

PRAISE FOR  
**How to Fight Racism**

Jemar Tisby has given us a gift in *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey toward Racial Justice*. I deeply appreciate the holistic approach to racial justice outlined in this book and am both challenged and inspired to apply the practical action steps that can promote racial equity. If we all step up and do our part, we can finally achieve racial justice. This book is an important part of moving closer to making this dream a reality.

**CHRISTINE CAINE**, founder, A21 and Propel Women

Those recently awakened or reawakened to the need to pursue racial justice who find themselves wondering “What’s next?” will find the answer here. With authority, clarity, and compassion, Tisby invites readers of all races to join in a transformative journey of learning and doing, a journey marked by both resilience and hope. This is an invaluable book that points the way to deep and enduring change.

**KRISTIN KOBES DU MEZ**, professor of history,  
Calvin University, author of *Jesus and John Wayne*

Jemar Tisby is a sociohistorical scholar par excellence! And he is committed to the advancement of the good news, for all. Tisby offers an unvarnished, biblical approach to antiracist work—one rooted in sound research, biblical knowledge, and a clear-eyed perspective on how white supremacy has made the good news bad news for so many. This is a critically important combination.

**KORIE EDWARDS**, associate professor of sociology,  
Ohio State University

Jemar Tisby reshaped the conversation about race for white Christians with his bestselling, *The Color of Compromise*. Thousands of us came to see the way that our faith had been co-opted by the wicked ideology that sustains racism, and we then became desperate for concrete ideas to break the chains of this unholy alliance. In *How To Fight Racism*, Jemar responds to that very need. In this book, Jemar uses a very accessible framework of ARC (awareness, reconciliation, and commitment) to provide a road map for moving forward. You can be certain that you will walk away from this wonderful book feeling armed with a litany of practical tools for taking the next steps to confront and challenge this systemic and historic evil.

**DANIEL HILL**, pastor, author of  
*White Awake* and *White Lies*

In this clear-eyed and practical book, Jemar Tisby brings his scholarship, faith, and humanity to the inescapable challenges of racial injustice in America. *How to fight Racism* is a timely gift and a biblical challenge. Read it, share it, teach it, live it!

**CHARLES MARSH**, Commonwealth Professor of  
Religious Studies, University of Virginia,  
author of *The Beloved Community*

With clarity and conviction, Jemar lays the path for anyone seeking to uproot racism in their lives, their families, their congregations, or any sphere of influence. Every leader needs this book!

**NICOLE MASSIE MARTIN**, DMin, assistant professor  
of ministry and leadership development,  
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

The value of this book is that it is more than “how-to” instructions aimed at transforming society. This book is also an invitation to a journey of love. To some that will be disappointing; the author invites you to take that up with Jesus.

**BILL PANNELL**, professor emeritus of preaching,  
Fuller Theological Seminary

This book is for people of faith who are ready to fight racism not merely by educating ourselves but by moving towards courageous action in diverse community. Jemar's work at the intersection of awareness, relationships, and commitment will serve the church as we seek to be reconciled, justice-oriented people. The varied narratives and concrete applications Jemar shares are in line with the integrity he has as a leader who is engaged in this multiethnic civil rights moment.

**SANDRA MARIA VAN OPSTAL,**  
executive director of Chasing Justice

*How to Fight Racism* by Jemar Tisby has come at a perfect moment for the church. While racism in America is a highly complex, multilayered reality with a variety of definitions, lived experiences, and proposed solutions, the church of Jesus Christ stands as the only viable hope for ending racism. Even though the church has a mixed record when it comes to racism, it is our fight! If you're new to the fight or could benefit from a concrete road map to a more just and merciful society, this beautiful book makes the complex doable.

**KAY WARREN,** cofounder, Saddleback Church



**HOW  
TO  
FIGHT  
RACISM**



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RACISM**

**Courageous Christianity and the  
Journey toward Racial Justice**

**JEMAR TISBY**

 **ZONDERVAN  
REFLECTIVE**

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*How to Fight Racism*

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Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

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## Chapter 1

# HOW TO FIGHT RACISM

Something is different this time.”

