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HATE SPEECH, PREJUDICE, AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS

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HATE SPEECH, PREJUDICE, AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Cover Page Footnote

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Hate Speech, Prejudice, and Biblical Interpretations

Beliefs in racial inferiority with specific references to African slaves was not confined to the southern states making up the Confederacy. Strains of racial and ethnic prejudice were wide-spread and very strong in other parts of the nation as well, even with an active contingent of abolitionists who were opposed to the institution of slavery. Following the Civil War and the end of Reconstruction around 1880, a system of de jure segregation known as Jim Crow effectively separated whites and blacks in the South and disenfranchised the entire black population. At the heart of this movement was the intense belief in racial inferiority of blacks, in comparison to their white, Anglo-Saxon counterparts. Lynching of blacks intensified in the South as a method of social control and all of the progress that was made during Reconstruction came to an abrupt halt.

After immigration of White Anglo-Saxons from Northern Europe slowed significantly, the face of immigrants destined for America changed with the introduction of Irish and Italian Catholics during the 19th century. The Anglo-American Protestant core group became threatened by the specter of a powerful and omnipotent Pope who they perceived would use his power to take over the government and destroy their Christian nation (Healey and Stepnick, 2017). Subsequently, both Irish and Italians were labeled distinct races and stereotyped as inferior to White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs). Negative attitudes about the two groups produced intense anti-Catholic sentiment that resulted in social policies

aimed at stemming the flow of immigrants from Italy and Ireland during the 19th and early 20th centuries and isolated both groups in ghetto communities in cities such as Chicago and New York.

Around 1880, at the same time Reconstruction officially ended in the South, Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe began arriving in large numbers to escape persecution, genocide, and terrible living conditions. Prior to this time, the population of Jewish Americans was relatively small and anti-Semitic attitudes not so intense. As more and more European Jews entered the United States, newly formed prejudices threatened even native-born Jews and their children. In some instances, they were banned from certain neighborhoods, business enterprises, and clubs (Goren, 1980). In many mainstream and fundamentalist churches, Jews were labeled ‘killers of Christ’ and stereotyped as greedy, Communist sympathizers, and political radicals.

This paper will address some of the issues surrounding hate speech, prejudice, and the use of biblical scripture to propagate racist ideologies and justify mistreatment of immigrants and other subordinated groups both in the past and in the present. I discuss how various racist and anti-Semitic ideologies came into vogue during and after slavery, Reconstruction, and the pre and post-World War eras. I also introduce a pseudo-religion called Christian Identity that emerged when believers in British Israelism tried to establish a foothold in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Barkun, 1994; Monson, 1927; Rand, 1932;

Zeskind, 1986; 2009). Next, I discuss some current issues that reveal a startling use of biblical verse to justify human rights violations by contemporary U.S. government officials. Finally, in my concluding remarks I suggest some possible remedies for the future.

God's Call to Race¹

During the American Revolution, a quote from the book of Romans was used by loyalists to justify their support of the British effort over American insurgents.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Romans 13: 1-2 (*New King James Version*).

Defenders of slavery during the 1840s and 1850s used the same verse to negate abolitionists who believed that slavery was wrong. In Europe, racial ideologies, with ties to contemporary extremist religious belief systems, were advocated by French social commentator and writer, Arthur de Gobineau (1853/1915). He argued that people of northern European ancestry were superior to other races and therefore, the builders of all great civilizations (1853/1915). According to de Gobineau, the fate of nations is determined exclusively by racial composition of the dominant core group. In England, other prominent men were making contributions

¹ The title of a pamphlet written by Klansman and Christian Identity minister, Wesley A. Swift.

based on their assumptions about the racial superiority of Northern European Anglo-Saxons as well. Perhaps the most significant pseudo-scientific advance was eugenics, a term first coined by Sir Francis Galton. Galton and his supporters advocated selective breeding of the ‘fittest’ individuals in order to improve the racial makeup of the general population (Kevles, 1985). Galton’s ideas spread to the United States at the turn of the century where eugenicists advocated policies of sterilization to protect Anglo-Saxon stock from contamination by inferior races such as “Negroes” and “Mexicans” (LaPan and Platt, 2003).

