *Racism among white Christians is higher than among the nonreligious*, concluding that “White Christians are consistently more likely than whites who are religiously unaffiliated to deny the existence of

structural racism.” Since White Christians have historically composed the nation’s majority, that denial has shaped a plethora of public policies, institutions, and laws that simultaneously reinforce inequality *and* the denial of inequality. Jones explains that “[c]ompared to nonreligious whites, white Christians register higher median scores on the Racism Index, and the differences among white Christian subgroups are largely differences of degree rather than kind” (Jones 2020), reiterating the claims in *White Too Long*. He also points to the concurrent growth of racial segregation and Christian identity in the U.S. during the 20th century – establishing a correlation but also calling into question whether Christianity influenced racism or racism influenced American Christianity. According to Jones, “An a priori commitment to white supremacy shaped what could be practiced... Such early distortions [of Christianity] influenced how white Christians came to embody and understand their faith and determined what was handed down from one generation to the next” (Jones 2020). With this statement, Jones clearly recognizes the initial *external* influence of white supremacy and racism on Christianity but still insists that the ideas have been conflated with (and preserved by) white American Christianity in its foundational dogma and practice.

Clearly, PRRI data consistently find a correlation between white Christian identity and racist attitudes. But does data from other scholars and institutions, looking for a similar connection, support these findings – and come to the same conclusions?

Non-PRRI Data

In “Black Practicing Christians Are Twice as Likely as Their White Peers to See a Race Problem,” The Barna Group (a “research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture”) summarizes the findings of a 2019 survey on Christian perceptions of racial discrimination – a collaboration of the Barna Group and the Racial Justice Institute. They frame the data within current conflicts around the Black Lives Matter Movement and white Christian reaction/rejection of it, supporting Jones’ findings from the PRRI data. Notably, the Barna study finds that “[o]nly two in five white practicing Christians (38%) believe the U.S. has a race problem. This percentage more than doubles, however, among Black practicing Christians (78%).” Additionally, 75% of these practicing Black Christians “at least somewhat agree that the U.S. has a history of oppressing minorities” – whereas only 42% of white Christians agree (Figure 3). As seen in Figure 4, the Barna Group’s data illustrate that fundamental beliefs about



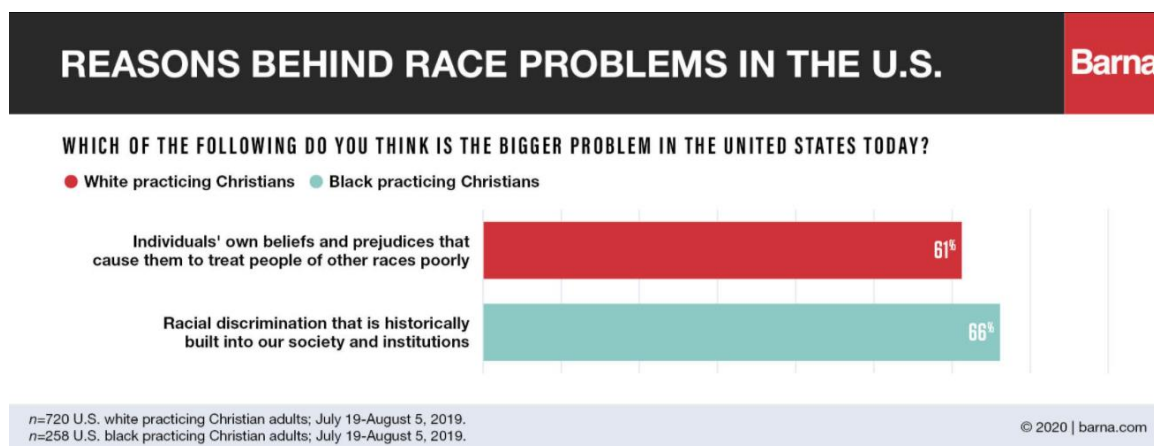


Figure 4: Reasons Behind Race Problems in the U.S.

responsibility and individualization play a large role in how groups interpret inequality, with “three in five white practicing Christians (61%) take an individualized approach to matters of race, saying these issues largely stem from one’s own beliefs and prejudices...” On the other hand, around 66% of Black practicing Christians agree that racism is built into the historical fabric of U.S. institutions and society. There is also a marked difference in motivation to address social injustice; 70% of Black practicing Christians believe they have a moral duty to engage in social justice work compared to 35% of their white counterparts. These data from the Barna Group combine the attitudinal beliefs recorded by Jones and PRRI while also teasing apart views of citizenship and the U.S. as a whole.

More generally, many white Americans do not believe there is a structural problem of racism, which negates any need for a government-led or widespread societal solution. Looking at years of responses to the General Social Survey (GSS), Victor Hinojosa and Jerry Park examine perceptions of racial inequality explanations by both race and religious affiliation. The GSS asked respondents to explain what causes socio-economic inequality, with choices including discrimination, less “in-born ability to learn” (Hinojosa and Park 2004, 230), fewer educational

Table 2: Racial and Religious Percent Differences in Responses to Racial Inequality Explanations, General Social Survey 1996

	All ¹	Whites	Blacks	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Black Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Other	Nonaffiliated
<i>Discrimination</i>										
Yes	39.0	34.6	64.2	31.9	34.3	62.4	33.1	40.0	50.0	50.5
No	61.0	65.4	35.8	68.1	65.7	37.6	66.9	60.0	50.0	49.5
<i>Lack of Education</i>										
Yes	45.9	44.5	53.5	35.6	49.3	46.7	46.5	66.7	51.5	51.4
No	54.1	55.5	46.5	64.4	50.7	53.3	53.5	33.3	48.5	48.6
<i>Lack of Motivation</i>										
Yes	50.4	52.1	41.2	61.4	52.3	42.2	52.4	25.5	36.5	39.8
No	49.6	47.9	58.8	38.6	47.7	57.8	47.6	74.5	63.5	60.2
N ²	1733	1,471	260	430	344	173	399	50	96	201

¹This study includes only all surveyed adult Americans who reported “black” or “white” on the race question and were asked the racial inequality questions.

²Sample sizes are conservative reports due to minor fluctuations across questions.

Religion and the Paradox of Racial Inequality Attitudes, p. 230

opportunities, and a lack of motivation (Table 2). They discovered “at least a 10 percentage-point differential between black and white Americans on these racial inequality explanations” (Hinojosa and Park 2004, 230), with white Americans being more likely to deny structural inequality and focus more on individual work ethics and will power, reiterating the results already seen in in PRRI data and the work of Whitehead and Perry (2020). Among white Americans, white Evangelicals ranked highest in this belief, with Mainline Protestants and Catholics coming in second and third, respectively, with responses varying by up to 35 percent between religious traditions.