I could hardly believe I had just typed those words in a tweet for thousands of people to read. I study history. I have the receipts of this nation’s racial failures. I am a Black man in the United States.\* I know firsthand that racism still pervades our society. I am neither naive nor optimistic about issues of race in this country.

But in the summer of 2020, a sustained movement of protests and uprisings began to roll through the United States and around the world. A viral cell phone video showed a white police officer kneeling for eight minutes and forty-six seconds on the neck of a prostrate Black man named George Floyd.<sup>1</sup> The officer killed Floyd, and once again a Black human being had become a hashtag. This person made in God’s image and likeness became another victim of racism, anti-Black police brutality, and white supremacy.

Floyd’s murder was just the latest in a string of similar

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\* Throughout this book, the word *Black* is capitalized when referring to the people group descended of people from Africa. This is because naming is a political act, a demonstration of power. For generations, Black people have been denied the power of naming themselves, of self-identifying according to their history, heritage, and personality. Capitalizing the *B* in *Black* is an act of reclamation and dignity. *Black* also refers to a racial and ethnic group, and capitalizing it coheres with other capitalization standards as in *Native American* or *Asian*. Finally, *Black* is the preferred term over *African American* because *Black* is inclusive of all people in the African diaspora regardless of their affiliation with the United States and connotes the global phenomenon of anti-Black racism.

events leading up to the 2020 protests. Breonna Taylor had been killed in a barrage of bullets in a “no-knock” raid by police who had entered the wrong house.<sup>2</sup> Video footage showing Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man out for a jog in a predominantly white neighborhood in Georgia, exposed three white men who pursued, shot, and killed him. They thought he looked suspicious because he had stopped to look in a house that was under construction. They became a law unto themselves and executed Arbery in what many characterized as a modern-day lynching.<sup>3</sup>

Christian Cooper, a Black man birdwatching in Central Park in New York, saw a white woman with an unleashed dog. The park regulations clearly state that dogs need to be on a leash. When he asked her to follow the rules, she called the police on him. Video footage showed her talking to the dispatcher and feigning an imminent threat from Cooper, who stood calmly filming her tirade.<sup>4</sup> Amid these and other similar events of racial profiling and anti-Black brutality, people once again raised the cry “Black lives matter!”

We had been through a round of racial crises recently. In 2014 and 2015, protesters had chanted “Black lives matter” in the wake of Mike Brown’s death at the hands of a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. We saw the response of law enforcement, who came out with tanks, guns, body armor, and tear gas against people protesting for basic dignity and rights. Yet that wave of antiracist resistance rose and fell with little positive change.

We had seen the aftermath of a white supremacist entering the historic Emanuel AME Church in Charleston and murdering nine Black Christians after a Bible study.<sup>5</sup> We had witnessed the deadly “Unite the Right Rally” that brought together khaki-clad white people carrying tiki torches and demanding the protection of a Confederate monument.<sup>6</sup> We even saw the election of a president who regularly engaged in racist and violent rhetoric that seemed to embolden the basest desires of a certain segment of the population.<sup>7</sup>

We had no evidence that the results of protests in 2020 would be any different than all we had seen before.

Yet I could not deny the facts. NASCAR banned confederate flags at their races. Companies such as Nike and Uber gave employees a paid day off to commemorate Juneteenth, the oldest celebration of Black emancipation in the United States.<sup>8</sup> The state flag of Mississippi came down. Confederate monuments came crashing down in cities around the country. Books about racial justice written by Black authors (including one of mine) packed the *New York Times* bestseller list like never before, as people clamored for resources to understand our racial moment.<sup>9</sup>

This time did feel different. The rapid shifts we saw could hardly have been predicted just a few months prior. But the COVID-19 pandemic and years of grassroots pressure for change had built up pressure that erupted in a flood of unexpected changes. I, as well as the countless others who dedicated their lives to the cause of racial justice, felt encouraged, exhausted, excited, and skeptical all at once.