This type of thinking enabled race based religious perspectives to gain some currency, especially when British Israelist (BI) philosophy infiltrated the United States. BI retold the story of Israel’s division into two kingdoms following Solomon’s reign. John Wilson, a Scotsman, carried the idea to the next level with claims that he could prove the 10 lost tribes of Israel had, in fact, migrated to northern Europe (Barkun, 1994). Touting racial superiority of the Angles and the Saxons, disciples of Wilson’s formed British-Israel associations in London. One of the more notable adherents of BI was Englishman Edward Hine who envisioned a full-fledged international social movement touting the British as God’s chosen people rather than the Israelites. Hine’s efforts to consolidate BI in the United States fulfilled a biblical prophecy that included territorial expansion and colonization on behalf of the British Empire (Zeskind, 2009).

Religious prejudice that is specific to American culture has roots in early race science and beliefs about the inferiority of non-white races that are linked to literal translation of biblical texts from the Old Testament such as the book of Genesis.

Then God said, “Let Us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Genesis 1:26-28.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Genesis 2:7.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Genesis 2: 24-25.

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, and after his image; and called his name Seth. Genesis 5:1-3.

During the 1800s reinterpretations of scriptures such as those cited above, culminated in polygenesis, a theory promoted by southern physician and supporter

of slavery, Josiah C. Nott. Nott was a leading figure in the American School of Ethnology, a discipline that dominated the scientific understanding of race decades before Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Nott and his co-author, George Gliddon, published *Types of Mankind*, a summation of their theory that races were separate species of Homo Sapiens. Nott also argued that Adam and Eve were not the origin of all races of humankind as cited in the Bible but rather the sole ancestry of the white race (Horsman, 1987).

Types of Mankind was regarded by many as the best statement to date on race, establishing polygenics as the generally accepted theory for an understanding of human racial variety (Brown, 2012). In order to reach a wider audience, Nott participated in scientific debates, academic lectures, and eventually published articles about his theory in journals and newspapers. Abolitionist churches were united against polygenics and parishioners did what they could to discredit Nott and his supporters. One of his most important scientific opponents was Reverend John Bachman, a Lutheran minister, social activist and naturalist. Nott dismissed Bachman's contention that all humans share a common origin (monogenesis) as nothing more than conjecture from a biased pastor. Even though many people tried in vain to discount Nott's theory, his ideas continued to be embraced by certain WASP elites and other powerful people during the time he lived and worked (Brown, 2012).

Prior to both world wars and after Reconstruction, anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic sentiments were growing in the United States along with ethnic prejudices and entrenched hatred of Blacks. Slightly before Wesley Swift's special brand of Christian Identity, to be discussed in the next section, reared its ugly head, the publications of William Cameron, Howard Rand, and Philip E. J. Monson played a role in the dissemination of virulently anti-Semitic beliefs (Zeskind, 1986). Cameron edited *The Dearborn Independent*, a newspaper owned by Henry Ford, who was well known for his hatred of Jewish people (Ridgeway, 1990). Many of the essays published as editorials in the paper, contained propaganda aimed at vilifying Jewish immigrants along with native born Jews. Additionally, Cameron and Ford supported Hitler's idea of creating a white master race which was an element in the eugenics movement ideologies that were spreading in both Europe and America. Both men believed that the white race must remain pure in order to maintain its cultural and political power on the world stage (Milwicki, 2019). One of the ways they hoped to do this was to ensure that the United States government be based solely on the teachings of the Christian Bible. These ideas also influenced two men who are widely acknowledged as the architects of the American version of British Israelism known as Christian Identity, Wesley Swift and Gerald L. K. Smith.

