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Author, Activist, and Preacher Jim Wallis Challenges White Christians to Help Right the “Unacceptable Wrong” of Racism

“If white Christians acted more Christian than white, black parents would have less to fear for their children,” says respected public theologian and New York Times bestselling author Jim Wallis in his latest book, *America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* (Brazos Press, \$21.99 hardcover, January 19, 2016, foreword by Bryan Stevenson). It’s a timely call for a new conversation—and action—on racism, and a compelling agenda to deal with our lingering racial sins in many places, including our criminal justice system .

White privilege must be confronted by white people, says Wallis, because “our primary identity is as the children of God.” He reminds his fellow Christians of the gospel command that the body of Christ be racially inclusive (Gal. 3:28) and not segregated. “To treat these issues as *sin*—which can be repented of and changed—is a deeper, more effective way to solve these problems than just seeing them as political issues in an illusory ‘post-racial’ America.”

Whiteness is a false identity that perpetuates injustice and oppression. “The existence and persistence of white identity itself, with the accompanying assumption of white privilege, is still a major obstacle to real change,” Wallis says. Whiteness is not just an ideology, but also an idol that separates white Christians from God.

Wallis speaks truthfully about race and inequality. He brings clarity, hope, and healing to these troubling issues along with practical solutions to change the culture, public policy, and society:

- **Police killings of people of color:** It’s time for multi-racial zero tolerance of racialized policing. The model for police work needs to be transformed from warrior to guardian. “I believe that most police are good cops, but it would take more than few ‘bad apples’ to produce all the stories that *almost every black person in America* has about their experience with the police,” he says. When virtually all black parents must have “the talk” about the police with their children, and white parents aren’t even aware the talk is going on, something is terribly wrong.
- **Reforming the criminal justice reform:** Data on police stops, arrests, sentences, incarceration, and recidivism show that the system is intrinsically biased against African Americans and Latinos. Wallis presents 14 recommendations for restoring trust, such as training that creates a new constitutionally-grounded culture, independent prosecutors, demilitarizing police departments, community policing, and restorative justice.
- **Changing racial geography:** Wallis calls for deliberate, practical efforts to create genuine multiracial life experiences, with suggestions for starting in three common places in our lives: school, sports, and congregations.

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- **Immigration reform:** Long at the forefront of faith-based efforts on this issue, Wallis outlines principles for common-sense change, and illuminates the human crisis that makes “welcoming the stranger” so urgent.

Wallis uses the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, an icon of the Civil Rights Movement, as a metaphor for crossing into a renewed nation, one where growing diversity is seen as a great benefit and not a great threat. The bridge was the site of marches led by Martin Luther King, Jr, and was crossed again by thousands of people, including Wallis, in a 50th anniversary observance earlier this year. “The new bridge that our children will cross is into a more just and inclusive America.”

America's Original Sin is perhaps Wallis's most deeply personal book. Fifty years ago, as a teenager growing up in Detroit, Michigan, he was driven away from his faith by a white church that refused to deal with racism. “Something very big was very wrong, and the white Christians who raised me wouldn't talk about it.” Participation in the civil rights movement helped him discover a faith that leads to racial justice. He now calls fellow believers to repent: “Repentance is much more than saying we are brokenhearted and sorry; it means turning in a totally new direction.”

“Change is never inevitable, and injustice doesn't just sort itself out,” Wallis says. “Both in advocating for real change and in ensuring that the changes are fundamental, we need people of faith, along with others, who bring moral principles to public life. This isn't just a matter of policy changes. It will be a test of our moral conscience and practice and for people of faith, a test of our theology—whether we really believe that all of God's children are made in the image of God and must be treated with human dignity and respect,” Wallis says. “I am choosing hope and believe we are already seeing change, especially in a new generation.”

Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative and author of the acclaimed book *Just Mercy*, says in the foreword to *America's Original Sin*, “People of faith are going to have to raise their voices and take action. Reading this extraordinary new work by Jim Wallis is a very good place to start.”

Jim Wallis is president and founder of Sojourners and editor-in-chief of *Sojourners* magazine in Washington, D.C. He is a bestselling author, public theologian, national preacher, social activist, and international commentator on ethics and public life. Wallis has written ten books, including *The (Un)Common Good*, and the *New York Times* bestsellers *God's Politics* and *The Great Awakening*. He is a frequent speaker in the United States and abroad, has written for major newspapers, and appears frequently on ABC, CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, HuffPo Live, and NPR. Wallis also teaches at Georgetown University and has taught at Harvard University. Husband of Joy Carroll, father to two sons, Luke and Jack, he is also a Little League baseball coach.

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by Jim Wallis
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