Rather than discrimination or institutionalized racism, white Americans more often “appear to believe that individual blacks have made and continue to make bad choices, leading to unequal outcome” (Hinojosa and Park 2004, 233). While they “found that religion does, in fact, play a role in the formation of inequality attitudes and that religious tradition has a unique effect

on each of [the] dependent variables” (Hinojosa and Park, 236), they – unlike Jones – found *no* correlation between church attendance and belief in structural inequality explanations of racism. The authors admit to being surprised by this, since “[i]ts lack of significance here surprised us because if religious beliefs are forming attitudes toward racial inequality, then we expect those who are the most formed by a tradition to best exhibit it” (Hinojosa and Park 2004, 236). Instead, the study suggests that it is other factors such as involvement and composition of the church membership that encourage racist attitudes². Specifically, political orientation showed signs of correlation; indeed, political affiliation with the Republican party and living in the American South were the only consistent variables. In contrast, Jones does not include political affiliation as a contributing factor – though he does acknowledge that living in the South is an important factor in white Christian racism (but not as being more important than Christian identity itself). By the 1980s “to be a White, Republican, capitalist-friendly ‘Christian’ was now an all-encompassing personal identity sacredly charged as good, right, and true” (Martí 2020, 29). These observations are supported by the American Mosaic Project’s 2014 research that showed reverence for – and the sanctity of – law and order that are traditionally tied to white Christian morals and definitions of civilization. “Where religion is significant, its effect is either to deny a structural cause – mainliners and Catholics deny discrimination and black Protestants deny lack of education opportunities – or to affirm the individualist explanation – evangelicals affirm lack of motivation” (Hinojosa and Park 2004, 235). This correlation between racist attitudes and Southern residency was also noted by Tom Gjeltun, as well as the PRRI survey data analyzed by Cox et al. (2017) in *Who Sees Discrimination? Attitudes on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Race, and Immigration Status*.

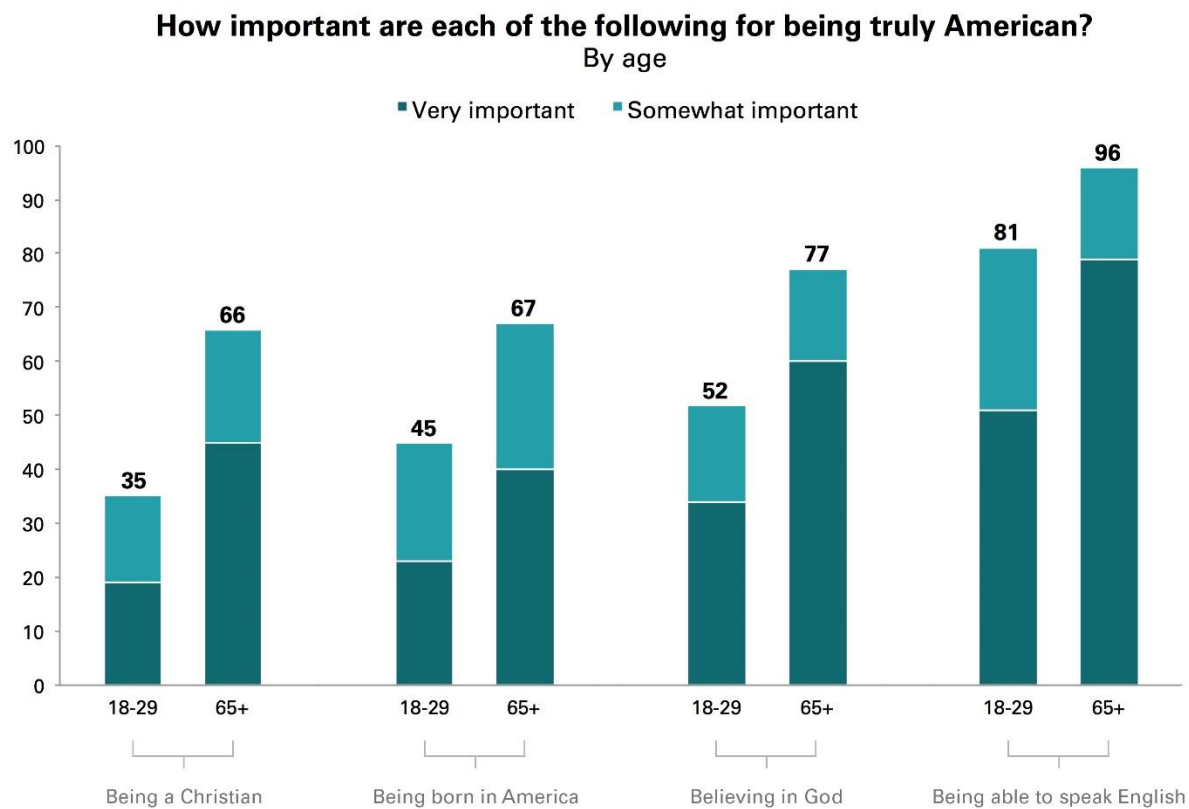
²A major difference between Hinojosa and Park’s data and that of Jones is the direct inclusion of additional factors, including political affiliation, education, age, and income. The date of the surveys might also contribute to the contrasting conclusions: while Jones uses data from 2016, Hinojosa and Park are working from the 1996 General Social Survey.

Political scientist Catarina Kinnvall describes the powerful narrative that forms when nationalism and religion are conflated: religious nationalism perpetuates the idea of creating a “secure” nation/homeland. This nation is represented in media and law as infallible, stable, and reliable in the face of change in an attempt to keep religious nationalists in control of culture and the primary benefactors of legal and economic systems. “The world, in this view, ‘really’ consists of ‘a direct primordial relationship to a certain territory (a ‘home’) and/or to a certain god(s). In this way nationalism and religion, as identity-signifiers, are likely to increase ontological security while minimizing existential anxiety” (Kinnvall 2004, 763).