The Legacy of Swift and Smith

Wesley Swift, one of the most influential white supremacists of the 20th century, was born in 1913 to a prominent Methodist minister in New Jersey (Milwicki, 2014/2015). At age 18, the younger Swift was himself ordained by the Methodist Church where he proved to be a dynamic and charismatic minister. After moving to California, he attended a lecture at the Kingdom Bible College in the mid-1930s along with many theologians of the time who came under the spell of the founder of the institute, Philip E. J. Monson (Milwicki, 2019). Monson was virulently anti-Semitic and a supporter of Hitler. He wrote that Hitler was ordained by God to drive Jews out of Germany and must be supported by the American government in his efforts (1927). Monson's teachings also stressed the superiority of WASPs over all other groups. Influenced by Monson and the writings of Howard Rand and William Cameron, Swift was called to find the true heritage and covenant of the white race (Milwicki, 2014/2015). He agreed with Monson that most churches of the day were degenerating into Babylonian style Judaism under a fragile mantle of Christianity. Both men argued that Protestant ministers were nothing more than false prophets delivering lies about true Israel (America) to the enemies of Jesus (Jews, immigrants, and people of color).

Eventually Swift joined a California Ku Klux Klan group and in 1944 he moved to Los Angeles where he established his first church, the Anglo-Saxon Christian Congregation which was later renamed the Church of Jesus Christ

Christian (Ridgeway, 1990; Milwicki, 2014/2015). By then Swift had been radicalized by Monson and began to develop the building blocks of what would become Christian Identity, a pseudo-religion based entirely on racist and anti-Semitic principles he learned at the Kingdom Bible College. Among other things, Swift believed that whites were the only race that could achieve salvation and other races, including Jews, were doomed to eternal damnation.

In 1945, Swift met his future benefactor, Gerald L.K. Smith, a right wing political operative, fundraiser, and charismatic speaker (Ridgeway, 1990). With Smith's financial help, Swift's ministry grew and he established congregations in San Francisco, Oakland, Lancaster, Riverside, Hollywood, and San Diego in California. Swift convinced Smith that North America, specifically the United States, was the true Israel and that WASPs were rightful heirs to the covenant that God made with Abraham, not the Jews. Under Swift's tutelage, Smith came to believe that Jesus Christ was not a Jew because God would never grant salvation to the very people who were responsible for his son's crucifixion. Smith eventually converted to Christian Identity and because of his political ties, spread Swift's teachings to anti-Communist and other right-wing circles (Milwicki, 2019, p. 60).

In order to justify hatred of and religious disfranchisement of Jews, Swift preached that all whites are God's chosen people not just Northern Europeans. He also took a harder line than British Israelists in that he refused to ever accept converted Jews to his ministry. Using his own reading of scripture, Swift insisted

that Jesus was descended directly from the seed of Isaac and Jacob and it was this blood line that produced white, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic people, the true children of God. Referencing the book of Genesis, Swift argued that modern Jews were neither Israelites nor Hebrews but instead descendants from the Esau-Edom line that evolved when Esau sold his birthright for a serving of lentil stew.

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he *was* weary. And Esau said to Jacob, 'Please feed me with that same red *stew*, for I *am* weary.' Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, 'Sell me your birthright as of this day.' And Esau said, 'Look, I *am* about to die; so what *is* this birthright to me?' Then Jacob said, 'Swear to me as of this day.' So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. Genesis 25: 29-34.

Swift's theology taught that Jews were not actually human but instead direct descendants of Satan, the serpent responsible for the seduction of Eve in the Garden of Eden. This helped support Gerald L. K. Smith's contention that the inherently evil Jews tricked the United States into going to war with Germany and the holocaust was a hoax perpetrated to destroy Hitler, the Third Reich, and Germany, a Christian nation (Jeansonne, 1997). According to Swift, Smith, and Monson, all the events surrounding World War II resulted in suffering and hardship for white Christian America. Theological evidence provided by Swift was founded on his belief that since modern Judaism originated in the Garden of Eden, it was linked to original sin. All the disparate beliefs about Jewish wickedness and deceptiveness

acquired a new biblical foundation readily accepted by many in the racist right at the behest of Swift's supporter and benefactor, Gerald L. K. Smith.

