

BOOK REVIEW

Racial Justice for the Long Haul: How White Christian Advocates Persevere (and Why)

by Christine Jeske

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2026, 312 pages

Although it pains me to admit this, anthropologists generally write much better prose than sociologists do. And Christine Jeske's *Racial Justice for the Long Haul* is just another among the countless examples of anthropologists doing so. Whereas we sociologists too often get lost in numbers and lose sight of the very people and conditions we seek to explain, Jeske provides another example of the opposite. She interviewed seventy Christians (thirty people of color and forty white), all of whom had a passion for racial justice and were living out their passion, heartbreaks and all. And she conveys all of this in a beautifully written piece of research.

The book is divided into six parts: *Is Perseverance Possible; Dare We Hope; Collisions; Asking a Lot of Why; Responding to Grace; and Abiding Hope*. What Jeske found from her interviews was a pattern of three interlocking elements which help to spell out why people make a long-term commitment to racial justice. The first she labeled "a *collision*—an encounter in which the reality of racial justice hits home in a conscious and often emotionally salient way." The second was an engagement in "*asking a lot of why*." The third was "*responding to grace*" in one's spiritual and physical interactions with the world. The three elements brought forth an "abiding and active kind of hope" (17-18). As Jeske writes: "When I began the research that led to this book, I did not plan to write about hope. I planned to look for patterns across the lives of white Christians who had come to spend the years of their lives intentionally pursuing racial justice and to write about how to replicate the process" (38).

Nevertheless, hope is constant in the lives of the people interviewed, because, to put it mildly, racism is not something that can easily be changed. It is embedded in American society. Although "racism occasionally manifests itself in interpersonal cruelty...it is not ultimately a problem of individual animosity from one person to another. It is rather a problem in the arrangements of society more broadly" (109). In short, racism is a structural problem, and Jeske introduces us to individuals who, in their passion for social justice, live out their lives in hope of changing structures on smaller scales. From a Christian perspective, hope is part of a response to God's love and His grace, and as Jeske states: "Again and again, people I interviewed insisted that pursuing racial justice for the long haul involves joy" (265). She sums up not only the joy,

but also the agony of Christians in their long haul for racial justice when she writes: “The answer this book offers is not a proof that things will get better. It is rather a set of possibilities, a testimony of what can happen when people become something they were not before. It is also an exploitation of hope’s exploration in the space of uncertain possibility” (269).

Yet there is so much more to this book than the presentation of what Christians who confront racism believe and then act on. In Appendix B, Jeske offers questions for reflection and discussion about what can be done. I need to confess here that most times I just stop there, falling back on the idea that because I’m a professor, if I point out how change comes about, that’s enough. But this book affected me differently. It made me look at how as a Christian I have dealt with my own confrontations with racism (collision), and admit that I have fallen short in attempting to change what many have called America’s “greatest sin.” Like so many of my academic colleagues, I feel that I have done my bit in confronting racism.

I’ve always prided myself on the fact that I grew up in a subculture that, in retrospect, can only be called racist. As an Italian American growing up in Queens, New York, I went to an elementary school with only one black student who claimed to be half Puerto Rican, and was there less than one year. My high school practiced *de facto* segregation. I was in the honors school with no black students. There was a White section and a Black section in the school cafeteria and perhaps a half dozen students crossed into the other part of the lunchroom (none of my friends, as I recall.) In college, there were very few students of color, and I can’t recall any in my graduate school cohort. Today, although it sounds like a cliché, only one of my closest friends is a man of color.

This all leads me to say that Black Lives Matter and Christine Jeske have made me see this with so much more clarity than ever before. There’s not much more one can hope for. This has led me, after reading this book, to take a look at my complacency concerning racial justice. My advice, then, to others, is simple: read it. If you are a professor, assign it to your students; if you belong to a book club, suggest it. *Racial Justice for the Long Haul* is that important a book, and deserves a wide audience.

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