In the U.S., this security was built on racial prejudice, expanding the projection of social taboos and scapegoating regarding anti-Indian and anti-Judaism (Lloyd and Prevot 2017, xxii) to all people of color. This scapegoating was called on to justify slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow laws as acceptable Christian practices; after all, it was reasoned, since dark-skinned people did not fully qualify as civilized humans, they did not have to have the same legal protections and rights – even if they converted to Christianity. As Paul Kivel (2015) notes in *Why Black Lives Haven’t Mattered*, “the structure of anti-blackness is really a new form of the theological problem of anti-Judaism, or supersessionism” (Lloyd and Prevot 2017, xxiii). Poor whites were socially elevated just enough to feel superior to Blacks to ensure their support of white hegemony and economic control despite their equal levels of poverty. Public riots and lynching served to “unify” the white community in their supremacy and served as reminders to those who would challenge them. Over time, racism, capitalism, Social Darwinism, and religion have merged into new policy-centric systems of inequality that shy away from mentioning race outright, but still oppress minorities through the codification of white Christian morality. Martí calls this “a push for the restructuring of American society as a mirror of the Kingdom of God on

earth” (Martí 2020, 111), which aligns more closely with white Christian *nationalism* – defined by Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry as “an ideology that idealizes and advocates a fusion of American civic life with a particular type of Christian identity and culture.” Specifically, it “[i]ncludes symbolic boundaries that conceptually blur and conflate religious identity (Christian, preferably Protestant) with race (white), nativity (born in the United States), citizenship (American), and political ideology (social and fiscal conservative)” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, x). Figure 5 demonstrates the importance of these factors to respondents of a PRRI survey on what is important for being “truly” American.

Indeed, Whitehead and Perry – referencing a 2014 General Social Survey on Americans’ explanations for Black and white inequality – noticed that if Christianity is an important and/or



Source: PRRI/RNS, Religion News Survey, June 2015.

Figure 5: How Important Are Each of the Following for Being Truly American?

sacred part of a person's identity, they "may in *essence* be drawing symbolic boundaries around and defending white racial group membership and privileges" (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 278). Their analysis shows that the more orthodox a person is, the less supportive they are likely to be of racial equality movements. In addition, Black Christians are more likely to see institutional racism as a problem than their white peers. However, Perry and Whitehead argue that these data don't necessarily indicate white supremacy just because Black Christians respond differently. "Beliefs about systemic or structural racial inequality are no more settled among whites who strongly conflate Christian and American identities than it is for other white Americans" (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 293). On the other hand, however, they admit that it might mean that white Americans conflate their Christian faith and American patriotism to strengthen their identity as socially and spiritual superior, therefore deserving to control mainstream society and institutions. Echoing previous data, "white Americans who viewed being a Christian as very important to being truly American are more likely (compared with both blacks and other whites) to blame blacks' supposed lack of motivation for black-white inequality, a view that fits squarely within a dominant white-racial frame that explains whites' successes in meritocratic, colorblind terms" (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 292).

Delving deeper into the views of the dominant white Christian demographic, The American Mosaic Project's 2014 *Boundaries in the American Mosaic: Preliminary Report* assesses how Americans view religion, inequality, and other social issues affecting the country. Nearly 60% of those surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that social standards of right and wrong should be grounded in Christianity. Additionally, almost 60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that society's standards of right and wrong should be based on "God's Law." The report also includes responses to a "Threat Scale," a series of questions about which groups

are perceived to pose the greatest threats to society, broken down by category (Figure 6). For “Threat to Public Order and Safety,” African Americans are second only to Muslims. When asked about groups that “Don’t Contribute to My Community,” *African Americans* rank third, behind *Muslims* and *Recent Immigrants*.

Combining these findings, The American Mosaic Project’s data connects belief in religiously grounded (especially Christian) approaches to law and social order with a perception of Black people being one of the biggest threats to this order among immigrants, Muslims, and Hispanic/Latino peoples. In the same survey, 60 percent of the respondents “agreed or strongly agreed that society’s standards of right and wrong should be based on God’s laws” (American Mosaic Project 2014, 8) This finding fits with Whitehead and Perry’s observations that white nationalism conflates nativist white Christianity with the ideal U.S. citizen, as well as the 2015 PRRI Religion News Survey. Working from the belief that white Christianity was inherently pure and just, American white Protestants commonly held the conviction that their socio-racial constructs (and accompanying concepts of right/good and wrong/bad) were the only path to democracy and peace.

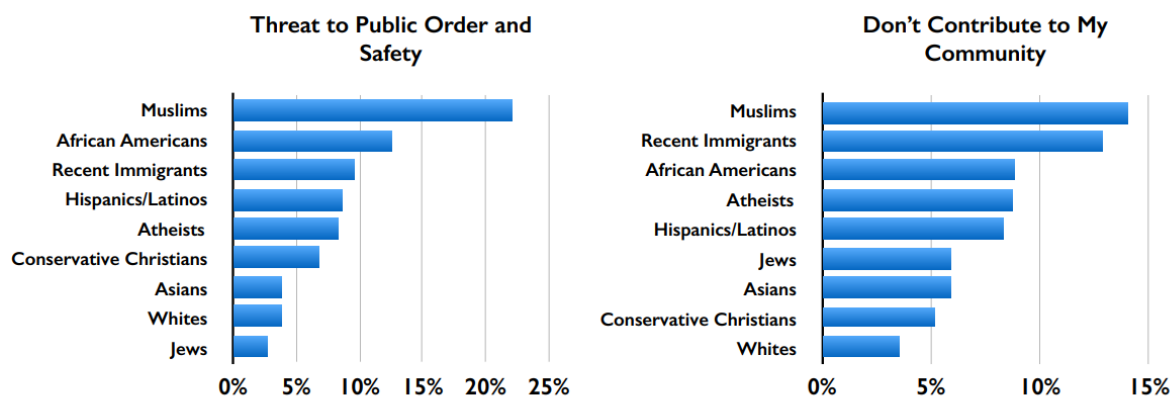


Figure 6: The “Threat Scale” Which groups are blamed for social problems?

