

“From Selma to Ferguson: A Sacred Conversation on Race”

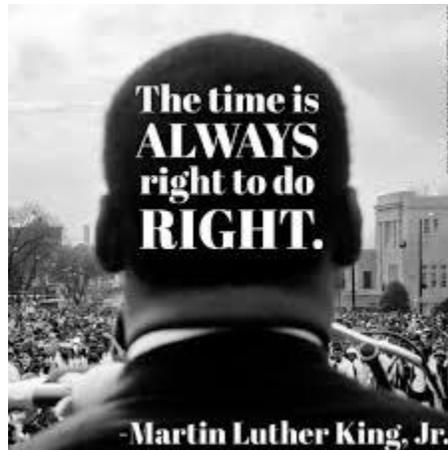
Discussion Resource for the Movie *SELMA*

The Racial Justice Ministries
Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ

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A note to facilitators

- **Gentle** – Be gentle with yourself as you prepare to lead this conversation. This film is difficult to watch and the contemporary comparisons are heartbreaking to acknowledge. **Tips:** Wear comfortable clothes and be sure to provide “Comfort Food” for yourself and participants. *(It is much more difficult to argue when we are at table together.)*

- **Prayer-** Conversations that address the reality of racism are difficult. We have the benefit of having these conversations within a faith-based context. One of the gifts of our context is the ability to pray prior to, during and at the conclusion of the dialog. **Tips:** Begin the conversation with a written prayer (be sure to name the spirit and attitude you hope to foster in the dialog). Close the conversation with an extemporaneous prayer (be sure to name the themes and struggles that emerged in your discussion).

- **Prepare** – Allow your curiosity to inform your preparation. If the events and individuals referenced from the movie are unfamiliar to you, be sure to take a few moments to google the names and places referenced. **Tips:** Be sure to consider both the historic and contemporary view of these issues. Here are a couple videos to reflect on each. **Historic:** “1965 Voting Rights Act” **Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQ2j8zSxPgU>. **Contemporary:** “The Last Words of 11 People Killed by Police” **Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1ZXqKriGp0>

Continued

- **Safe Space** - This conversation is likely to create discomfort for participants. It is natural to look away when faced with the brutality of racism. Your role as facilitator is to create a safe space in the midst of discomfort. This will require acknowledging the discomfort and setting clear boundaries for participants. **Tips:** Two things: NAME the discomfort up front and be sure to name the covenant you will follow during the discussion.
- **Naming Racism** – This guide provides framing to engage the issues related to personal, interpersonal, cultural and institutional racism. There are a number of universal themes in this film and some participants may want to engage them in depth. Both are important frames for dialog. **Tips:** Resist the temptation to avoid discussing the impact of racism in the film and in contemporary times. These impacts are both contemporary and historic.
- **Contemporary Conversation** – Recent events across our country including but not limited to the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice, have raised awareness on the impact of systemic racism. These conversations are an opportunity to discuss contemporary challenges. This resource connects the modern era Civil Rights Movement with the historic Civil Rights movements. **Tips:** Be sure to acknowledge the difference between interpersonal racism and institutional racism.





God created [humanity] in [God's] own image, in the image of God, [God] created [them]; male and female [God] created them. - Genesis 1:27

Selma to Ferguson: A Sacred Conversation on Race **Conversation Outline**

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| I. Opening Prayer | 3-4 Minutes |
| II. Scripture Reading - Genesis 1:27 | 1-2 Minutes |
| III. Lighting a Candle | 2-3 Minutes |
| IV. Safe Space | 5-7 Minutes |
| V. A Few Definitions | 5-10 Minutes |
| VI. Exploring...How We Feel? | 20 Minutes |
| VII. Exploring...What We Think? | 20 Minutes |
| VIII. Exploring...What We Will Do? | 20 Minutes |

A Sacred Conversation on Race

Exploring...How We Feel?

Exploring our feelings after watching a movie that includes racial violence can be a difficult task. Most of us pull away when we are forced to witness cruelty. Yet, the ability to empathize with the plight and suffering of others is a vital part of our faith-journey. Take a moment to consider the scene(s) in this movie where racism was on display. Remembering that racism is more than just a personal attitude. It is the institutionalized form of that attitude...it is both overt and covert. **Overt racism** is easy to recognize. In overt racism it is clear that the cause for inappropriate behavior is based on prejudiced views on race. But **covert racism** is harder to recognize. Often inappropriate behaviors maybe attributed to causes unrelated to racial prejudice. **As you remember these scenes close your eyes and recall how you felt.**

1. How did you feel at the conclusion of this film?
2. What scene(s), if any, in the movie *Selma* made you feel sad?
3. What scene(s), if any, in the movie *Selma* made you angry?
4. What scene(s), if any, in the movie *Selma* gave you hope?
5. Which characters, if any, did you feel connected to in this film?



