

# critique

A Ransom Fellowship Publication

2017 Issue 6

TO BLESS OR CURSE, DRAWING LINES  
WITH IDIOTS, HUMANITY IN A WORLD OF  
MACHINES, TOXIC MASCULINITY, AND  
**A CONVERSATION ABOUT RACISM**



## CRITIQUE



2017 Issue 6 © Ransom Fellowship

### EDITOR

Denis Haack

### ART DIRECTOR

Karen Coulter Perkins

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Donald Guthrie

Professor of Educational Ministries  
Director of PhD Program in Educational Studies  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Illinois

Denis and Margie Haack  
Co-founders, Ransom Fellowship, Minnesota

Bonnie Liefer

Vice President for Marketing and Communications  
CCO, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Henry Tazelaar

Chair, Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology  
Professor of Pathology  
Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Arizona

Paul Woodard

Life Care Retirement Community Chaplain, retired  
St. Louis, Missouri

### CONTACT CRITIQUE:

[www.RansomFellowship.org](http://www.RansomFellowship.org)  
5245 132nd Court, Savage, MN 55378  
[ransomfellowship@gmail.com](mailto:ransomfellowship@gmail.com)

**ABOUT CRITIQUE:** *Critique* is part of the work of Ransom Fellowship founded by Denis and Margie Haack in 1982. Together, they have created a ministry that includes lecturing, mentoring, writing, teaching, hospitality, feeding, and encouraging those who want to know more about what it means to be a Christian in the everyday life of the twenty-first century.

Except where noted, all articles are by Denis Haack.

**RECEIVE CRITIQUE:** *Critique* is not available by subscription. Rather, interested readers can request to be added to Ransom's mailing list, which is updated frequently. Donors to Ransom Fellowship, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-deductible ministry, are added to the mailing list automatically unless requesting otherwise.

Everyone on Ransom's mailing list also receives *Letters from The House Between* (formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*), a newsletter by Margie Haack in which she reflects on what it means to be faithful in the ordinary and routine of daily life and gives news about Ransom's ministry.

**COPYING POLICY:** Feel free to make up to 50 copies of any article that appears in *Critique* for use with a small group. We only ask that you copy the entire article, note the source, and distribute the copies free of charge.

**HEARTS & MINDS:** Hearts and Minds bookstore donates 10% of your purchase to Ransom Fellowship if you mention us when placing your order.  
[www.heartsandmindsbooks.com](http://www.heartsandmindsbooks.com).

## 2017:6 CONTENTS

# 1

EDITOR'S NOTE

To Bless, Not to Curse

# 2

DISCERNING LIFE

Drawing a Line with Idiots

# 4

Got privilege?

READING THE WORLD

Racism in America:  
A Conversation

between Denis Haack and Luke Bobo

# 12

DARKENED ROOM

Being Human  
in a World of Machines

thoughts on the film *Blade Runner*  
and *Blade Runner 2049*



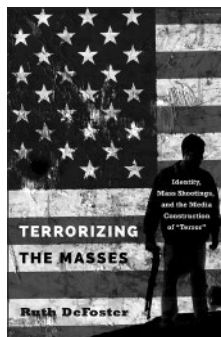
# 15

RESOURCE

Shaped by Media  
in an Age of Toxic  
Masculinity

about the book *Terrorizing the Masses*

by Ruth DeFoster



# To Bless, Not to Curse



As I walked into the nursing home where my mother lives, I was aware of being behind. Traffic was heavy—both an accident and construction were fouling things—and there were still several more appointments on my to-do list. It is a lonely place, and desperate eyes hungry for human contact followed me down the hall. I've met some of the residents in those wheelchairs. More accurately, I meet them repeatedly when I visit, for they do not remember. I am always keenly aware of how I cannot meet their needs, or restore their minds or grant them release from bodies decaying rapidly towards the moment of their death.

And so I walked briskly, eyes forward, to my mother's room. And just before reaching her door it dawned on me that I was a walking curse. It would not have hurt me to smile and say words of happy greeting as I walked, and it need not have slowed me down.

Moment by moment I live as a blessing or a curse, in both the big decisions I make and in the tiny ones. The tiny one in the nursing home haunts me as perhaps being big for those whose consciousness is narrowing relentlessly to a pinprick, and then to a great unknown.