Boundaries in the American Mosaic: Preliminary Report, p. 6

This conflation of religious, racial, and social identities has created a “dominant ideology,” which Marylee Taylor and Stephen Merino (2011) define as the belief that “opportunity is widespread and those who work hard will be rewarded with success: these beliefs and the associated acceptance of inequality [...] have been prevalent in the United States and can be construed more broadly as an element of Western culture” (Taylor and Merino 2011, 61). Like Jones’ Racism Index, their study finds that not only Evangelicals (who have become the most prominent denomination when discussing white nationalism), but also Catholic and Protestants – conservative or not – were more likely than other groups to believe individual failures are what cause poverty and inequality. Additionally, whites in general were more likely to oppose government intervention or support for minority groups, with white Christian groups expressing the most negative opinions about such government initiatives. The authors propose a possible explanation: “non-Christian groups are relatively insulated from dominant ideology messages and policy positions deduced from these messages, by virtue of less frequent participation in settings where the dominant ideology is promulgated or assumed” (Taylor and Merino 2011, 74). This conclusion diverges from the assumption that it is religion itself that is promulgating racist attitudes; rather, it is the insular community, living in a relative vacuum of hegemonic reinforcement and shared ideology of the dominant culture that bolster and perpetuates racism and the conviction of white superiority.

Sociologists Penny Edgell and Eric Tranby take a closer look at the psychological factors of the cultural preservation of racism. Their 2010 study, *Shared Visions? Diversity and Cultural Membership in American Life*, divides beliefs about social issues into three different concepts or “realities” that shape an individual’s worldview: cultural preservationists, critics of multiculturalism, and optimistic pluralists. Edgell and Tranby find that for some Americans,

religion provides the symbolic boundaries of their reality, much like the insular communities of “dominant ideology” presented by Taylor and Merino. “Cultural preservationists are comfortable with diversity as long as it does not threaten a Judeo-Christian core” (Edgell and Tranby 2010, 194). The popular belief that America is a Christian nation has long been associated with white Protestantism, and most recently Evangelical Protestantism in particular. From a cultural preservationist outlook, this “reality” is distinguished by a commitment to a white Christian cultural heritage that is imagined as still being central to American identity. The concept of citizenship – both behavioral and legal recognition – stems from this heritage, and as the GSS survey results show, continue to be utilized. As Jerry Z. Park et al. have noted, second generation Latin American and Asian American citizens display attitudes closer to white Christianity than their first-generation parents – a sign of hegemonic cultural assimilation. The rigid parameters for “qualified citizens” – white, Christian, patriotic, loyal to God and America – are reproduced through congregational attendance, societal expectations, and media portrayals of what it means to be American.

Whiteness as identity is explored even further in *An Empirical Assessment of Whiteness Theory* (2009). While Douglas Hartmann et al. do not address religiosity’s role in racism, the data of this 2009 study support the existence of a “perception gap” between white and non-white respondents – as previous analyses have already shown. As demonstrated in Table 3, they, like others, find that “[w]hites are less likely to see and fully grasp racial inequalities in general and white advantages in particular than people of color as anticipated by theories of whiteness and white privilege” (Hartmann et al. 2009, 418). Further, a third of white Americans see their racial identity as very important, and three-quarters of white Americans believe their “racial group has a culture that should be preserved” (Hartmann et al. 2009, 418).

Table 3: Exploring Advantage and Disadvantage

<i>Which factors are important or very important in explaining white advantage and African American disadvantage?</i>	<i>White Advantage</i>			<i>African American Disadvantage</i>		
	<i>Whites (percent)</i>	<i>Nonwhites (percent)</i>	<i>Total (N)</i>	<i>Whites (percent)</i>	<i>Nonwhites (percent)</i>	<i>Total (N)</i>
Prejudice and discrimination	62.0	78.4	66.0 (1003)	77.0	86.7	79.5 (917)
Laws and institutions	46.3	80.4	54.6 (998)	37.5	66.1	44.8 (898)
Access to schools and social connections	82.5	91.3	84.5 (1022)	81.8	88.1	83.4 (919)
Effort and hard work	88.2	81.6	86.6 (1019)	61.9	76.5	65.7 (892)
Differences in family upbringing	79.1	74.2	78.0 (1009)	84.2	88.5	85.3 (911)

Hartmann et al., p. 414

Hartmann and his colleagues read more ambiguity in their results, however, determining the differences to be not as pronounced as Jones and others have argued. Their work aligns more with Whitehead and Perry, pointing to white Christian *nationalism*, which attracts believers across Christian denominational lines. Essentially, they argue that it is not that white Christians are statistically more likely to be racist per se, but that they are more likely to adhere to Christian nationalism, which upholds white Christian identity and values as the legitimate foundation for American society.

So far, data have reinforced a focus on (and propensity of) white Christians and racism. Other scholarship, however, has shown that it is not just *white* Christians who are drawn to this cultural preservationist view. The *National Asian American Survey* of 2016 illustrates that white Christians are not the only group more likely to be unsupportive of “equality for all,” finding that “[s]econd generation Asian American and Latino Evangelicals hew closer to the White Christian mean, while most other Asian and Latino Christian groups adhere more closely to the Black Christian mean” (Park et al. 2020, 1). This study argues that “White Americans create and promote their own culture and interests as the norm to which non-Whites and other subordinate

groups must conform or assimilate” (Park et al. 2020, 2). On top of this are what the authors call “honorary Whites,” comprised of light-skinned Latinos and various Asian ethnic groups. Honorary Whites, according to the data, are more likely to adhere to the beliefs of the dominant, white Christians who fundamentally believe that equal opportunity is available for all Americans. This suggests that not only are white Christians *themselves* more likely to hold racist views, but they also pass these beliefs on to other groups in the form of what a “good American” is. At first glance, these findings might be interpreted as support of white Christianity itself carrying racist, cultural preservationist tendencies. However, Park et al. specifically look at the *cultural norms* created by a dominant white Christian majority that tends to be, as previously noted, insular and self-affirming in their social ideals. Again, this research points to a problematic dominant culture more than religion as the primary conduit for racism.

The limitations of all the data reviewed thus far, however, is examined by Jerry Park and James Clark Davidson in *Decentering Whiteness in Survey Research on American Religion* (2020). They posit that the very surveys analyzing relationships between religion and race are *themselves* part of this insular, self-affirming bias of white Christianity – and that this bias only serves to further support the dominant social narrative of a white, Christian default for citizenship. Park and Davidson highlight at least three major problems found in most data collection methods. First, not only are the surveys primarily conducted in English (with only a few translated into Spanish), but “minority religions are often lumped into an ‘other religion’ category (Park and Davidson 2020, 254) that erases the unique characteristics and beliefs within those subgroups. Secondly, questions are based on a *congregational* understanding of religion, leaving out many religions that are more focused on individualization, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto, etc. Finally, “since no religion is racially homogenous, any fine-grained

examination of religious group difference among racial minorities is hampered in its repetitive samples. Native and Asian Americans immediately fall below the minimum threshold for analysis when simply differentiated into Christian and non-Christian” (Park and Davidson 2020, 255). This makes accurate analysis and representation of minority group beliefs challenging, if not impossible; this limitation could potentially meaning that the data Jones is pulling from is a contributing factor of his conclusion that it is only *white* Christians who are most likely to hold racist perspectives.

