

SACRED GROUND

A FILM-BASED DIALOGUE SERIES ON RACE AND FAITH

SESSION THREE STUDY GUIDE



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SESSION 3: WHOSE LAND? EXPLORING INDIGENOUS HISTORY

To watch beforehand or in the session

- PBS series: *We Shall Remain*, Episode I: “After the Mayflower” (77 min.)
- *The Episcopal Church Exposes the Doctrine of Discovery* (14 min.)

To read beforehand

- Audio story and article: “The Map of Native American Tribes You’ve Never Seen Before” by Hansi Lo Wang from NPR. Please look at Aaron Carapella’s map – the link is at the very bottom of the article – to see which Native tribes lived at the time of European conquest in the region where you live now.
- Article: “Unshackled by Visions and Values” by Martin Brokenleg
- Core book: *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman – Forward and Preface
- Core book: *Waking Up White* – Chapters 1, 4-6, and 30

Notes to facilitators

Open with acknowledgment/honoring of the Indigenous peoples who were in your geographic area before Europeans, and who may be in the area today, and perhaps in your circle.

Session themes and overview from the author

After looking at some of the harms suffered by various groups of Europeans, we turn our attention now to the harms done by them to other groups, beginning with Native Americans. We are walking in the “Telling the Truth” quadrant of the labyrinth. Notice what emotions or storylines arise as you perhaps remove some blinders, or layers of defended-ness/defensiveness, in relation to Native history – layers that many people were enculturated to have. Notice what helps you to see, hear, and absorb well.

This session starts with a focus on the initial contact between English settlers and Indigenous people. The first film to view is the first episode in a powerful PBS five-part series, *We Shall Remain*. It describes key events in the 1600s related to the Wampanoag and the Pequot confederations and the Pilgrims, then the Puritans, in what came to be called New England. It covers the Pequot War and the horrible choices that Massasoit and then Metacom/King Philip each had before them. It includes the events surrounding the first Thanksgiving. It is foundational to watch this episode of *We Shall Remain*, as this history sets the stage for the rest of Indigenous/settler relations and also helps the *Sacred Ground Dialogue Series* progress in a *roughly* chronological order.

Aaron Carapella's map of "locations and original names of hundreds of American Indian nations before their first contact with Europeans" is powerful to absorb. Please spend some time with this map (the link is at the very bottom of the article). Look at the region where you live now, and perhaps other places you have lived or your family has lived in previous generations. Did you know the names of the tribal nations that lived in these places before settler colonialism? If you have European heritage, do you know specifically how your ancestors benefited from Indian removal? For example, the Homestead Act of 1862 provided land for free to American citizens who wanted to farm in the Great Plains, and the federal government forced Native communities to reservations to make way for this expansion. There are countless other ways that your family history could have intersected with the conquest of this land.

"Christian religion and the Western idea of history are inseparable and mutually self-supporting. To retrench the traditional concept of Western history at this point would mean to invalidate the justification for conquering the Western Hemisphere. Americans in some manner will cling to the traditional idea that they suddenly came upon a vacant land on which they created the world's most affluent society. Not only is such an idea false, it is absurd. Yet without it both Western man and his religion stand naked before the world."

– Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, p. 111

This session also includes a short film from the Episcopal Church Office of Indigenous Ministries called *The Episcopal Church Exposes the Doctrine of Discovery*. This video provides a chance to consider the role that both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity (and The Episcopal Church in particular) played in various phases of racial oppression against Indigenous peoples. It references 2009 General Convention resolution D035, which repudiates and renounces the Doctrine of Discovery and "encourages all Episcopalians to seek a greater understanding of the Indigenous Peoples." Do you know in what ways your church is tied to the harms described? The powerful article by Martin Brokenleg provides a vision for healing and wholeness for Native children. The curriculum returns later to the legacy of Native children forced to attend boarding schools, or placed in foster care or for adoption, both in Session 9 and in the last session, when you will view *Dawnland*, a powerful film that documents a resulting truth and reconciliation process in the state of Maine.

"American Indians and other indigenous peoples have a long-standing confidence that they have much to teach European and North American peoples about the world and human relationships in the world. They are confident in the spiritual foundations of their insights, confident that those foundations can become a source of healing and reconciliation for all human beings and ultimately for all of creation."

– George Tinker, *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty*, p. 47

"From the Native spiritual perspective, when a person loses their priority for living in community then they have broken the most sacred bond set down by God at the time of creation. The inter-relatedness of all things, the kinship of humanity, and the sacredness of each person as a vital part of the whole are the foundational values of God's original covenant with Native America that must never be violated. Traditional Native America is built on the 'we,' not on the 'I.'"
– The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston, *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus*, p. 101

There is a strong tradition in many Indigenous communities to teach through storytelling, so this can be a time to deepen into that approach with each other in your circle.

For this session, you start reading Dr. Howard Thurman's seminal book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, which was a touchstone for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in shaping his vision of a nonviolent civil rights movement. This book is meant particularly to be in service to people of color in the circle (if you have an interracial group) naming what they may wish to name from their experience, though it is a deeply valuable work for all people to read and reflect on. In this as in other sessions, please also share reactions to the assigned chapters in the other core book, Debby Irving's *Waking Up White*.