Seedline Theory and the Birth of Satan's Son

Christian Identity dogma asserts that there were epochs preceding Adam and Eve where two or three varieties of soulless dark races roamed the earth and lived outside the Garden of Eden (Gayman, 1985/1995). The Identity movement contains many denominations and different doctrinal sub-theologies, as does mainstream Protestant Christianity. Some Christian Identists follow Old Testament dietary laws such as not eating pork, mushrooms and shellfish, while others do not. Some do not drink any kind of alcohol, while others do. A small minority of Christian Identity adherents practice polygamy, but most do not (Billy Roper², personal communication, October 26, 2016). A major tenet of Christian Identity is that the European nations are descended from the ten lost Israelite tribes connecting the ideology to its European cousin, British Israelism. The most significant division within Christian Identity; however, involves single and dual or two seedline perspectives.

Single seedline adherents believe that Ashkenazi Jews (the DNA source of most American, European, and Israeli Jews) are descended from Eastern European Khazar converts to Judaism. The Khazar kingdom, a mixed race European and

² Billy Roper is a longtime activist in the white nationalist movement who is currently affiliated with Divine Truth Ministries and Shieldwall Network.

Turkish nation in southern Russia, converted to Judaism several centuries after the Jewish diaspora. When the Khazar kingdom was conquered, the Ashkenazi Jews scattered throughout Eastern Europe. A key to understanding single seedline Christian Identity dogma is that Jewish claims as God's chosen people is based on a myth about an inherited covenant between God and Abraham. Single seedline proponents believe, instead, that since Jews are descendants of converts to Judaism they cannot be descended directly from Abraham. For this reason, the argument goes, they did not inherit a covenant and are not God's chosen people (Rand, 1932, p. 79; Gayman, 1985/1995; Mange, 1998).

The smaller but more hardline dual seedline branch of Christian Identity is based on another interpretation of Genesis.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and
between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and
thou shalt bruise his heel. Genesis 3: 15.

The dual seedliners maintain that the serpent in the Garden of Eden was Satan and the allegory of the fruit³ was actually the seduction of Eve by Satan in human form (Swift, date of publication unknown). Eve's transgression led to expulsion from the Garden, loss of innocence, and subsequent relegation by a vengeful God to a life of hard labor and strife. Additionally, the theory suggests that Eve was impregnated simultaneously with two seeds, Cain and Abel, twins with different

³ Most Christian Identity literature refers specifically to the fruit as an apple and later fig leaves were woven together as aprons to cover the two sinners after the fall.

fathers. Cain was the son of Satan and Abel, the son of Adam. After Cain killed Abel, he journeyed to the land of Nod where he encountered a group of pre-Adamic (non-white) people, directed building of a city, and took a dark skinned wife; the origin of inferior races. Dual seedline Identists cite the Apostle John to bolster their beliefs detailing that Jesus told the Jews their father was the devil and they were not descended from God.

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. John 8: 44.

He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. John 8: 47.

Anti-Semitic attitudes run deep in Christian Identity circles and are supported by both seedline theories. According to Swift's teachings (1968, p. 17), isolation and inbreeding turned the Jews into a genetically identifiable separate sub-race that resulted in expert collective group survival adaptation. The oppression Jews faced throughout history resulted in solidarity much stronger than that of other races (Gayman, 1985/1995). According to contemporary white supremacist rhetoric, this strength culminated in control over banking, the media, the state of Israel, and the federal government of the United States. Among the sins committed by contemporary Jews, in the eyes of many people in the white supremacist movement who may or may not identify as Christian Identists, is promotion of

abortion rights, open immigration, homosexual rights, and opposition to collective white interests (Dentice, 2019). For example, Billy Roper (personal communication October 1, 2016) argues that Jewish support of multiracial democracy and uncontrolled immigration will eventually lead to economic collapse and balkanization of the United States; thus there is no need for Armageddon. When central governmental authority finally collapses (thanks to Jewish influence), racially enlightened whites will resettle the heartland of America represented by the red states and the kingdom of Christ, established on earth for a millennium.

