Global racism, colonialism and white supremacy

By Jed Koball, Mission Co-Worker, and Valéry Nodem, Associate for International Hunger

Over the past 50 years, the Presbyterian Hunger Program has been witness to the impacts of systemic racism on the lives of people of color both in the U.S. and around the world. The ideology of white supremacy that undergirds systemic racism is a global force whose eradication demands global solidarity. Toward this end, it is important to understand how such an evil ideology came to be and how it is manifest today among our partners in the world.

Most of the countries where we partner were once colonized by European countries. European colonialism was driven by the Three Gs:

- Gold: Explorers were in search of wealth for themselves and for their empires.
- God: Europeans defined non-Christians as uncivilized. The Church’s “doctrines of discovery” justified their claims to lands considered “unoccupied” or “pagan.”
- Glory: Colonization was instrumental to competing empires in their pursuits of global domination.

Global racism, colonialism and white supremacy

The pursuit of domination coupled with the encounter of different peoples bred the ideology that humanity can be divided into races and that the white race is superior. Ultimately, through the practice of the Three Gs, this ideology led to racist structures and norms that are lived out to this day around the world.

In Peru, we have learned from our partner Red Uniedos Manos Peru (RUMP) how such structural racism is manifest today. Five hundred years ago, prior to the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors, King Ferdinand of Spain gave his famous dictum: “Get gold, humanely if possible, but at all costs, get gold.” About 20 years later, Francisco Pizarro arrived on horseback with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other. Pizarro sought the chief Inca — Atahualpa. As legend goes, shortly after an exchange of

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Deep Links Between Racism and Climate Change

By Beth Gander, journalist and the author of “Choked: Life and Breath in the Age of Air Pollution”

Elizabeth Yeampierre sees the fights against climate change and racial injustice as deeply intertwined, noting that the transition to a low-carbon future is connected to "workers’ rights, land use, and how people are treated."

Yeampierre calls for a just transition to a low-carbon future that includes not just renewable energy but healthy food and all of the things that people need in order to thrive. The word "just transition" is a process that moves us away from a fossil fuel economy to local livable economies, to regenerative economies. Those are different economies of scale that include not just renewable energy but healthy food and all of the things that people need in order to thrive.

The climate solution is we reduce carbon, but the environmental justice problem is that the transition to a low-carbon future is connected to "workers’ rights, land use, and how people are treated."

Elizabeth Yeampierre has been an important voice on these issues for more than two decades. As co-chair of the Climate Justice Alliance, she leads a coalition of more than 70 organizations focused on addressing racial and economic inequities together with climate change. In an interview with Yale Environment 360, Yeampierre draws a direct line from slavery and the rapacious exploitation of natural resources to current issues of environmental justice. "I think about people who got the worst food, the worst health care, the worst treatment, and then when freed, were given lands that were eventually surrounded by things like petrochemical industries," says Yeampierre.

A Just Transition

The following is an excerpt: the full article can be found at www.pcusa.org/food.

This article first appeared in Yale Environment 360 - e360.yale.edu. The original article can be found at bit.ly/justrans21 and is also published in full at www.pcusa.org/food.

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The killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on African Americans, Latino and Native Americans have cast new light on the racism that remains deeply embedded in U.S. society. It is as present in matters of the environment as in other aspects of life.

October includes World Food Day (Oct. 16), and the Food Week of Action. Find educational, worship and other links at www.pcusa.org/foodweek.

The second Sunday in November can be a focus on Hunger and Homelessness Sunday. Find resources at www.pcusa.org/homelessness.

Dismantling Structural Racism as a Part of Anti-Hunger Work

By Rebecca Barnes, coordinator for PHP

Racism and white supremacy are sins. Power and privilege embedded in our societal and church structures have long created, maintained, exacerbated and enabled racial injustice. We are called to confess this sin, to actively turn from it, and to create a world where the image Dei is celebrated in each person.

Because of the inequalities and injustices long perpetuated in church and society, we are particular in naming and affirming that God loves all Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American and People of Color communities, that Christ calls for the liberation of all people and that the Holy Spirit is moving to make a more just world.

As Presbyterians who work to alleviate hunger and to eliminate all intersectional root reasons why hunger exists, we know that we must stand shoulder to shoulder with others fighting to dismantle structural racism and to actively turn from it, and to create a world where the PC(USA) national office building in Louisville, KY in summer 2020.