*For he did not remember to  
show kindness,  
but pursued the poor and needy  
and the brokenhearted, to put them  
to death.*

*He loved to curse; let curses come  
upon him!*

*He did not delight in blessing; may it be  
far from him!*

*He clothed himself with cursing as  
his coat  
may it soak into his body like water,  
like oil into his bones!*

*May it be like a garment that he wraps  
around him,  
like a belt that he puts on every  
day! [Psalms 109:16–19]*

It is an ancient problem. The dark preference for belittling, criticizing, name-calling, and cynicism is rooted deep in our hearts because such things make us feel like a winner. And when leaders engage in such cursing a spreading darkness descends on the land, and those that are weak and powerless and voiceless have reason to fear.

The Hebrew psalmist is not being vindictive but realistic. If we bless, blessing gathers to us, and the same is true if we curse. How I walk down the hall in the nursing home doesn't just express my heart but helps to shape it.

One of my errands was at the bank. In front of me was an older woman who waited patiently to reach the teller. Only when she reached the window did she begin digging in her purse for the check to be deposited, and then rummaged further to find her checkbook for a deposit slip. It was the wrong checkbook, so she rummaged more and finally found what she was looking for. Then the check needed to be signed, and the deposit slip filled out. And then

there was renewed rummaging because she had another transaction to accomplish. After the second transaction was completed she rummaged again to find the correct checkbook, record the deposit, and then to find a little coin purse in which to place the carefully folded receipts. Then, after warmly thanking the teller, and greeting me, she went on her way.

As I waited my heart was not full of blessing.

I am a slow learner. What I learned in the hallway of the nursing home did not translate to the bank.

But I need to learn it. I need to learn it because to be a blessing and not a curse is part of faithfulness to my Lord. And I need to learn it because when leaders pursue the poor, when they love to curse rather than to bless, divisions deepen, the "other" is made a scapegoat, and the fragility of freedom is threatened. "A curse devours the earth," the prophet Isaiah said, "therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched" (24:6). At such moments in history the need for healing and reconciliation—of blessing—is deepened.

The last I checked, healing and reconciliation are part of the calling of the people of God, to be accomplished by those for whom blessing is a habit of the heart. ■



# Drawing a Line with Idiots

I know, I know. My mother always told me not to call anyone an idiot, but really, what other word will do?

I've just started an inductive study of St. Peter's first epistle. It's been a while since I've immersed myself in a biblical book, living in it over a period of weeks or however long the study takes me. That's reason enough to do it. Over the centuries of Christian experience, 1 Peter turns out to be a section of scripture beloved by Christians who find themselves in societies that are hostile to their faith. That sounds familiar and is a second good reason, and so I've begun.

The first step in such study is called Survey, when I try to become familiar with the entire text, reading and rereading it, and then rereading it again. It's like moving into a house at the edge of a woods and taking the time to walk slowly through the woods enough times in all directions, and over again, until it begins to feel familiar. The first few forays seem artificial, forced, rote, but I've learned that if I stick with it, quiet discoveries begin to present themselves and I'm drawn in to the text more deeply. Themes distill from the details of what the author wrote, questions take shape that I need to pursue, surprises appear, the flow of the

prose and its sections emerge, as slowly my interaction with the text becomes a conversation.

So I'm in this process in 1 Peter and two verses jump out at me by making me distinctly uncomfortable. On the one hand it's exactly what I expect in

Bible study, and it always happens during Survey. On the other hand, uncomfortable is uncomfortable, so I thought I'd raise the issue with you.

*If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ...if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. (NIV, 1 Peter 4:14, 16)*

Here's why these texts make me uncomfortable.

I'm not ashamed of my faith and don't think I'd have much of a problem with being insulted for being a Christian. It wouldn't be pleasant, but it's a cost worth bearing for the sake of my Lord. At least that's how I hope I'd respond. On the other hand, I am mightily ashamed of a lot of what passes for Christianity in America. I can imagine being insulted not for the faith that I actually hold but for the incivility, embarrassing foolishness, and, dare I say it, utter and complete idiocy that sometimes passes for evangelical biblical Christian belief and practice today.

Okay, with apologies to my mom, I've said it. Am I the only Christian in America who thinks some who claim to be Christian act and talk like idiots? I don't have any data to back this up, but I don't think so. I think a lot of us are uncomfortable.

Truth be told, I'm a lot more patient with non-Christians than with Christian idiots.