And The Bible Says.....

What are the connections between hate speech, prejudice, the Bible and more mainstream American society? Feagin (2012) writes that beginning in the 1960s white Americans grew fearful of losing status and privilege due to perceptions of uncontrolled immigration from darker skinned countries like Mexico. Since that time worries over the emergence of a non-white majority population have been documented in public opinion polls where between 40 to 50% of Americans favor lowering the volume of immigration (Healey and Stepnick, 2017). During the 2008 campaign of Barack Obama, the nation's first African American President, the media covered sermons given by Dr. Jeremiah Wright (Obama's African American minister) calling for God to "damn America" for all its sins against people of color and other minorities (Feagin, 2012). Taken largely out of context, a religious racial

divide occurred that brought about rancorous political rhetoric on both sides of the isle and not just in white supremacist circles.

Despite laws that ensure separation of church and state, some politicians and government officials insist on pulling verses from the Bible to make their point regarding issues such as immigration, welfare reform, and LGBTQ rights. For example, in May 2013, the House Agriculture Committee debated whether or not to cut up to \$4.1 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps). While some Democrats cited Jesus Christ's call to care for the poor, Republican Representative, Stephen Fincher, of Tennessee explained his support for the proposed cuts by quoting Thessalonians.

For even when we were with you, we gave you this command:
Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.
Thessalonians, 3: 10.

While citing Thessalonians is a convenient tool for those who want to justify harming the poor, Fincher's use of the Bible to defend the slashing of food stamps is bad government social policy if one believes that a safety net for our most vulnerable citizens is an important link in the Democratic social contract.

In June 2018, amid the national debate regarding detention of immigrant families, most of whom were from Central and Latin American countries, then Attorney General Jeff Sessions used Romans 13:1 (cited earlier in this paper) to defend his department's policy of separating immigrant parents from their children (Zauzmer, McMillan, and Natanson, 2018). In response, the U.S. Conference of

Catholic Bishops strongly condemned the administration's immigration policies as immoral. One bishop suggested that any Catholic that supports the Justice Department's policies on this issue is violating his/her faith and should be denied Communion. Pope Francis referenced scripture from Deuteronomy in a tweet addressing the issue.

He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

Deuteronomy 10: 18-19.

Conclusions and Implications

America is a nation of nations, made up of people from every land, of every race and practicing every faith. Our diversity is not a source of weakness; it is a source of strength, it is a source of our success.

Former U.S. Secretary of State - Colin Powell

If, as a nation, we are to work toward social justice, we must celebrate difference and diversity. The word celebrate refers to honor, respect, and recognition of the many cultures and groups that make up world societies, not just American society. It is not enough to simply tolerate or accept people who are different. The next step is to move toward collective cultural humility that involves questioning our own background as Americans with the goal of working in partnership with others. The United States is increasingly multiracial, multicultural, and multiethnic. At the same time, conditions of economic inequality by gender, race, and ethnicity have not improved all that much for some of our most vulnerable populations. Trends in

the structure of American society challenge citizens to understand and appreciate demographic shifts resulting from historical and future migration patterns.