'Projecting Hope,' a public art installation by artist Laura Lee, is displayed on the PC(USA) national office building in Louisville, KY in summer 2020. The project, along with a website called Hope20/20, is designed as a way of processing, healing and connecting to others. Projecting Hope uses light to cast a shadow on the building, which is the backdrop for a stitched fabric collage of images taken around the city of Louisville. The installation is a community project to celebrate the resilience of those who have been on the frontlines of the pandemic and the systemic issues of the pandemic. Projecting Hope also serves as a reminder of the need to listen, learn and be guided by the experiences of those around us.

This project is part of a larger initiative called Hope20/20, a yearlong project that aims to use art to promote healing and community during and beyond the pandemic.

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Reparations Cannot Wait

By Christian Brooks, Representative on Domestic Issues, PC(USA) Office of Public Witness

The concept of reparations is not new to the federal government. Examining the impacts of policy and providing reparations to impacted communities is a common governmental practice. In 1862, Congress passed the Compensated Emancipation Act, which ended enslavement in Washington, D.C. However, the law also provided direct compensation to slave owners in D.C. for the “loss of their human property.” Additionally, in 1980, Congress established the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians to study the wrongful internment of Japanese citizens and permanent residents during World War II. This led to the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which issued a formal apology and provided compensation to survivors of internment and their families.

Continued evidence shows the detrimental impact of racist policies and practices on the Black community (police brutality, health disparities, the racial wealth gap, etc.). In 2020 alone, we saw many examples of the impact of our country’s long history of systemic racism on the Black community. However, despite the proof, the U.S. government has never apologized or provided redress to the Black community for the harm caused by enslavement and systemic racism. In the summer of 2020, we saw hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets calling for justice. These protests were a demand not only for an end to police brutality, but for America to repent and atone for its sins against the Black community. H.R. 40 serves as a first step toward repentance and atonement.

H.R. 40, the “Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act,” is strategically named after the failed promise of 40 acres and a mule to freed Blacks after the American Civil War. The bill will create an expert federal commission to research reparations for the African American descendants of enslavement. The commission of 13 people would be tasked with researching the history of enslavement in the United States and systemic racism, including federal and state governments’ role in supporting it, and recommend appropriate remedies to Congress.

H.R. 40 was first introduced by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) in 1989. It has been introduced in every Congress since that time. Support for the commission has continued to grow over the years. However, despite the continued support, the bill had not been brought to a committee vote until April 14, 2021. After more than 30 years in committee, the bill passed the vote and is now waiting to be scheduled for a floor vote.

At the 216th General Assembly (2004), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopted the report of the Task Force to Study Reparations, which affirmed that “Jesus Christ calls us to repair wrongs done to one another and to work for personal and social reconciliation and renewal.” This involves remembering, restoring, repairing, and redressing injustices for the purpose of reconciliation and human restitution… and acknowledgment of beneficial gains at the expense of others or harm done to others… In order for us to move forward as a nation and heal from atrocities committed against the Black community in the past and present, reparations is necessary.

Many educational institutions have acknowledged their contributions to enslavement. Our own Union Presbyterian Seminary has created a $1 million endowment in support of reparations for descendants of enslaved Africans. For the first time in U.S. history, local governments are taking steps toward redress. Recently, the city of Evanston, Illinois, established the Local Reparations Restorative Housing Program as a step “towards repairing historic harm to the Black and African American community caused by past racial discriminatory housing policies and practices in Evanston.” These initiatives are great first steps. Our government must now fully acknowledge its culpability in the institution of enslavement and systemic racism, the resulting harms to the Black community, and make restitution.

1. LAND AND POWER GRABBING

Slavery and colonization were built on the extraction of people’s labor and resources for the development of industrialized countries. Indigenous and other racially or ethnically marginalized communities often do not own titles to their land and are frequently forced off their lands after large-scale land concessions are granted by governments to corporate and elite interests for resource extraction without their consent.

2. BIPOC TARGETED

Many Indigenous and other racially or ethnically marginalized communities live in biodiverse and resource-rich regions that are targeted by multinational corporations for their revenue-generating potential for extracting oil, gas or other resources. Furthermore, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities are more likely to be located in zones with higher risks of exposure to contaminants than other communities.

3. RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Industrial extraction of natural resources often violates the rights of Indigenous communities, including their right to free, prior and informed consent, which is recognized in the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous communities often do not know their legal rights and have limited access to the judicial system, health and a healthy environment.

4. CORPORATE RIGHTS

The rights of foreign investors to profits are prioritized, and protected under trade agreements, and very often supersede the rights of BIPOC communities to public health and a healthy environment.

5. UNEQUAL ECONOMICS

Governments and corporations make a lot of profits from oil, gas and mining projects. But the revenues generated often do not contribute to the development of impacted communities, which tend to be poor and exposed to toxins from resource extraction. There also continues to be a lack of transparency in the revenues generated by extractive projects.

6. EXPOSURE TO TOXINS

Extractive practices have contaminated the air, waterways and soils of racial and ethnic minorities, Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups, exposing people to toxic metals and other harmful pollutants.

Resources

1. www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/civil-ref/DCEmancipationAct_FeaturedDoc.htm
5. www.presbyterianmission.org/story/union-presbyterian-seminary-creates-1m-endowment-in-support-of-reparations-for-enslaved-africans
7. www.content.govdelivery.com/accounts/ILEVANTION/bulletin/2cp9iap

2. www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/civil-ref/DCEmancipationAct_FeaturedDoc.htm
5. www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/report/task-force-reparations
7. www.content.govdelivery.com/accounts/ILEVANTION/bulletin/2cp9iap
Environmental Racism

Environmental racism, a form of systemic racism, refers to the greater impact of environmental hazards on (and fewer environmental benefits for) people of color. It is no accident that communities of color experience more environmental harm and fewer environmental benefits. These outcomes are the direct result of policies and decisions by governments and corporations that have targeted certain communities, forcing them to live in proximity to sources of toxic waste such as sewage works, mines, landfills, power stations and more, while protecting other communities from such impacts.

People of color are 3X more likely than whites to live in areas with restricted access to nature. For example, 70% percent of low-income communities live in areas lacking green spaces.

61% of drinking water systems on Native American reservations had health violations, compared with 27% of all public systems in the United States.

The Environmental Protection Agency has denied 95% of the civil-rights claims brought by communities of color against polluters.

Black Americans breathe 56% more pollution than they produce, and Latinos breathe 63% more — while whites breathe 17% less.

The Environmental Justice movement resists environmental racism and works to ensure that all people live in safe, healthy and prosperous communities.

As people of faith, we are called to seek well-being for all communities on a thriving, bountiful earth. We can do this by:

- Learning about environmental racism in your local context and globally
- Doing your own research to understand how environmental racism is a part of systemic racism
- Listening to and learning from people with firsthand experiences
- Connecting with organizations that advocate for environmental justice.

Learn more at www.pcusa.org/environmentaljustice

Sources:

- www.discovermagazine.com/health/green-spaces-are-a-necessity-not-an-amenity-how-can-cities-make-them
We Take a Matthew 25 Stand
By Rev. Shanea D. Leonard, Associate of Gender and Racial Justice

One of the evil truths in our country that we do not always like to discuss is the fact that racism is as American as baseball, apple pie and the Fourth of July. From the founding of this country over 244 years ago on the stolen land of Indigenous nations who largely succumb to racialized genocide, to the legalized bigotry against Asian siblings in the Chinese Removal Act and Japanese internment camps, to the segregation and ill treatment of Latin and Hispanic immigrants at the southern border, to the nascent core of deep-rooted discrimination and evil perpetrated on Black people throughout the centuries, part of the fabric of our nation is the incessant existence of inequity. We cannot deny the fact that our nation is built upon the ideals of racism and, furthermore, that the Church is culpable in much of it. Racism is a systemic and sinful evil that has seeped into every facet of American society. It is the intentional and unintentional perpetuation of unfair treatment based on race or culture. However, that is not the end of the story. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is taking a definitive stance to face this evil head-on in an effort to eliminate it within our body. One of the three foci of the Mathew 25 initiative started by the General Assembly is the eradication of white supremacy and dismantling of racism. Realizing that the Church is culpable for participating in racist practices and behaviors is an undeniable fact. But the work of making sure we are also proactive in its abolition is the move of the Spirit within our Church to propel us forward. The Matthew 25 initiative states:

“As a Matthew 25 church, our denomination has taken the stand to eradicate white supremacy and dismantle institutionalized racism as we create vital congregations and eliminate poverty. And none of these can be obtained if we do not involve ourselves in ways that create systemic change. We must care about what matters to those in the pews. Making intentional change and creating educational outlets helps to grow the knowledge of Presbyterians on how all fit in the narrative of doing the work of equity, equality and inclusion.”