Time will tell if the protests and uprisings of 2020 lead to lasting transformations in the United States. What is clear is that racial progress does not occur apart from the sustained efforts of people who dedicate themselves to fighting racism in all its forms. History demonstrates and hope requires the fundamental belief that when people of goodwill get together, they can find creative solutions to society's most pressing problems.

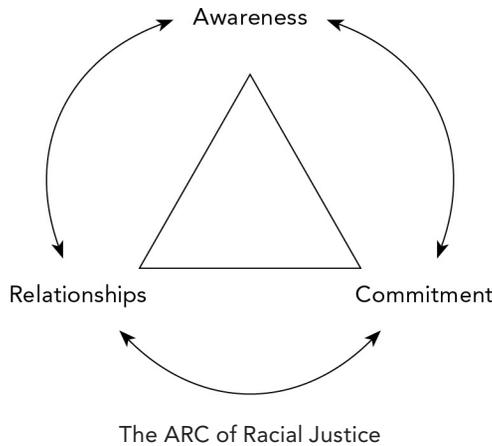
## How to Fight Racism

I have been publicly speaking and writing about racial justice for over a decade. From the Pacific to the Atlantic, from college students to clergy members, the most frequent question I receive about fighting racism is “What do we do?”

A growing swell of people recognize the “fierce urgency of now” when it comes to fighting racism.<sup>10</sup> Maybe that's you.

You realize racism—a system of oppression based on race—is a problem nationwide and worldwide.<sup>11</sup> You understand that everyone is either fighting racism or supporting it, whether actively or passively. You want to be part of the solution. But you need guidance about what exactly you should be doing as an individual or within an institution to push back against the current racial caste system.

*How to Fight Racism* is one response to the how-to question of racial justice. While there has been a proliferation of books on race in the past several years, there remains room for more works that focus on the specific methods and actions that can promote racial equity.\* This book prioritizes the practical.<sup>12</sup>



\* Throughout this book I often use the term *equity* rather than *equality*. The Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance website explains the difference this way: “*Equality* aims to promote fairness. This is only effective if all participants have similar starting points and the same access to resources for achieving their desired goals. This approach can intentionally disregard the needs of individuals. *Equity* on the other hand demands that individual needs are taken into consideration. It accounts for identities (race, ethnicity, ability, nationality, gender, etc.) and circumstances that may otherwise hinder the success of one participant over another.”

*How to Fight Racism* is structured around a model I created called the ARC of Racial Justice. ARC is an acronym that stands for awareness, relationships, and commitment. Racism uses an array of tactics to deceive, denigrate, and dehumanize others. As fighters for racial justice, we need to become familiar with racist strategies to effectively counter them. That's where awareness comes in. It is the knowledge, information, and data required to fight racism. Awareness is the "head" portion of the head-hands-heart triumvirate. In this book, you will discover ways to increase your awareness by studying history, exploring your personal narrative, and grasping what God says about the dignity of the human person.

All racial justice is relational. What sparks the desire for people to see change? How does someone develop a burden to combat racism? Often it comes through relationships with other people who are most adversely impacted by racist ideas and deeds. It is through knowing others that those we previously viewed as "problems" become people. It is by knowing other people, developing friendships and collegiality, that we can form the coalitions necessary to take on a society rife with racial bigotry. Think of relationships as the tender heart of racial justice. But often people stop there. "I have Black friends," they boast. We will address the shortcomings of such views later, but misapplications aside, you cannot pursue true racial justice without authentic relationships with people who are different from you.

Besides building awareness and developing relationships, what truly enables broadscale change on the racial justice front is a commitment to dismantle racist structures, laws, and policies. There is no amount of books you can read that will reduce the disproportionate rate at which people of color are incarcerated. There is no amount of probing coffeeshop conversations you can have that will shift the racial segregation present in our public schools. To enact society-wide change, people must commit to deconstructing laws that have a disparate impact on people of different races and rewrite the

rules so they lead to greater equity among people of all races and ethnicities. Think of commitment as the “hands” aspect of the head-hands-heart metaphor.