Tips: Consider the opening scene when we witness the death of 4 African-American girls. **Addie Mae Collins** (14), **Cynthia Wesley** (14), **Carole Robertson** (14) and **Denise McNair** (11) were killed in the 16th Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama on September 15, 1963.

A Sacred Conversation on Race

Exploring...What We Think?

The images on the screen in the movie Selma, which depict violent confrontations between peaceful protestors and police, are remarkably similar to recent images on TV, which depict violent confrontations between peaceful protestors and police. The images of police using tear gas to disperse crowds and violence to subdue those who broke the law (by assembling) galvanized religious leaders and people of faith to join the historic Civil Rights Movement. **Close your eyes for a moment and consider the images of the deaths of Eric Garner and Tamir Rice.**

1. Why do you think religious leaders and people of faith traveled to Alabama to participate in the march to Selma in 1965?
2. What, if any, similarities do you see in the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson (shot by police after participating in a march) and Eric Garner (asphyxiated by police-using an illegal choke hold)?
3. What, if any, differences do you see in the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson and Eric Garner?
4. What, if any, similarities do you see in the death of the 4 little girls at the 16th street Baptist Church (killed by a bomb in their church) and the death of Tamir Rice (killed by police in his neighborhood playground)?
5. What, if any, differences do you see in the death of the 4 little girls at the 16th Baptist Church and Tamir Rice?



Tip:

Ferguson, MO August, 2014



Pettus Bridge, Alabama March, 1965

A Sacred Conversation on Race

Exploring...What Will We Do?

James Reeb traveled from Boston, MA after he watched the news on Bloody Sunday (March 7, 1965, the day protestors were beaten while attempting to cross the Edmond Pettus Bridge in Alabama). James was a white Unitarian Universalist minister. When asked why he traveled from New England to participate in a Civil Rights March for People of Color in the South, he replied “I couldn’t stand by.” People of faith, often respond to tragedy and crisis around the world. Youth groups travel to build houses in communities devastated by natural disasters. Missionaries sacrifice personal comfort to spread the gospel in impoverished countries. People of good will often donate money and time to individuals battling life-threatening diseases. **Take a few moments to consider the last time you felt compelled to do something because of a crisis?**

1. What would you do to respond to racism if you were brave? (Imagine you are not afraid.)
2. What do you think you SHOULD do as a person of faith? (Imagine what Jesus would do as it relates to racism.)
3. What could you do to combat racism? (Imagine that you could do ANYTHING.)
4. What will you do to combat racism?

Tips: Educating ourselves about the use of lethal force by police departments, does not diminish our support for individual police officers. Here are the names and links to several organizations and organizers in the modern day Civil Rights Movement. **Hands Up United** <http://www.handsupunited.org/> . **Millennial Activists United** <http://www.millennialau.org/>. Twitter: Alexis Templeton **@MusicOverPeople**; Ashley Yates **@BrownBlaze**; and Brittany Ferrell **@bdoulaoblongata**.

FACILITATOR RESOURCES

*Definitions

*Originally produced in the *Sacred Conversations on Race Resource*: Developed by the United Church of Christ. Link:

http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/2023/SCbook-whole.pdf?1418425547

RACISM: Is racial prejudice plus power. Racism is the intentional or unintentional use of power to isolate, separate and exploit others. This use of power is based on a belief in superior origin, identity of supposed racial characteristics. Racism confers certain privileges on and defends the dominant group, which in turn sustains and perpetuates racism. Both consciously and unconsciously, racism is enforced and maintained by the legal, cultural, religious, education, economic, political and military institutions of societies. Racism is more than just a personal attitude. It is the institutionalized form of that attitude...it is both overt and covert.

PERSONAL RACISM: Encompasses our values, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. Racism is expressed in the personal realm in such things as fear of difference, prejudice, and stereotypes. **Examples** include the belief European American cultural and religious traditions are inherently superior or the belief that People of Color are less capable of academic excellence than White People.

INTERPERSONAL RACISM: Individuals act on their fears, prejudices, and stereotypes. These behaviors, which can be conscious or unconscious, can be expressed as discrimination, condescension, verbal abuse or physical violence. **Examples** include such things as White people avoiding contact with People of Color or White People exhibiting paternalism in their interactions with People of Color.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: Finds expression in policies, practices, rules, or procedures that have been formally adopted or are informally in place. These policies, practices, rules, and procedures function, intentionally or unintentionally, to grant unearned privileges to White people and to disadvantage People of Color. **Examples** of institutional racism include such things as racial profiling and searching for new staff members of a congregation through predominantly White friendship, publicity, and colleague networks.