These limitations of data collection present a need for additional for additional research into the diversity and variations in attitudes among distinct religious minority groups to ensure the accuracy of Jones’ PRRI survey data. While PRRI insists its results were “balanced to match target population parameters for gender, age, education, race, and Hispanic ethnicity, and division (U.S. Census definitions)” and “weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results [to] ensure that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the target populations” (PRRI 2019), even this setup appears to skew data by having, demographically, a larger number of whites as respondents and representatives of Christianity. While this does allow for a generalized claim about the U.S. population, the racial representation imbalance does not represent the reality of non-white Christians’ anti-Black sentiments. As Park and Davidson point out, “Latinx Evangelical (72%) and Catholic (73%) support for individualist explanations of Black inequality suggests a more consistent Latinx Christian view rivals White non-Latinx Evangelicals. [...] this rate of endorsement was just as high among Asian American Catholics” (Park and Davidson 2020, 268). These findings imply that some non-white immigrant groups adopted either part or all of the white Evangelical social views, which Park and Davidson refer to

as a “cultural toolkit” (Park and Davidson 2020, 268). This analysis echoes the findings in *Equal Opportunity Beliefs Beyond Black and White American Christianity*, which highlighted the tendency of Asian and Latino Evangelical immigrants to adhere more closely to the cultural toolkit than other groups.

While the demographic details were not readily available for most of the studies reviewed here, the Pew Research Center provides an example breakdown of religious denomination affiliation categories in data collection. The data indeed seems skewed to over-report a select group of Christian perspectives: of the 70.6% of respondents that identified as Christian, 25.4% are Evangelical Protestant, which is further broken down into 9.2% Baptist Family, 4.9% Nondenominational Family, and 3.6% Pentecostal Family as the top three most common denominations. Of the 14.7% of respondents identifying as Mainline Protestant, the top three affiliations are Methodist Family (3.9%), Baptist Family (2.1%), and Lutheran Family (2.1%). Catholics are represented as 20%. If other studies use a similar system, they could be capturing the views of the *dominant* white Christian groups, not Christians *as a whole*. Each denomination varies in history, political ideology, and levels of racial prejudice, but none of the denominations comprising the “dominant” denominations in Evangelical Protestantism or Mainline Protestantism even make up 10% of their category. Indeed, while white Christians *do* present as holding more racist values in most of the available research, it is in the aggregate only – not as an encompassing feature of the religion. Therefore, Jones’ conclusion that white Christianity is more likely to hold racist views is potentially only a reflection of a small portion of Christianity, rather than white Christianity in its entirety.

Comparing the Data

Looking at a broader range of data not collected by PRRI, Jones' direct link between white Christianity and propensity for racist attitudes is not fully supported – and the data collection methods themselves are constructed with a potentially white Christian bias. Without inclusion of political affiliation and nationalist sentiments and a decentralizing of white Christianity in the framing of research and surveys, a definitive answer to whether Christianity *itself* perpetuates white racist attitudes (as Jones claims) is lacking. By leaving out measures of political affiliations and nationalist sentiments, Jones seems to be overlooking a key component in his connection of white supremacy/exceptionalism and Christianity: white Christian nationalism.

As previously noted, Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry make a strong case for white nationalism being the missing element in the relationship between white Christianity and racism in their book, *Taking America Back for God*. Their findings line up with the PRRI and others but focuses on white Christian nationalism rather than religiosity (Table 4). While there are “higher than average levels of Christian nationalism among white Christians” (Whitehead and Perry, 83), being committed to a religion does not always equate to more conservatism or nationalism. Rather, identifying as Evangelic Protestant – while being a significant predictor of subscribing to Christian Nationalism – is no more predictive than identifying as “Bible-believing,” political conservatism, or other non-exclusively Evangelical Protestant beliefs.

Table 4: Top Predictors of Stronger Adherence to Christian Nationalism

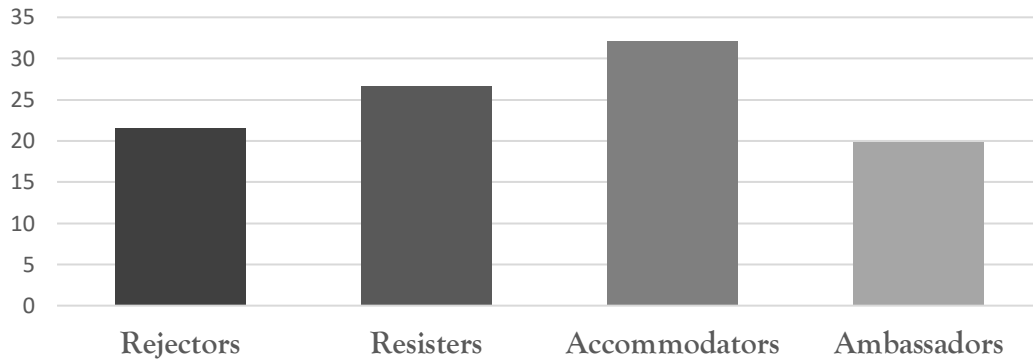
Predictor (ordered from strongest predictor to weakest)	Direction
1. Identifying with Political Conservatism	+
2. Identify as “Bible-Believing”	+
3. Bible is the literal word of God ^a	+
4. Bible is perfectly true, though not literally interpreted ^a	+
5. Religiously Unaffiliated ^b	—
6. Religious Practice ^c	+
7. Believe that the nation is on the brink of moral decay	+
8. Believe that God requires the faithful to wage wars for good	+
9. Believe in “the Rapture”	+
10. Education	—

All variables are statistically significant predictors of Christian nationalism beyond the .001 level. + = positively correlated; — = negatively correlated. ^a Compared to believing the Bible is a book of history and legends. ^b Compared to being an evangelical Protestant. ^c A scale made up of three questions asking how frequently respondents attend religious services, prayer, and read their sacred scriptures.

Source: 2007 Baylor Religion Survey.