The ARC of Racial Justice provides helpful shorthand for a comprehensive approach to race reforms. Many of us gravitate toward one area or one component of this fight. Some love to devour books, articles, and documentaries about race to increase their knowledge. Others do admirable work forging relationships with people from a wide spectrum of backgrounds and experiences. Still others are activists on the front lines of protests and leading campaigns for radical change. These are all admirable steps, but a holistic approach to racial justice includes all three aspects: awareness, relationships, and commitment.

Awareness, relationships, and commitment need not exist in *perfect* balance. The point of the model is not to practice an equal number of actions in each area. Rather, the goal is to keep all three areas in conversation and tension with one another. For instance, a college student can certainly build relationships and commit to racial justice, but college is an especially opportune time to build one’s awareness through reading, writing, and learning from experts on campus. If one or two areas receive less attention due to your specific circumstances, that is fine. Just be sure to periodically assess where you are putting your energy and think about how your focus may need to shift from time to time. Keeping the three areas in tension and conversation ensures that no person or organization focuses on one area to the exclusion of the other areas. Rather, the three categories interact in a dance that changes cadence and rhythm according to the music of the moment.

The ARC of Racial Justice does not proceed in linear fashion. One does not progress from awareness, to relationships, to commitment—like following the steps to a recipe. Rather, you will grow in each area simultaneously, and sometimes one practice will build your capacity in multiple areas. For example, in the months leading up to an election, you may

commit your time to helping potential voters get registered. During this season you may build your awareness of particular policies and platforms under debate in the election while also building new relationships with people in the community.

The process of growing in awareness, relationships, and commitment never ends. You will always be learning, you will always be developing relationships, and you will always be discovering new ways to commit to a life of racial justice.

## The Journey toward Racial Justice

The subtitle of this book is “Courageous Christianity and the Journey toward Racial Justice.” Thinking of racial justice as a journey helps us focus on each step without growing discouraged when we don’t make the progress we desire. The destination is racial equity and justice for people of every racial and ethnic background. The endpoint is harmony, where unity in the midst of diversity prevails. But viewing racial justice as a journey encourages us to think about fighting racism as an ongoing series of steps rather than a final point of completion. Instead of defining success by the results we achieve, we should define it by the actions we take. The effectiveness of our actions is not solely determined by their outcomes but also by the fact that we are taking steps forward and moving in the right direction.

As we begin to treat each other with more love and empathy, it will not only change the world around us; it will also change *us*. As I have taken steps to promote racial justice, I have developed more endurance, discovered untapped wells of creativity, and experienced more joy than I ever expected. The journey of racial justice is itself transformative.

On the journey toward racial justice, not all of us have the same starting point, nor are we all moving at the same speed. Black people and people of color have been fighting racism our whole lives. We have thought about racism, prayed about

it, cried about it, written about it, marched against it, and resisted it as the very means of our survival. This is not new to us. At the same time, we still have more to learn, and we can always get better at pursuing justice. For some white people, this may be a brand-new discussion. Perhaps you are just starting the journey, and even baby steps are accompanied by the risk of stumbling and falling. But you learn how to walk one step at a time through persistent, informed practice.\*

No matter how far along you are, thinking of racial justice as a journey helps us move beyond the binary of racist and not racist. In reality, everyone may act in ways that support racism at times. People of color who have internalized racist tropes may act in prejudiced ways toward white people or toward other racial and ethnic minorities. White people may support the racist status quo by choosing comfort and privilege over the confrontation and change that racial justice always requires. At times, even the most closed-minded person may stumble into words or actions that promote equity. With the humility of knowing that everyone's quest is different, our challenge is to get on and stay on the journey of racial justice.