I'm willing to be insulted by a secularist for believing in Christ's miracles when he thinks the stories are make-believe because science has shown there is no supernatural. Or for believing in prayer when, by my own admission, things don't always turn out like I request and studies have not definitively proven its effectiveness. I'll gladly be insulted for believing—really believing, mind you—every line in the Apostles' and Nicene creeds. I'm even willing to be insulted for my involvement with the church when that institution is guilty of so much that is so terribly wrong, including but not limited to instigating religious wars, persecuting those who disagree with it, excusing slavery, autocracy, and misogyny, and preaching repentance while being slow to repent for these and other sins.

However—and here I draw a line—I am not willing to be insulted by a hostile neighbor simply for being a Christian when everyone knows what Christians are like because it's in the news. Christians are judgmental and negative people who are homophobic and quick to criticize; who believe all undocumented persons should be rounded up and deported, no exceptions, no questions; who are convinced that, since some blacks have achieved success and wealth, racism is not a serious problem in America; who argue that refugees are dangerous and should

**I HATE PEOPLE SAYING ANYTHING STUPID. I DON'T REALLY SUFFER FOOLS VERY WELL AT ALL. WHEN PEOPLE ARE ACTING LIKE IDIOTS, NOT THAT I'M NOT GUILTY OF DOING THE ODD IDIOTIC THING MYSELF FROM TIME TO TIME, BUT WHEN PEOPLE SAY STUPID THINGS, IT STRESSES ME OUT.**

—Joshua Jackson

not be admitted to the country; who believe smaller government is always better government; that an unregulated free market always produces just, equitable, and sustainable results; who think contemporary art is an abomination; who are slow to condemn neo-Nazis; and that... well, the list goes on and on. I don't want to be lumped in with this sort of belief and practice, I don't want to have people assume this is an expression of true Christianity, and I don't want to be insulted for being part of it. When such insults come, I draw the line and insist this is not me, but idiots that may claim to be Christians but who obviously have not learned to think Christianly, or on second thought, to think at all.

More and more non-Christians find Christianity an unattractive faith and unhelpful or even potentially dangerous in a pluralistic society riven with religious and ideological rivalries. So, given the growing hostility, it only makes sense that I should expect to perhaps be insulted for being a believer. I am content with that, but still, I do not want to be insulted for idiocy I am careful to eschew and find antithetical to my faith. I don't expect non-Christians to make these distinctions, or frankly to even care. So the issue is mine.

And that suggests the need for some careful Christian discernment. ■

*Source: [www.brainyquote.com](http://www.brainyquote.com).*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Do I need to repent?
2. There is a category of person mentioned in scripture as "weak," and mature believers are to make allowance for them and care for them in love and compassion. Some, apparently, are weak in terms of justice and some are weak in faith.
  - 2.a. See, for example, Psalm 72:13-14; 82:4-5; Ezekiel 34:1-24; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 9:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 5:14-19. What do these texts suggest for my dilemma about those believers whom I find embarrassing?
  - 2.b. When St. Paul was instructing the elders of the church in Ephesus, he said they "must help the weak" (Acts 20:35). "As for the one who is weak in faith," he wrote to the church in Rome, "welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions" (14:1). In this particular case, the issues involved what they should and should not eat and whether certain days were more important than others; but love mandated that the mature should make allowances. "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?" Paul asks. "It is before his own master that he stands or falls" (14:4). And if that isn't clear enough, the apostle reminds his readers that we are all slated for God's judgment. "Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us will give an account of himself to God" (14:10-12). To what extent does this apostolic instruction apply to my unwillingness to be insulted for my faith when fellow believers act in ways I find idiotic?
  - 2.c. The Hebrew poet presents God as taking the side of the weak when they are spoken against. "'Because of the oppression of the weak, and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise,' says the Lord. 'I will protect them from those who malign them.'" (Psalm 12:5). It is likely, given the context of this statement, that it refers not primarily to those weak in faith but those who powerless, voiceless, and therefore cut off from justice in society. Still, it seems clear from the consistent emphasis of scripture that God disapproves of mistreatment of those who are weak and calls those who are strong—in society, in faith—to care for the weak and to never treat them dismissively. To what extent does this apply to the issue we are discussing?
3. Several clichés come to mind: "Hate the sin but love the sinner." "Debate ideas but don't dismiss people." Are there healthy, loving ways I can separate myself from toxic ideas and practices without being dismissive of the believers that hold them?
4. To what extent should I be willing to accept the insults of unbelievers who accuse me of things that are untrue of me but true of the "Christianity" displayed before a watching world today?