Recreated from Taking America Back for God, p. 12

Whitehead and Perry “primarily use a composite measure created from multiple BRS survey questions from 2007 to 2017 that asked Americans to rate their level of agreement” to six questions (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 7): the government should officially declare the U.S. a Christian nation; if Christian values should be promoted at a government level; whether the separation of church and state should be federally enforced; if religious displays should be permitted in public spaces; belief that U.S. success is “God’s plan,” and whether or not public schools should allow prayer (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 8). Using the responses as a guide, they categorize four major groups of Americans based on their belief in Christian nationalist ideas and goals: Rejectors, Resisters, Accommodators, and Ambassadors (Figure 7). People classified as Rejectors (21.5% of the population) are most likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the ideological statements found on their on Christian nationalism scale, believing there should not be any connection between politics and Christianity. Resisters, however, have a more ambivalent

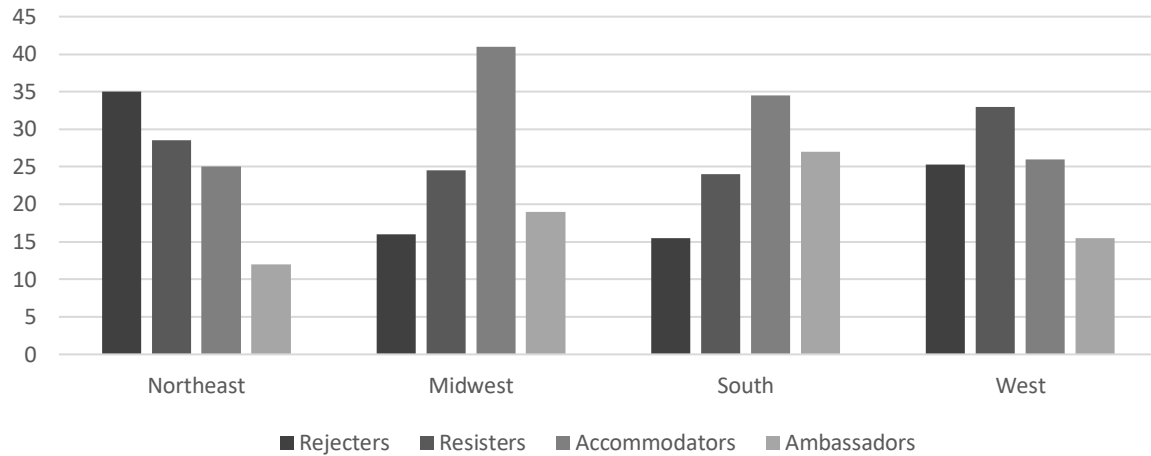


Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

Figure 7: Percent of Americans who are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejectors of Christian Nationalism

Recreated from Taking America Back for God, p. 25

view of the relationship between Christianity and politics. While they agree with Rejectors on matters like prayer not being appropriate for schools and being opposed to the U.S. officially declaring itself a Christian nation, Resisters do not uniformly oppose *all* public displays of religion. Whitehead and Perry describe Accommodators as “agreeing that the federal government should advocate Christian values, [but] might be undecided about the federal government officially declaring the United States a Christian nation” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 33). Accommodators believe in Christian values, but not necessarily in Christian exceptionalism. They also live in more rural areas than rejectors and resisters – most reside in the Midwest and South (Figures 8 & 9); these are the same geographic regions that Jones and Cox et al. pointed to as the locations of more racist opinions by white Christians. Ambassadors, who “tie our prosperity as a nation to our heritage of obedience to God’s commandments as laid out in the Christian Scriptures” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 36), tend to live in rural areas as well, with 16% in cities and almost half residing in the south – the highest levels of Christian nationalism among all categories are found in the “Bible Belt” of the south and the Midwest. Ambassadors



Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

Figure 8: Percent of Americans In Each Region of the U.S. Who Are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters

Recreated from Taking America Back for God, p. 39-40

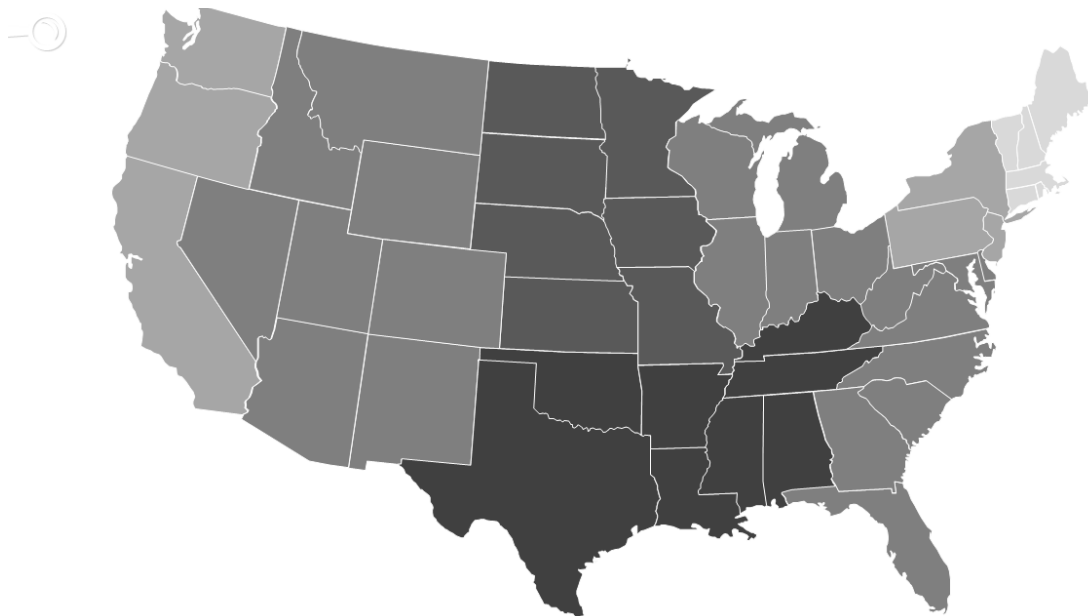


Figure 9: Map of the United States Showing Average Christian Nationalism Score Across Nine Major Census Divisions

Recreated from Taking America Back for God, p. 40

unequivocally support Christian nationalism, believing that economic prosperity as a nation is directly tied to the U.S. “heritage of obedience to God’s commandments as laid out in the Christian Scriptures” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 36). It is important to note that Whitehead and Perry insist religiosity is not the main factor that impacts prejudice and racism. Rather, it is a

strong sense of religious *identity* – community, power, and political ideals – instead of religious morals. Specifically, “Christian nationalism gives divine sanction to ethnocentrism and nativism” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 91).