## Courageous Christianity

While this book is intended for anyone who wants to work toward racial justice, I have decided to approach this subject from a Christian perspective. I am convinced that Christianity must be included in the fight against racism for several reasons. First, Christians must fight racism as a matter of responding to the past. Throughout the history

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\* Throughout the book I often use the phrase "Black people and other people of color." Distinguishing between these groups highlights the unique experience of Black people in the United States due to the existence of race-based chattel slavery. A similar distinction can be made for the particular histories of colonization that Native Americans and other indigenous groups have faced. This delineation does not imply that any group deserves more sympathy for the suffering they endured, just that histories of oppression differ between people groups.

of the United States and colonialism worldwide, people who claimed Christianity as their religion have been the progenitors and perpetuators of racism. Theologian Willie James Jennings explained the concept this way: “Indeed, it is as though Christianity, wherever it went in the modern colonies, inverted its sense of hospitality. It claimed to be the host, the owner of the spaces it entered, and demanded native people enter its cultural logics, its ways of being in the world and its conceptualities.”<sup>13</sup> As an illustration of Jennings’ point, try this: Close your eyes and picture the face of Jesus. For many of us, we have to make a conscious effort to picture Jesus as a brown-skinned, carpenter from Nazareth instead of the European-looking image of Jesus with flowing auburn hair, thin lips, and blue eyes.<sup>14</sup> Visual representations of Jesus as European-looking are ways of making claims about religious belonging and authority. Christians wrote extensive and complicated works of theology to justify both race-based chattel slavery and racial segregation. When activists fought against slavery and racial apartheid, Christians were often the most vociferous and violent in defending the racial hierarchy they created and from which they benefited.<sup>15</sup> So Christianity must be part of the conversation about racial justice because, in the context of the United States, white Christians often have been the ones responsible for racial injustice.<sup>16</sup>

Second, Christianity provides a transcendent narrative for why racial justice is important. On one level, most people would agree in principle that treating other people fairly and not using race as an excuse for inequality are good practices. But why are these things good? What is it about human beings that means we should treat one another as equals? From whence do such ideas derive? As we will see in the next chapter, Christianity teaches that all people are made in the very image of God. We are God’s crowning creation, and each person is precious simply because they are human. Their physical appearance—including skin color—are part of bearing God’s image and should be respected as such.

Third, Christianity has within it the moral and spiritual resources to rebel against racism and white supremacy. Time and again, Christianity has provided courage for activists fighting for racial justice. One of the starkest examples occurred during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. Theologian Soong-Chan Rah explains, “Civil rights is often seen in social and political terms. We often fail to recognize this movement as one of the most significant faith-based campaigns in American history.”<sup>17</sup> Ida B. Wells, Prathia Hall, Rosa Parks, and many other foot soldiers of racial justice movements have counted on their Christian faith to give them courage to fight against racism.

Courageous Christianity contrasts with the complicit Christianity that led so many religious people to cooperate with bigotry instead of challenging it. In “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” King wrote, “All too many [religious people] have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows.”<sup>18</sup> Courageous Christianity moves beyond the numbing safety of church walls and the comfortable Christianity that makes its home in segregated pews on Sunday mornings. It travels into capital buildings, city streets, farm fields, and wherever racial injustice may be found to demonstrate that the church is more than a place; the church is a people whose love for God compels them to act on behalf of their neighbors. Racial justice comes from the struggle of a small but committed group of people who choose courageously to stand against racism rather than compromise with it. Courageous Christianity dares to love through action and to risk everything for the sake of justice.

## Setting Expectations

*How to Fight Racism* is an exercise in “prophetic imagination.” In the Hebrew Bible, “The prophets voice a world other than the visible, palpable world that is in front of their hearers.”

Filled with visions of a new reality, the prophets encouraged “an act of imagination by word and image that evokes and hosts a world other than the one readily available.”<sup>19</sup> Oppression puts limits on our ability to envision alternate realities. By spending time exploring strategies for change, we may be inspired to create new ways to remedy issues of racism.