# RACE IN AMERICA

:



PHOTO BY GORDON PARKS

*During the 1940s, psychologists Kenneth Bancroft Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark designed a test to study the psychological effects of segregation on black children. Read about the Clark's "Doll Test" at [www.loc.gov/exhibits/brown/brown-brown.html](http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/brown/brown-brown.html).*

# A CONVERSATION

"To love your neighbor as yourself," Christopher Wright says in *The Mission of God*, "is not just the second great commandment in the law; it is the essential implication of our common createdness" (p. 424). There are no exceptions, though our brokenness finds plenty of rationalizations to excuse our wickedness when we see and treat another person bearing God's image as "other," or remain silent when others do.

Even if we want to do the right thing, this responsibility for righteousness and justice is daunting. We ask the same question the man wanting to "justify himself" asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29) Surely, we can ignore some injustice, some expressions of racism, because in these cases they aren't really my neighbor. In response Jesus told a story of a mugging and three individuals who could have done something, though only one did, and then turned the man's question around. Which of them, he asked the man, "proved to be a neighbor?" (10:36) And in Jesus's story none of the three lived anywhere near or were personally acquainted or were in the same social circles as the man who was mugged.

America has great and noble legacy; it has also been guilty of great and ignoble sins, one of the most horrible of which is slavery. It should not surprise anyone that outlawing slavery does not eradicate racism. The Christian perspective on sin says things are messier than anything the law can solve, that the evil of racism is spawned in our selfish hearts, embedded in unjust social structures, and fomented by spiritual powers. If we pray, as Jesus taught, that God's "will be done on earth as it is in heaven," then we will need to think and live Christianly in an America being torn apart by racism.

What does it mean to be a Christian neighbor when racism haunts the fabric of American life and society? What must I come to see, to understand, and ultimately to do?

I can think of few better people to ask than my friend, Luke Bobo.

**Denis Haack:** Luke, in *Critique* 2015:2, you and Greg Pitchford had a conversation on race prompted by the tragedy that unfolded in Ferguson, Missouri—a place not far from where the two of you lived. Time has passed, sermons have been preached, commentators have commented, investigations have issued reports, trials have been conducted, and politicians have made promises. But have race relations improved in America since that fateful date, August 9, 2014, when Michael Brown was killed?

**Luke Bobo:** Denis, some days I want to ask, what do we mean by race relations? Some days I would answer in the affirmative; some days I really wonder, and on these days I really want to curse and holler! Since the turbulent 1960s, race relations have certainly improved—no one can deny that good news; however, ongoing events seem to suggest that bettering race relations have either stalled or regressed.

Consider this evidence. First, think of the horrific and painful events of Charlottesville, Virginia, August 18–19, 2017. Once upon a time groups

like white nationalists and neo-Nazis secretly hid their identity; however, Charlottesville has shown us that some whites can be quite brazenly and unashamedly racist. Second, think about the research of Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan. They found a relationship between a person's name and their employability. For instance, in cities like Chicago and Boston, they found that applicants that had a black sounding names were less likely to be called in for an interview. Ironically, I have taught young people with names such as Lakisha, Devontre, Sharniqua, Jamal, and others who were quite bright but sadly their birth names might prevent them the opportunity to show-

case their skills and brilliance for an employer.

In general, I think white and black Americans are cordial and civil with each other in public, in our cities, and in our workplaces; but if something or someone agitates 'the pot' or the status quo, evidences of racism seem to quickly bubble to the surface. For

example, in "The Making of Ferguson" (online at [www.epi.org](http://www.epi.org)), Richard Rothstein says that Ferguson was 20 years in the making. The killing of Michael Brown was the trigger for what was stirring beneath the surface to erupt like a volcano. Race relations seem to be quite tenuous at best at this moment in history in America.

---

**PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT THE KLAN AND THE OVERT RACISM, BUT THE KILLING OF ONE'S SOUL LITTLE BY LITTLE, DAY AFTER DAY, IS A LOT WORSE THAN SOMEONE COMING IN YOUR HOUSE AND LYNCHING YOU.**

**—Samuel L. Jackson**



**DH:** I hear white Americans in the north (where I live) say, "Southern slavery was inexcusable and evil, but enshrined in the Declaration of Independence was a notion of equality informed by the biblical belief that people are made in God's image. We fought a war over slavery and ended it. Civil rights have been extended to all, and now there are blacks that have risen to the highest reaches of societal power, education, wealth, and prestige."