CULTURAL RACISM: Refers to what groups value as right, true, beautiful, normal and worthy of our time and attention. Our cultural norms or beliefs affect what we understand to be normal or appropriate styles of behavior, expression, and thought. Cultural racism is manifest when the cultural values of the dominant racial group are considered the only acceptable values. **Examples** of cultural racism include such things as images of Christ as a White Person or the belief that European classical music and hymns are “real” church music.

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Historic Individuals and Events

Annie Lee Cooper: (June 2, 1910 - November 24, 2010) was born in Selma, Alabama on June 2, 1910, one of ten children of Lucy Jones and Charles Wilkerson Sr. By the seventh grade, Cooper dropped out of school, and moved to [Kentucky](#) to live with an older sister.

In 1962, Cooper returned to her hometown to care for her elderly mother. About this time she also began to participate in the [civil rights movement](#), appalled by the fact that although she had been a registered voter in Pennsylvania and Ohio, she was unable to register to vote in Alabama. Her attempt to register to vote in 1963 resulted in her being fired from her job as a nurse at a rest home. She then worked as a motel clerk.

In January 1965, Cooper stood in line for hours outside the [Dallas County Courthouse](#) to register to vote until Sheriff Jim Clark ordered her to vacate the premises. Clark prodded Cooper in the neck with a [billy club](#) until Cooper turned around and knocked the sheriff in the jaw. Deputies then wrestled Cooper down as Clark continued to beat her repeatedly with his club. Cooper was charged with "criminal provocation" and was escorted to the county jail, and then held for 11 hours before being allowed to leave. She spent the period of her incarceration singing spirituals. Some in the sheriff's department wanted to charge her with attempted murder. Following this incident, Cooper became a registered voter in her home state.

Source Annie Lee Cooper http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annie_Lee_Cooper

Murder of 4 Little Girls: The 16th Street Baptist Church in [Birmingham, Alabama](#) was bombed on Sunday, September 15, 1963 as an act of white supremacist [terrorism](#). The explosion at the [African-American](#) church, which killed four girls, marked a turning point in the [United States 1960s Civil Rights Movement](#) and contributed to support for passage of the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#).

Although city leaders had reached a settlement in May with demonstrators and started to integrate public places, not everyone agreed with ending [racial segregation](#). Bombings and other acts of violence followed the settlement, and the church had become an obvious target. The three-story [16th Street Baptist Church](#) in Birmingham, Alabama had been a rallying point for [civil rights](#) activities through the spring of 1963, and was where the students who were arrested during the [1963 Birmingham campaign's Children's Crusade](#) had been organized and trained by SCLC Director of Direct Action [James Bevel](#). The church was used as a meeting-place for other civil rights leaders such as [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#), [Ralph David Abernathy](#) and [Fred Shuttlesworth](#). Tensions were escalated when the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the [Congress on Racial Equality](#) (CORE) became involved in a campaign to register African Americans to vote in Birmingham.

Source 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th_Street_Baptist_Church_bombing



Murder of Jimmie Lee Jackson: (December 16, 1938^{[1][2]}-February 26, 1965) was a civil rights activist in [Marion, Alabama](#), and a [deacon](#) in the Baptist church. On February 18, 1965, he was beaten by troopers and shot by [Alabama State Trooper James Bonard Fowler](#) while participating in a peaceful voting rights march in his city.^[3] Jackson was unarmed; he died several days later in the hospital.

His death inspired the [Selma to Montgomery marches](#) in March 1965, a major event in the [American Civil Rights Movement](#) that helped gain Congressional passage of the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#). This opened the door to millions of African Americans being able to vote again in Alabama and across the South, regaining participation as citizens in the political system for the first time since the turn of the 20th century, when they were [disenfranchised](#) by state constitutions and discriminatory practices.^[3]

In 2007 former trooper Fowler was indicted in Jackson's death, and in 2010 he pleaded guilty to manslaughter. He was sentenced to six months in prison.

Source Jimmie Lee Jackson http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmie_Lee_Jackson



Murder of James Reeb: (January 1, 1927 – March 11, 1965) was an American [Unitarian Universalist](#) minister from [Boston, Massachusetts](#), and a pastor and [civil rights](#) activist in [Washington, D.C.](#) While participating in the [Selma Voting Rights Movement](#) actions in [Selma, Alabama](#), in 1965, he was beaten severely by white segregationists and died of head injuries two days later in the hospital. He was 38 years old.