We must continually remind ourselves that even Jesus had to take care of the dominant needs of the 5,000 before they could be stable enough to hear the gospel message. The needs of our congregants and communities often go beyond just a moving message and an uplifting song. In many ways, the world around us is hindering the humanity of those most disenfranchised in our churches. Racism is the sin that keeps us from living into the beloved kin-dom that Christ calls us to. We cannot lose sight of our moral obligation to care, love and welcome all people. Let us not forget that the Book of Order states, “God sends the Church to work for justice in the world: exercising its power for the common good; dealing honestly in personal and public spheres; seeking dignity and freedom for all people...” (Book of Order, W-5.0304)

This is the foundation of our denomination and the stance we must take in the world today. Thus, the message of the Matthew 25 initiative is not just an ideal from the past, but is collective. As we read the book, we shared our reactions and responses to the book, to this approach, and where to go next. We must care about what matters to those in the pews. Making intentional change and creating educational outlets helps to grow the knowledge of Presbyterians on how all fit in the narrative of doing the work of equity, equality and inclusion. For more information on Black Lives Matter efforts in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and other resources for racial justice, see www.pcusa.org/holdingwitness. Aug. 23–29, 2021, will be a national Presbyterian Week of Action on racial justice and other justice concerns. See www.pcusa.org/wcoaction.

One grant partner supported by the PHP Advisory Committee is Climate Justice Alliance, which among many other things, galvanizes youth and others to march for climate justice for historically harmed and disadvantaged populations.

Congregations and individuals entrust the Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP) with financial support to meet PHP’s mission, of alleviating hunger and eliminating its causes, as a result of trust built over decades of intentional and steady work of the PHP staff. Those staff have worked with purpose and clarity to build networks of trust to identify and enter into partnership with organizations whose missions and approaches align with PHP’s. PHP staff and the Advisory Committee have the distinct privilege and difficulty of determining how to use monetary gifts, and make the difficult choices of how to spread the wealth of the church to those who can best use it.

Over the past two years, we have worked to examine that privilege, and in a way that we hope allows us to better fulfill our mission. In 2019, we committed to reading “Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance” by Edgar Villanueva, and then had center group discussions around topics within the book.

“Decolonizing Wealth” centers the discussion of philanthropy and grant-making – the main financial approach that PHP utilizes – around colonization. For centuries, our world’s history has included and been rooted in dividing, conquering and exploiting people. We have formed haves and have-nots, whether they be identified by the country where they live, the color of their skin, the way they speak, education level, gender or any other of the myriad ways in which we separate one from another. This impacts the way PHP and all of philanthropic and granting groups work. For “[t]he basis of traditional philanthropy is to preserve wealth, and that wealth is fundamentally money that’s been twice stolen: once through the exploitation of natural resources and cheap labor, and the second time, through tax evasion.”

For Villanueva, the essence of decolonizing wealth is to close the gaps, particularly around race. To do that, to truly be part of a justice-seeking solution, if we are to give our money and talents, we need to be aware of the history. The history of how groups were separated from their land, the history of affordable housing, health care, education. Only by employing a lens of race and a real understanding of how we arrived here can we deploy resources in a manner that will provide solutions that work for all.

Collectively, as we read the book, we shared our reactions and responses to the book, to this approach, and where to go next. So very much appreciated the different ways in which the book impacted each of us. For some, the approach was more natural than for others. Some had critiques; others, questions. What I loved was the clear sense that teammates were invested in the conversation, and in seeing if this exercise could strengthen our understanding of our role and our privilege. It is truly a privilege and honor to be able to support the amazing PHP team and the groups with whom we collaborate. We also have privilege in being part of a mainline denomination formed in the Global North and boasting eight previous (all white) U.S. presidents. Who we are now as a denomination is predicated on centuries of wealth accumulation, land acquisition and ownership, and tax advantages as a U.S. nonprofit. This does not diminish anyone’s work, but it is necessary to see how we came to the position of privilege and power that we hold now, so we can begin to discuss what we can do to honor those who did not benefit as we did, or who suffered because of the systems that advantaged us.