This book is an invitation to dream. It is an open door for you to explore the possibilities of a world in which racism does not define so much of our reality, an opportunity to reimagine a life where we acknowledge our differences but do not use them to dismiss or dehumanize others.

People of any race or ethnicity will find helpful suggestions and ideas in the chapters that follow. The dynamics of race affect people across the spectrum of color, creed, and country. What is helpful for dismantling anti-Asian racism, for instance, will likely prove beneficial for fighting anti-Black racism as well. While most of the examples apply specifically to Black-white racial dynamics, broad applications can be made to the prejudice that other groups experience as well.

Many of the suggestions in *How to Fight Racism* pertain especially to white people because white people bear the most responsibility for racism. This has to do with a term that can be controversial: *white supremacy*. White supremacy is the belief or assumption that white people and their culture are inherently superior to other people and cultures. Or as Bryan Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative explains it, white supremacy is “the narrative of racial difference.”<sup>20</sup> While I often use the term *racism*, *white supremacy* encompasses bigotry and racism of all kinds that gives social, cultural, and political advantages to those deemed white. If we want to fight racism, we must fight white supremacy as well. White supremacy is the reason that white people bear so much responsibility in the fight against racism.

To be clear, this book is not a how-to manual for forming multiethnic churches or increasing the racial diversity of communities of faith. Although some of the practices therein

will produce greater diversity, I wrote *How to Fight Racism* to encourage people to go beyond the doors of the church and into society where so much of racism resides. The practical suggestions include things like political involvement, education reform, and expanding voting rights. The truth is that the racial segregation we see on Sunday is downstream from the racial segregation we tolerate Monday through Friday. As such, fighting racism has to be something that goes beyond a once-a-week service. It must become habit, practice, and disposition.

For those who have been deeply involved in racial justice, some of the ideas presented here will be familiar. Let us remember that potency in the fight against racism rests not solely on innovation but also on action. Even if a suggestion is familiar to you, now may be the time when you can finally put it into practice or when you can execute a strategy more effectively. Perhaps you will find new rationales for why you pursue certain methods. Maybe hearing them explained in a new way will spark new ideas. For those already engaged in the work of racial justice, the greatest benefit of reading this book may simply be the encouragement to keep going. You are not alone in this work. Your efforts are valuable and necessary. Reading about how to fight racism may refresh you on your lifelong journey in pursuit of justice.

Undoubtedly, some people who are beholden to the binaries of “left” and “right” or “liberal” and “conservative” will criticize the suggestions and practices I propose. Preexisting views about racial justice are shaped by political parties, religious affiliations, and polarized visions of the world as it should be. One of the major fault lines among people who hold different views of racial justice concerns whether racism is an individual or an institutional problem. Is racism mostly a matter of personal attitudes and actions, or is it the result of systemic structures and institutional policies? Those labeled “liberal” focus on the latter while those labeled “conservative” highlight the former. In this book, I am not seeking to pit the personal against the systemic. Individual agency matters significantly,

even in a world where institutions wield enormous power. And institutional policies and practices can limit the personal choices and the number of good options that individuals have available to them. Racial justice must occur at both the individual and the institutional level.

Others may criticize the practices proposed here as “liberal,” “leftist,” “socialist,” “Marxist,” “Communist,” or “promoting critical race theory.” But such accusations are ahistorical. Some of these ideas for fighting racial justice have been offered for centuries. Extending voting rights to people of all races and ethnicities, for instance, has been around since the founding of the United States. Black activists and ministers have proposed the idea of reparations for slavery since before the end of the Civil War. Labels used pejoratively like those above typically ignore the continuity of racial justice movements throughout different historical eras. Instead of reflexively rejecting recommendations, test the ideas themselves for their impact on racial and ethnic minorities. Let mutual respect, humility, and solidarity with the oppressed lead you to your conclusions about what must be done to ensure racial justice.