Source James Reeb http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Reeb

Civil Rights Act of 1964: An act to enforce the constitutional right to vote, to confer jurisdiction upon the district courts of the United States of America to provide

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injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations, to authorize the Attorney General to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, to extend the Commission on Civil Rights, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, to establish a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and for other purposes.

Source Civil Rights Act 1964 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_Rights_Act_of_1964

1965 Voting Rights Act: An act to enforce the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and for other purposes. This “act to enforce the [fifteenth amendment](#) to the [Constitution](#)” was signed into law 95 years after the amendment was ratified. In those years, African Americans in the South faced tremendous obstacles to voting, including poll taxes, literacy tests, and other bureaucratic restrictions to deny them the right to vote. They also risked harassment, intimidation, economic reprisals, and physical violence when they tried to register or vote. As a result, very few African Americans were registered voters, and they had very little, if any, political power, either locally or nationally.

Sources 1965 Voting Rights Act:

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=100> and
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting_Rights_Act_of_1965

Contemporary Individuals and Organizations



Death of Eric Garner On July 17, 2014, **Eric Garner** died in [Staten Island, New York](#), after a police officer put him in a [chokehold](#). The incident was recorded by a bystander and posted on YouTube. Mr. Garner repeated "I can't breathe" 11 times while officers held him face down on the ground. After losing consciousness he waited 7 minutes for the paramedics to arrive. Paramedics did not perform CPR once they arrived and Mr. Garner was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital.

Source Eric Garner http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Eric_Garner



Death of Tamir Rice The **shooting of Tamir Rice**, a 12-year-old [African American](#) boy, occurred on November 22, 2014, in [Cleveland, Ohio](#). Two police officers, 26-year-old Timothy Loehmann and 46-year-old Frank Garmback, responded after receiving a police dispatch call describing a "young black male" brandishing a gun at people in a city park. A caller reported that a juvenile, was pointing "a pistol" at random people in the Cudell Recreation Center, and stated twice that the gun was "probably fake". The officers reported that upon their arrival, Rice reached towards a gun in his waistband. Loehmann fired two shots, hitting Rice once in the torso.

Source Tamir Rice http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_Tamir_Rice

Hands Up United <http://www.handsupunited.org/> **Hands Up United** is a social justice activist organization based in Ferguson, Missouri formed after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer.

Millennial Activist United: <http://www.millennialau.org/> MAU build grassroots power and leadership to create strong, sustainable communities. We believe Black is beautiful and knowledge is power. We demand accountability for victims of social injustice

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in Ferguson, across America and the world. We are committed to learning strategy and tactics from the generation before us while simultaneously carving our own millennial voice and style for the unique challenges of a so-called post-racial America. We're an educated, funny, creative, passionate crew putting much of our regular lives on hold to hunt down justice. We're dope, we're daring and we're not going anywhere anytime soon. Join us. The MAU TEAM is made up of Alexis Templeton, Ashley Yates and Brittany Ferrell.



ALEXIS TEMPLETON
@MusicOverPeople

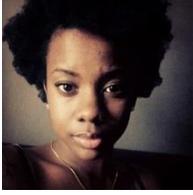
Alexis Templeton is a 22 year old Ferguson resident that was turned into an activist on August 9th. She has put school on hold to fight for justice. She has given her voice, her passion, her soul and her love to the movement.



ASHLEY YATES
@BrownBlaze

Ashley is an activist and poet that was raised in Florissant, right next door to Ferguson. She is using her talents and twitter to let the world know that she is tired of seeing our

black people get gunned down. She is dedicated to building the organization that is needed to bring about expedient change.



BRITTANY FERRELL
@bdoulaoblongata

Brittany is a 25 year old mother who has put nursing school on hold to fight to get free. She leads marches and protests with strength that few can match. She manages to express anger, struggle, fear and love in every word she chants.

Prayer for Facilitators

“Holy Spirit, I come before You now, lifting up those who will serve as facilitators in these Sacred Conversations. I give You thanks for individuals and communities that are willing to engage in difficult dialog. I thank You for their courage to create safe-spaces. I thank You for their tenacity in attending to the details in convening community. I give You thanks for their phone calls, texts, Facebook posts, Instagram messages and tweets inviting individuals into A Sacred Conversation on Race. In the moments when they feel, underprepared or ill-equipped to unmask, dismantle and eradicate racism, I ask for Your Peace to be upon them and Your Power to infuse them. Grant them Hope for a better future, and Joy on the journey. Give them community and colleagues in the work. Build a strong network of support to encourage and uplift them. I pray for the communities in which they live and work. I pray for their health and well- being. I pray for the resources to do this work and for the heart to sustain it. Bless now these Your people, by whatever name they call themselves and whatever name they ascribe to YOU. Amen!