Additionally, citizens of the United States represent many different religious backgrounds. The United States is often characterized as a nation of immigrants. Our rich heritage has been referred to as a melting pot, due in part to successive waves of immigrants who have come here from around the world and who continue to do so. The United States has welcomed more immigrants than any other country, more than 50 million in all, and today welcomes almost 700,000 people a year (Healey and Stepnick, 2017). Despite a history of slavery, Jim Crow era segregation, wage inequality, and white supremacy, America still has many things to offer and most Americans do not begrudge immigrants who come here and contribute to our culture and economy.

Sometimes actions of our political leaders do speak louder than words, however. Former Indiana Governor, now Vice-President of the United States, Mike Pence, attracted national attention when he signed a religious freedom law in 2015 that put members of the Indiana LGBTQ community at high risk for discrimination. After criticism from the statewide business community, Pence signed an amendment to the law. This incident was not Pence's first troublesome encounter with the LGBTQ community. A self-described Christian Republican conservative, the Vice-President has been a prominent figure in battles over marriage equality and equal rights for at least a decade. In one instance he said that gay couples

signaled ‘societal collapse’ on the heels of deterioration of traditional marriage and family life (Drabold, 2016). Pomeranz (2018, p. 67) reports that LGBTQ people who live in a state that fails to provide equal protections are at a “significantly increased risk for disparate health outcomes.”

In 2006, as head of the Republican Study Committee, a group of 100 conservative House members, Pence was a vocal supporter of a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as only between a man and a woman. He has called being gay a choice and that keeping marriage between opposite sex partners is not discrimination, but rather the enforcement of God’s plan as stated in the Bible. Among other things, while serving in various capacities during his political career, Vice President Pence opposed the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell and rejected the Obama administration federal directive on transgender bathroom access.

I am the first to acknowledge that much of the hateful rhetoric that is spouted by people who identify as white nationalists and participate in groups that are part of the white supremacist/nationalist social movement can be viewed as a totally different source of racial hatred and animosity than what comes from the mouths of mainstream whites. However, we have a currently serving U. S. Representative from Iowa, Steve King, who has been censored by his colleagues partly due to his long personal history of making racist comments from a position of power. In July, 2013 Representative King made the ridiculous claim that for

every child of illegal immigrants “who’s a valedictorian, there’s another 100 out there who weigh 130 pounds and they’ve got calves the size of cantaloupes because they’re hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the desert” (Lapidos, 2013). If that was not enough, after the events in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, President Trump stated in a press conference:

I will tell you something, I watched this very closely, much more closely than you people watched it and you have, you had a group on one side that was bad and you had a group on the other side that was also very violent. And nobody wants to say that, but I'll say it right now. You had a group on the other side that came charging in without a permit and they were very, very violent.

When asked by reporters if he condemns neo-Nazis, he went on to say:

Those people, all of those people, excuse me, I've condemned neo-Nazis, I've condemned many different groups," Mr. Trump said. "But not all those people were neo-Nazis, believe me. Not all those people were white supremacists. Those people were also there because they wanted to protest the taking down of a statue Robert E. Lee.

(Watson, 2017).

This discussion is not meant to be political in nature. In order to clarify points made throughout this article regarding public discourse about race it is necessary to give rhetorical examples when they come up. General political commentary, whether intended to be inflammatory or not, can potentially influence opinions, attitudes, and even perpetuate hate speech on new levels that everyone should be aware of.

The United States owes its success to many factors including the vision of the nation's founding fathers to establish a government of, by and for the people. They provided a constitution that guaranteed freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion. America's founders established a society that has attracted diversity and many different cultures, all helping to make this country great. But, as different as the many cultures, religions and ethnic backgrounds of the American mosaic are, there are certain core values that we all share. Faith, hope and charity continue to inform this great American experiment. The misappropriation of religious texts to support racism, prejudice, and hate speech must be exposed in order to halt the proliferation of prejudiced attitudes among a segment of our population directed at minority groups and persons of color. More orthodox religious adherents, along with mainstream Americans, religious or not, can benefit from learning about how and why some extremist groups misrepresent and misinterpret biblical scripture for their own nefarious purposes.

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