Now for a word on structure: this book is divided into three main sections based on the ARC of Racial Justice: awareness, relationships, and commitment. Each section has three chapters, and each of those chapters contains an “Essential Understandings” section to outline necessary knowledge that will help you understand the “Racial Justice Practices” section that follows. In general, the first chapter of each main section pertains specifically to Christianity and speaks to the religious dimensions of racial justice that often get underplayed, overlooked, or misunderstood in the broader public discourse about race. These chapters will be particularly relevant to Christian leaders and laypeople who want to pursue racial justice, but they can be helpful for anyone who wants to understand more about fighting racism from a religious perspective.

I believe it will be most helpful to read this book in community. Processing the concepts will be more fruitful when you

can hear other perspectives and experience the dynamism that comes from conversation with others who are on a similar journey. As you consider what actions you should take, start by choosing one or two specific actions from each chapter. You may want to scaffold the practices by choosing ones that seem easily achievable, others that feel like a stretch, and a few that may strike you as truly radical.

Above all, don't worry too much about where to begin. Just start somewhere. If you want a complete step-by-step plan for racial justice before you get involved, you will remain stuck in place. Often throughout history, people became activists because they took a single action. While there are always precursors leading to that action, there eventually comes a moment when a person decides that doing nothing is more costly than doing something. W. E. B. DuBois once said, "The cost of liberty is less than the price of repression."<sup>21</sup> When that becomes true for you, you will be ready to take the next step on the journey toward racial justice.

Sometimes people ask me what keeps me going on this journey. How do I avoid discouragement when racism seems to be winning the day? I certainly have seasons of struggle, doubt, and fatigue. But I find that remembering the ancestors in this fight fills me with inspiration and conviction to keep moving.

Fannie Lou Hamer has become an enduring example for me of what it means to practice courageous Christianity and move toward racial justice. Born as the youngest of twenty children to a family of sharecroppers, Hamer took up the family business of picking cotton at the age of six. Although she had a quick mind, she only attained a sixth-grade education in her formal schooling. White supremacy in the Jim Crow South dictated that tending the fields was more important for a Black woman than cultivating a life of the mind. After spending years as a sharecropper on a cotton plantation, Hamer might have lived and died in obscurity. But in 1962, at the age of 44, Hamer heard a civil rights presentation given at Williams Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Ruleville, Mississippi, where she

lived and worked. The presenters included James Bevel, James Forman, and Bob Moses, and they told those assembled about voting rights and how, by registering to vote, they could help elect officials who would work to uplift poor Black communities like hers. “I could just see myself voting people outa office that I know was wrong and didn’t do nothin’ to help the poor.”<sup>22</sup> When they asked for volunteers to go down to the county courthouse to register, Hamer raised her hand as high as it could go.

While I cannot offer a full accounting of the momentous life of Fannie Lou Hamer, her story is worth knowing. She endured incredible hardships in her fight against racism. At one point white supremacists shot up the house where she was staying. White police officers brutally beat her and other Black activists in a rural Mississippi jail. Yet she went on to become a nationally known civil rights figure who, in 1964, gave live televised testimony of her struggles for voting rights at the Democratic National Convention. She also helped form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party as an alternative to the all-white southern Democratic machine operating in Mississippi at the time. She spent the remainder of her years working on behalf of the poor—both Black and white—in the Mississippi Delta.<sup>23</sup>

Hamer lived at the intersection of racism, sexism, and poverty. As a child of the Black church and with a mother who instilled in her belief in the Christian God, Hamer had a deep faith that empowered her activism and gave her indomitable courage in the face of life-threatening danger. In response to the threats she endured for her activism, she said, “Sometimes it seem like to tell the truth today is to run the risk of being killed. But if I fall, I’ll fall five feet four inches forward in the fight for freedom. I’m not backing off.”<sup>24</sup>

We need another generation of people willing to fight for freedom. We need a movement of people who will not back away in the face of racist evils and the lie of white supremacy. If you are willing to be part of this movement, and if you want to better equip yourself for the struggle, then read this book and take the next step on the journey toward racial justice.