And this is the crux of where we are now as PHP staff and an Advisory Committee. Just as PC(USA)A wrestles with the discussion about where to invest its endowment, we wrestle with the question of how to invest our grant funding. Each year, for instance, only 7% or 8% of grant funding goes to communities of color; I am delighted to say that PHP gives more than 80% of international and national hunger grants to communities of color. I am delighted to say that PHP gives more than 80% of international and national hunger grants to communities of color. It is truly a privilege and honor to be able to support the amazing PHP team and the groups with whom we collaborate. We also have privilege in being part of a mainline denomination formed in the Global North and boasting eight previous (all white) U.S. presidents. Who we are now as a denomination is predicated on centuries of wealth accumulation, land acquisition and ownership, and tax advantages as a U.S. nonprofit. This does not diminish anyone’s work, but it is necessary to see how we came to the position of privilege and power that we hold now, so we can begin to discuss what we can do to honor those who did not benefit as we did, or who suffered because of the systems that advantaged us. PHP and Decolonizing Wealth
By Alex Peterson, PHP Advisory Committee

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The Presbyterian Hunger Program  

Fast-forward 500 years. The extractive model still drives the economy, and Peru continues to depend on foreign investment for gold to get gold and other metals. Peru ranks sixth in the world in gold production; second in silver, copper and zinc. Extractives are the backbone of the economy, accounting for two-thirds of its export revenue. But at what cost?

Nearly 20% of the national territory of Peru has been concessionsed to foreign mining companies. The land conceded is primarily occupied by people of Indigenous descent. The presence of the mining industry on this land is a threat to their life and livelihood. For the past 20 years, RUMP has been accompanying the people of La Oroya who are present-day victims of such thirst for gold. La Oroya is often considered one of the 10 most contaminated places in the world, where almost 99% of the children have been shown to have extreme levels of lead in their blood. The cause of the contamination is a metals smelter owned by a U.S.-based corporation. After pressure from RUMP and others in civil society for the government to enforce environmental regulations, the smelter declared bankruptcy. It claimed the environmental regulations were more costly than it had anticipated, and because of this, it further claimed that its rights as a foreign investor as stipulated in a free trade agreement between the U.S. and Peru had been violated. In effect, it claimed that its right to profit supersedes the human rights to breathe clean air. This case is still pending, and in the meantime, no remediation or health care has been provided to the people. La Oroya is but one of over 4,000 environmental mining liabilities in Peru today that put at risk the lives of over 11 million people — most of whom are of Indigenous descent.

Perhaps the most important question then comes to us: how might we (the Church) change? Will we be complicit in the continued conquest of places like Peru? or, will we participate in something new?

This year marks the 200th anniversary of Peruvian liberation from Spain as well as the 20th anniversary of RUMP. Many might ask what has changed over these 200 years or what difference our global partner has made over the past 20 years? But our partners will respond that it is important to first ask what has not changed over the past 500 years. From the perspective of Indigenous populations impacted by mining activity, many would argue that the only change is those who control the shots. During colonial rule, the extractive industry served the State — getting gold to expand the King’s empire. In this era of free trade and globalization, it is the State that serves the Extractive Industry — designing laws and trade agreements that facilitate its drive for profit. As for what has not changed - the land is still being misappropriated, extracted and contaminated. The gold is still largely being exported to sustain the way of life in higher income countries. And those paying the price with their lives and livelihoods are still the indigenous.

With the cooperative, the community actually owns the utility, owns the energy source. People will be able to access renewable energy, at a reduced cost, be hired locally to build it — and have ownership.

We're hoping this model will birth more projects like this.

Now, we’re reaching out to small businesses. They’re struggling because of how COVID-19 has affected the economy. When we started this project, we were thinking it would provide resilience to disruptions of the supply chain and other systems from extreme weather events. We hadn’t anticipated the disruption would be something like COVID. But these models become a real benefit in moments like this where you don’t know where your next paycheck is coming from. You have access to energy that is both renewable — which means it has a health benefit — and also benefits your pocketbook.

Deep Lanka, continued from p. 3

Protests from PHP Joaing Handa network Praja Abilasha in Sri Lanka, standing with other partners against the eviction of farmers and fishermen from their lands for tourism projects.
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The views represented in this publication are those of the writer and do not officially represent PC(USA) or PHP.

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