Whitehead and Perry outright contradict Jones’ analysis, arguing that “no one should claim that it is ‘religious’ people writ large” that support particular policies or ideologies (Whitehead and Perry, 155). Rather than white Christianity itself, “it is the degree to which Americans – perceiving current political conflicts through the lens of Christian nationalism – wish to institutionalize conservative ‘Christian’ cultural preferences in America’s policies and self-identity” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 153). In fact, they assert that knowing if someone is a Rejector, Resister, Accommodator, or Ambassador can more accurately predict their political and social views than church affiliation or frequency of attendance can. After all, Christian nationalism is not focused on following strict moral standards or peace and love: “Rather, Christian nationalist appeals to ‘Christian foundations’ and ‘Christian beliefs’ were more like code words for a way of life that is ‘ours’ (read: white conservative Christians) by divine right and which ‘the secularists, the humanists, the atheists, the infidels’ want to take away” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 86). Rather than adherence to Christianity, Christian nationalism focuses on a cultural vision based on an image of a “self-sufficient, hard-working, white Christian patriot” (Martí 2020, 123).

Not only have some business leaders partnered with some white Christian churches to encourage support for systems of white Christian economic prosperity, but their immense profits were also used as proof that their “religious” convictions were, indeed, right. The narrative becomes even stronger during times of economic, cultural, or political instability as people “fall back on their core identities, traditions, values, and narratives about themselves to bring order

out of chaos” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 124). In addition, Gerardo Martí explains how businessmen, politicians, Christian clergymen, and wealthy citizen allied to promote the mindset that obstacles to wealth are *individual* problems, rather than systemic. This focus on individual problems that must be overcome with individual solutions is consistent with what Emerson and Smith (2001) found in the seminal work “Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America.” The idea was promoted that since white Christians were free to work and make their wealth, all other groups were equally free to better themselves economically. If they could not conform to social expectations to succeed, it was *their* fault, not society’s.

Political scientist Benedict Anderson once posited that racism really has its origins in class, shaping who had the right to rule and who had to provide labor (Anderson 2006, 149) as well as promoting a solidarity of whites that would control the masses (Anderson 2006, 153). This becomes evident in the use of white Christian exceptionalism to exploit non-white, non-Christian populations for profit – first as slaves, then as the working class – and encouraging poor whites to support that system through a belief in racial/spiritual hierarchy. Even Jones himself recognizes the church’s role in hampering Black economic advancement and the promotion of what Martí refers to as Christian economics.

Conclusion

A review of the sociological data and historical context of American Christianity shows that there is, indeed, a close relationship between racist attitudes and white Christianity. However, it becomes the most pronounced when fueled by political, economic, or social concerns that have – over time – crystalized into Christian nationalism, including ideologies of Christian (specifically white Christian) supremacy. Foundational Christian beliefs of spiritual purity and inherent righteousness provided a foundation for white Christianity's sense of superiority and self-proclaimed patriarchal position within a racial hierarchy – most visibly in the South and other slave-owning states. Even after the Civil War and legal end of slavery, racism (especially anti-Blackness) was entwined in Southern culture and Christian churches. Racist attitudes were later used in the industrial revolution era, with capitalist influencers and factory owners encouraging their workers to preserve white economic control through hard work and a sense of white supremacy. The work ethic pushed by corporations and pastors, based heavily on Protestant dogma, was used to judge the worthiness of non-whites, who were considered lazy or fundamentally flawed if they could not succeed in the white-centric economy. Similarly, white- and Protestant-centric laws were universally fair and infallible – it was the fault of the offenders if they could not adhere to the societal expectations of behavior and belief.

On closer examination, however, the prevalence of racist attitudes is not limited to the South or to *white* Christians: Edgell and Tranby described the cultural preservationist world view that can accept diversity if it does not threaten their Judeo-Christian beliefs; Douglas Hartmann et al. illuminated the general perception gap between white and non-white respondents in

recognizing racial inequalities; the *National Asian American Survey* of 2016 points out that it is not *only* white Christians who hold racist attitudes, but also Asian and Latino Christian (particularly Evangelical) groups; Jerry Z. Park and James Clark Davidson question the entire data collection process' white-centric bias; and as the demographics of respondents are teased apart, it becomes clear that white Christians are more likely to hold racist beliefs only in the aggregate – not as a unified, cross-denominational feature. Additionally, racism has been linked to American economic and power structures that both support *and are supported by* white Christian denominations. Benedict Anderson posited that racism really has its origins in class, shaping who had the right to rule and who had to provide labor (Anderson 2006, 149) as well as promoting a solidarity of whites that would control the masses (Anderson 2006, 153). This can be seen in the use of white Christian exceptionalism to exploit non-white, non-Christian populations for profit – first as slaves, then as the working class – and encouraging poor whites to support that system through a belief in racial/spiritual hierarchy. Even Jones himself recognizes the church's role in hampering Black economic advancement and the promotion of what Martí refers to as Christian economics.

The U.S. has a long history of institutional racism, and religious studies scholars have worked to connect these systems of oppression to social and governmental norms that have been heavily influenced by white – predominantly Protestant – churches. Since institutional racism is comprised of social, governmental, and/or economic traditions or organizations, the individuals within the system do not necessarily have to hold racist opinions themselves – they only need to support (or not challenge) the system. Systemic, anti-Black racism has been transmitted and preserved through a combination of religious beliefs, social power structures, and historical events and choices made by the dominant group in the United States – white Christians. Though

the data are not as unanimous or inclusive as it could be, Jones' claim that white Christians are more likely to hold racist views is mostly supported by existing survey data. It appears more likely, though, that the direct connection Jones draws between white Christianity and a propensity for racist attitudes is missing vital components – namely, Christian Nationalism and a more accurate polling of diverse groups. There is a particularly powerful narrative that occurs when nationalism and religion combine, as religious nationalism perpetuates the idea of creating security in the face of racial and social change. In the U.S., white Christians use their religious history as a foundation for maintaining their hegemonic security. Indeed, “Approval of Christian nationalism...is a strong predictor of whether someone holds racially intolerant attitudes, especially if that person is white” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 19). As Philip Gorski summarizes, “it is political idolatry dressed up as religious orthodoxy” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 21).