But in *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates dashes that whole way of telling the story: "You must resist the common urge toward the comforting narrative of divine law, toward fairy tales that imply some irrepressible justice. The enslaved were not bricks in your road, and their lives were not chapters in your redemptive history. They were people turned to fuel for the American machine. Enslavement was not destined to end, and it is wrong to claim our present circumstance—no matter how improved—as the redemption for the lives of people who never asked for the posthumous, untouchable glory of dying for their children. Our triumphs can never compensate for this." Is Coates correct? Do we need to tell the story of America differently?

**LB:** Sure, we need to tell the story of America differently. Why? Because the dominant story that is usually told is predominantly a white America story.

I was honored to teach a worldview and ethics class to 90+ Campus Crusade staffers in Fort Collins, Colorado, over a two-week stretch this summer. We discussed ethical issues such as abortion, surrogacy, selling one's eggs and sperm, immigration, and of course, racism, white supremacy, and our racialized society. The class was

predominantly White. When I discussed race, racism, and our racialized society, most of these students had not heard of the famous black and white Doll Test conducted by Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark in the 1940s, of Emmett Till, of the Tulsa Riot of 1921, of the horrific and inhumane conditions of the Middle Passage, of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, of the forced sterilization of blacks and other "misfits" to advance the eugenics agenda of making this country the home of a superior race. For more on this see Edwin Black's voluminous book, *War Against the Weak* (2003).

I wonder if the readers of *Critique* have heard of such things?

Perhaps Coates is getting at this—we must teach a comprehensive and complete story of America and not just white America history. We should demand and require our educators (and this includes parents—a child's first teachers) to teach black history, Native American history, and Hispanic history, as all of these belong to American history and to the story of America.

**DH:** "Fully 60 percent of all young Black men who drop out of high school will go to jail," Coates writes. "This should disgrace the country. But it does not." I hear whites wondering why they should assume a sense of disgrace over what other people make of their lives. Do not individuals make choices for which they must alone be responsible?

**LB:** Of course, white, black, and

Hispanic individuals should bear the burden for their good and ill choices. Absolutely no one is asking anyone to be absolved of the consequences resulting from stupid mistakes. So whites should not assume a sense of disgrace

or personal culpability over such things. Yet, as those called by God to love their neighbors as themselves, we must not stop there—that would be disgraceful! Rather, we must lament this awful phe-

nomenon and ask that most penetrating question: why? *Why* do 60 percent of all young black men drop out of high school and go to jail?

Specifically, according to Brian Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative, "One out of three African American men, ages 18 to 30, are in jail, in prison, on probation, or on parole." (Listen to Stevenson's TED talk given March 2012. It is still one of the most listened to TED talks of all time.) Statistics like this should burden all Christians enough to ask why—isn't this what it means to be our brother's or sister's keeper? John Stott says in *Radical Disciple* that there should be a "mutual burdensomeness" (p. 110). Who or what forces a young Black man to believe that his only option is to forgo getting a high school education? Could it be joblessness or little hope of being employed? I wonder if joblessness or faint hope of finding a job contributes to the high incarceration rates of African American males. There is a cause-and-effect dynamic operating here. No one wakes up and says, "I am

## **RACISM IS MAN'S GRAVEST THREAT TO MAN—THE MAXIMUM OF HATRED FOR A MINIMUM OF REASON.**

**—Abraham Joshua Heschel**



dropping out of school today.” There are visible and invisible causes at play. LeBron James and his wife, Savannah, discovered that the “high school dropout rate was 24 percent” in Akron, Ohio. What he and his wife discovered was that such issues are not one-sided; rather, there are emotional, educational, and even nutritional factors at play. “Food insecurity is common among Akron’s mostly impoverished community.” [*Vogue*, September 2017, p. 334.]

Many young African American men are quite hopeless, especially those low on the socio-economic ladder. A young man in our church said to me, “I did not think I would live past 25 years of age” (he is now in his early 30s). There are many young African Americans who are profoundly hopeless. Knowing such things should burden us. Could there be invisible forces oblivious to the White majority that moves a young man to resort to dropping out of high school?

