

# SACRED GROUND

A FILM-BASED DIALOGUE SERIES ON RACE AND FAITH

SESSION FIVE STUDY GUIDE



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### SESSION 5: WHOSE LAND? MORE LAYERS: EXPLORING LATINO HISTORY

#### To watch beforehand or in the session

- PBS series: *Latino Americans*, Episode I: “Foreigners in Their Own Land” (53 min.)
- YouTube video: *Guns, Germs, and Steel: How Europeans Came to Dominate the World, in 7 Minutes*

#### To read beforehand

- Selection from book: *Ripe Fields: The Promise and Challenge of Latino Ministry* by Juan Oliver (pp. 5-18 from paperback edition)
- Op-ed: “Moving Beyond the Black-White Binary” by Roberto Lovato
- Reflection piece: “The Circle of Humanity” by Katrina Browne
- Core book: *Jesus and the Disinherited* – second part of Chapter I (from paragraph that starts “In the face of these alternatives...,” on p. 17 of 1996 paperback edition, to the end of the chapter)
- Core book: *Waking Up White* – Chapter 13

#### Session themes and overview from the author

By now, you have walked through stories of deep harms perpetrated by Europeans against Native peoples in the Americas and against people of African descent. In this session, you will see how Latinos often live in an in-between space, as many are descendants of the Spanish and the Portuguese, of the many diverse Indigenous peoples in what we now call South and Central America and the Spanish Caribbean, and of Africans who were enslaved in these regions in even greater numbers than in North America. It is important to qualify and say that, while historic forces did lead to mixed-race populations in North America as well, many Latin American countries had different attitudes toward “race mixing.” To this day, there are whole nomenclatures for the many variations of skin color that resulted (less of a black/white frame), and this is often a source of pride. It is also true that skin color-based racism still pervades many Latin American cultures, and Indigenous rights continue to be a major issue.

Latinos in the United States span from descendants of Spanish colonists of North America from the 1600s and onward (as we learn about in the first film), to recent immigrants, and everyone in between. Many bring family histories and memories from various Latin countries (again, often from multiple sides of race-based harms). In the United States, for much of the country’s history, regardless of how long they’ve been here, Latinos often have been cast as “other,” “foreign,” and “less than” relative to non-Hispanic whites and, thus, have had to deal with the realities of racism and discrimination.

Juan Oliver's book chapter "Who Is Latino?" will help outline these demographic histories and diversities more fully and, in particular, in relation to Latinos in The Episcopal Church. While the book's statistics are dated, the trend lines are still true and relevant.

What insights might Latinos have about issues of race – from the vantage point of Mestizo, Mulatez, Latinidad – that can contribute to national progress and healing today? What emerges – for anyone – when one is conscious of having members of one's family who were the "conquering peoples" and members who were the "conquered people"?

There is a tension built in to the very title of this session's documentary episode, "Foreigners in Their Own Land." The title seeks to make the point that vis-à-vis the "contest" between Mexico and the United States, the U.S. took over formerly Mexican lands, forcing people to become "foreigners" in what had been their home. But the episode also correctly highlights that Mexico itself was the product of Spanish conquest of Indigenous communities.

Fast-forward, and we can also ask: What emerges from the experience that some immigrants have of being in the dominant culture in their native countries and then being a minority or labeled as "racialized other" in the U.S.? Oliver invites us to think about the theological gifts that Latinos bring to the practice of multicultural ministry given their "wide and rich cultural matrix."

An important subject is how Latinos are seen, and see themselves, relative to fraught racial constructs in the United States. In the second reading, Robert Lovato helps name the way in which Latinos can get lost in the over-focus in the U.S. on the black/white divide – what is referred to as the "black-white binary." He asks us to be more conscious of stereotypes, invisibility, and gentrification, and more aware of how Latinos have been and are now subject to racial violence.

This session also can be a time to name and notice that an increasing number of Americans identify as mixed race and arguably have much to teach the rest of us, since the experience of identifying and being identified as mixed race in our society can provide a unique perspective on these issues.

Lastly, there is a short film to watch this session: an animated summary of Jared Diamond's groundbreaking book *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. Diamond tackles a critically important question, which perhaps is hanging in the air by this point in the series: What are the roots of global inequality? Why did Europeans succeed in conquering so much of the world? It is not because they are a "superior race," as racist ideology would have it. These days, many are tempted to wonder not whether *racial superiority* explains it, but whether *moral inferiority* does. Some naturally recoil at this suggestion, but others (of all backgrounds) are thinking it, so let's talk about it. What's *wrong* with Europeans, many wonder, that they could perpetrate so much harm?

"The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion...but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do." – Samuel Huntington

According to Diamond's research, the answer does not lie in any inherent human differences, but rather in the accident of geography that gave Europeans the advantage in relation to guns, germs, and steel. The academic community is not settled on these questions, and scholars offer a variety of theories that build on or go beyond Diamond's focus on climate and geography. But in any case, Diamond rightly points away from both the ideas of *racial superiority* or *moral inferiority* as the explanation. No group of humans has had a monopoly on sinfulness or saintliness; those are spread throughout human life across time and geography.

I hope the short reflection piece that I've written in response to these questions invites tender conversation. This may also be the right session to assign Rev. Stephen Phelps' theological essay from the "Religious Resources" section. What does your heart say? Where do you feel you stand in relation to the circle of humanity, the human family? Who gets to say who stands where? If you sense (as an individual or as a member of a collective) that you are seen as on the outside, in what spirit do you feel called to walk toward, and perhaps into, the circle? Play or pray with the image in your imagination, and see where it leads you. The final session grapples even more directly with repentance, repair, and reconciliation, but it will be natural to meditate and speak on these core questions throughout the series.