As Yukich and Edgell (2010) have noted, “At times, media coverage and even sociological research on religion seems to indicate that religion, and Christianity in particular, is uniformly White and conservative. White Christian nationalism, and the power it has long wielded in American politics, has exacerbated this tendency by depicting the United States as a nation inextricably tied to White Protestant, often Evangelical, beliefs, practices, and identities” (Yukich and Edgell 2020, 313). Jones himself recognizes that “collusion by the media, politicians, and religious leaders produced a nearly impenetrable cultural bulwark. Both white evangelical and mainline Protestant churches served as cultural hubs and moral legitimizers of white supremacy, while the power of the state protected their segregated sanctuaries” (Jones 2020, 43).

Religious Studies scholars and sociologists have a responsibility to curb this tendency: to address the demonstrated white Christian bias in the wording and framing of their surveys, re-

assess how their data is collected to avoid exclusions of non-white, non-Christian people, and to carefully discern the difference between white Christianity and white Christian Nationalism.

Future research that actively seeks to investigate more nuanced differences and factors between religious and political beliefs, as well as targeted outreach to gather data from under-represented religious and minority groups, would better illuminate whether “White supremacy...is typically tied to a concept of the superiority of Protestant Christian culture” (Jones, 80), or if the methods used to analyze white Christian racism is, itself, tainted with a white Christian exceptionalism.

As Whitehead and Perry state, understanding the content and consequences of Christian nationalism is vital for understanding American polarization (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 16).

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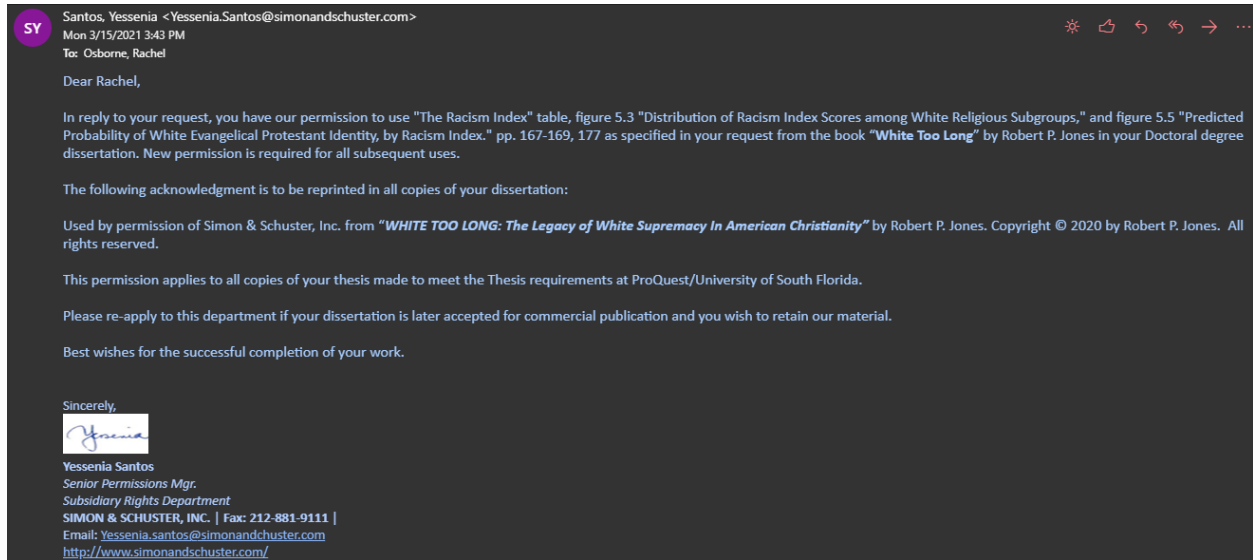
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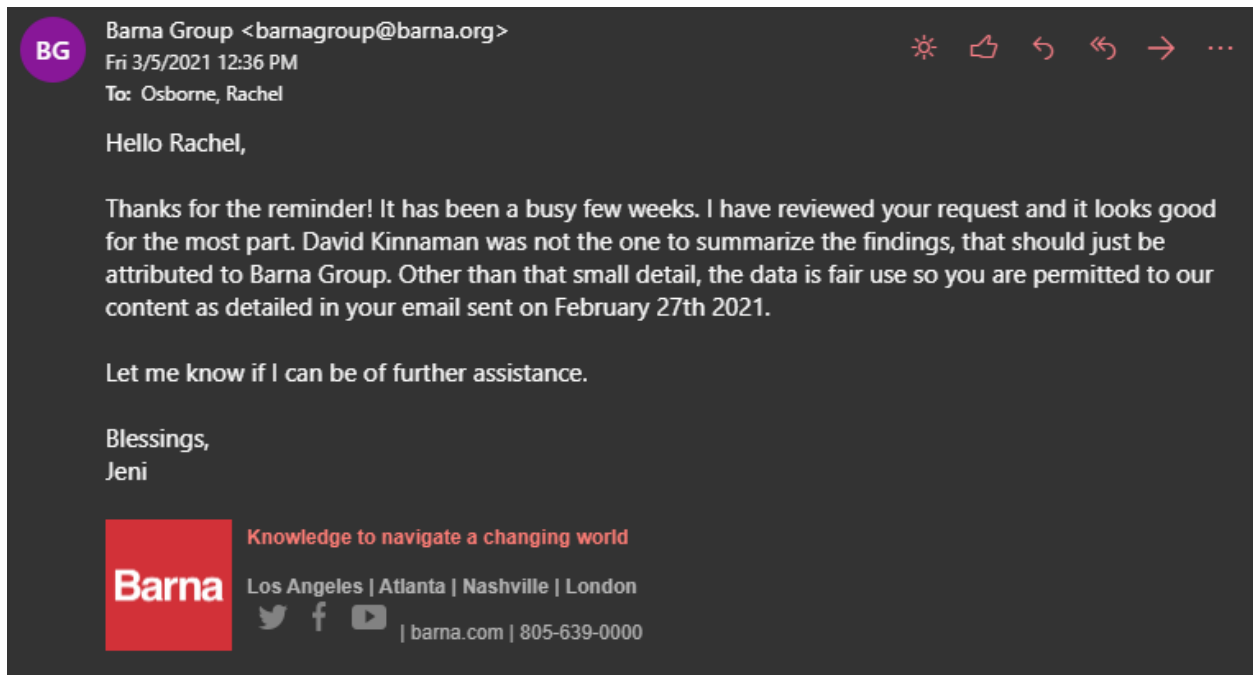


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Figure 5



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Figure 6:

The American Mosaic Project, Fair Use

Table 4, Figures 7, 8, 9



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ISBN/ISSN: 9780190057886
publisher: Oxford Publishing Limited

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