Why should such things burden all Christians? Because God intended for all human beings to flourish (Genesis 1-2) and we are all human beings, created in God’s image, together. We are implicated in the need to seek the common good of others.

**DH:** I recently attended a workshop led by a black pastor from Chicago. He told how one day he was pulled over by the police and discovered he did not have proof of insurance in his car’s glove box. So he appeared in traffic court on the day appointed. He watched as a succession of young black men stood before the judge when their names were called. Each was asked if they had insurance on the day the police stopped them. No, they said. Each time the judge imposed a fine and called the next name. One name resulted in a young white man

standing. “Did you have auto insurance on the day the police pulled you over?” the judge asked, and the young man said No. The judge turned to the district attorney and asked if there wasn’t something they could do for this young man. They dropped the charges. The next succession of names brought a succession of young black men, none of whom had insurance, and had fines immediately imposed.

Luke, is this an anomaly, a case of one bad judge in an otherwise decent system, or what?

**LB:** Denis, I had to laugh to keep from crying after hearing your question! In general, blacks have a disdain for and distrust of the American criminal justice system and this story you tell gives one of the reasons why.

I vividly remember an event that occurred while I was directing the Francis Schaeffer Institute at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. We were planning an event involving a white police officer. He was invited to share how he integrated his faith and his work on a daily basis. One of my interns, who is white, whispered to me, “Luke, you might not know this but we consider police officers our friends.” Unbeknownst to me, I was communicating my negative bias against the men and women in blue.

This was partly because, historically and experientially, blacks and white police officers have not been bosom buddies. Think about the Civil Rights movement when white police officers hosed down blacks and used attack dogs to fend them off; think about the acquittal of the white men who killed Emmett Till, a precocious

fourteen-year-old who was visiting family in Mississippi in 1955. It was alleged that he flirted with a white woman, and he was later found dead at the bottom of a river. (Even more heart-breaking, Timothy B. Tyson writes in his landmark book, *The Blood of Emmett Till*, that the white woman fabricated the entire story!)

Fast-forward and think about the inhumane treatment of Rodney King and how he was savagely beaten by four white police officers—who were later acquitted. Illinois attorney Scott Turow in his book, *Ultimate Punishment*, made this keen and disturbing observation while he was in the Illinois criminal



justice system: “A white life is more important than a black life.”

African Americans know this experientially. I have an African American colleague in Kansas City, Missouri, who said to a predominantly white audience two years ago that he stopped counting at 48—the number of times he has been pulled over by the police for no

# BLIND SPOT

apparent reason or cause. Or read about Mr. Cotton, a black man who was falsely accused of rape by a white female in *Picking Cotton*. He was later exonerated and freed based on DNA evidence—after spending ten years in prison. One more story: My pastor hails from Texas. During his early days in Liberty, Missouri, he was pulled over by the police. When asked why he was pulled over, the police officer said, “Your Texas tags were crooked.” True story, I am not making this up.

I want your white readers to see why psychologists are now mentioning the word ‘trauma’ and the black experience in the same sentence. Imagine these frequent, and sometimes daily, assaults on a person just because of his or her skin color. And even if it does not happen to me personally, I still feel and sense the experience. Recently I posted this on my Facebook page: “When I talk about race, racism, and our ‘racialized society,’ I often mention trauma. Events like Charlottesville (and U.S. slavery, Jim Crow discrimination, Tulsa riots

(1921), redlining, lynchings, restrictive covenants, racial profiling, the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, micro-aggressions, mass incarceration of blacks, etc.) explain why trauma is cited in the same sentence as race, racism, and our racialized society.”

Taking your initial story along with these stories and the countless others I hear from African Americans makes me cynical about our criminal justice system. I urge *Critique* readers to read Aaron

Layton’s recent book, *Dear White Christian: What Every White Christian Needs to Know About How Black Christians See, Think and Experience Racism in America*. Please don’t hear what I am not saying. I am not saying all white police officers or judges are rogues; rather, I am saying the criminal justice system—from policing, to court proceedings, to sentencing—has not been fair to African Americans overall.

**DH:** How do you as a black evangelical interpret the 2016 election? We learn from polls that white evangelical voters tended to vote overwhelmingly for Trump, as did those who believe in white supremacy. How is it possible that those two blocks of voters ended up supporting the same candidate?

**LB:** How is it possible? Now, that’s a great question! I think about the 2016 election often. I should say here as I start to answer this question that I hold firmly to the biblical and historic Christian faith, but I am not sure I want to be referred to as an evangelical. I posted this article, “The FAQs: What Christians Should Know About the Alt-Right,” by Joe Carter on Facebook. In it, Carter answers some frequently asked questions, such as: What is the alt-right? Who is Richard Spencer? What is white

identity? And why does the alt-right hate conservative Christians? I commend the article to you. You can find it on the website of The Gospel Coalition (TGC) at [www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org).

However, relative to this article, I was struck by a white friend’s brutally honest commentary on white evangelicalism. He wrote, “When you read the comments to [Carter’s] article on TGC’s website, you realize that tons of its subscribers adhere to alt-right movements and think it’s unfair to say it’s not the gospel... that’s where the problem lies, deeper than what an article or some leaders can solve. White evangelicalism in the U.S. is deathly sick if not fundamentally broken and heretical. I say this as an evangelical, of course.”

Is he perhaps right—is white evangelicalism in the United States deathly sick? Have white evangelicals, as he is suggesting, bowed the knee to a political party/identity and not God?

I remember telling a group of college students years ago before a presidential election, “It would be irresponsible to vote following your parents’ voting pattern.” The point I was making was that we must do our homework to be discerning and then vote our conscience. I wonder if these 80 percent white evangelical Christians did their homework? I wonder if they practiced discernment as Ransom Fellowship teaches us to do so wonderfully. One of the damaging effects of the election is the smearing of the word *evangelical*. What does it mean today? It is worth mentioning that many of my African American friends who are Christians do not refer to themselves as evangelicals because of the pre-/post-election results. And they raise their eyebrows of suspicion when a white Christian refers to himself as an evangelical Christian.

**DH:** In “Facing Our Legacy of Lynching: How a memorial could help lead America—and Christians—to repentance from a dark history,” in *Christianity Today* (September 2017), D. L. Mayfield points out that, “More than 4,000 African Americans were lynched between 1877 and the rise of the civil rights movement in the early 1950s.” How can white Christians be sensitive to such horror without surrendering all sense of pride in being American?

**LB:** Let me take a page from my training at Covenant Theological Seminary, specifically my apologetics and outreach class taught by Jerram Barrs. Professor Barrs taught us to affirm what is good about American culture and to also unabashedly decry its horrific past. What I find most often is the case with the majority culture is an emphasis on the first and a neglect of the second. In fact, what I find most often is that many whites are oblivious of America’s horrific past—the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, Emmett Till, Jim Crow discrimination, the Middle Passage, the Tulsa race riot of 1921, lynching, and so on.

It is fine to be a proud American—I am a proud American—but it is also incumbent upon whites to know black history as “Black History is American History,” as the late and deeply beloved

Covenant ethics professor, David Clyde Jones once said.

**DH:** I am a white evangelical believer. I am from Minnesota, a northern state that sent soldiers to fight in the Civil War. In fact, the First Minnesota Regiment that fought at Gettysburg suffered the highest rate of casualties in the Union Army. Yet, I obviously benefit from white privilege in our society and bear responsibility for America’s past as a citizen. What do I do, practically, to be faithful to my Lord’s call to humility, repentance, and reconciliation at this point in history?

**LB:** Like I said earlier, I was honored to teach a worldview and ethics class to 90+ Crusade staffers in Fort Collins, Colorado. And one of the Crusade directors reached out to me. In the post-Charlottesville reality, he asked what he should share with the students he will work with. This is what I sent him (with a few modifications):

1. As believers, let’s celebrate the progress we have made in race relations.
2. As believers, we should lament the evil personified in these white nationalists and supremacists. We should mourn for those *imago Dei* bearers killed—the young lady killed when the neo-Nazi drove into a crowd, the two officers killed in the helicopter crash, and we should

pray for their respective families. We should mourn for those injured.

3. As believers, God calls us to pray for both sides: the counter-protesters and the white nationalists and supremacists.
4. As believers, God calls us to pray for our local, regional, national, and international leaders—we should pray for Trump, Pence, police officers, etc. (see 1 Timothy 2). I pray for the U.S. Supreme Court, and men and women who sit in the Senate and the House of Representatives.
5. As believers, we need to understand our times. Ignorance is not bliss; ignorance is ignorance, and it is not helpful. We need to understand the racial history of this country. We need to know the history of this country—the good, the bad and the ugly. And we need to teach this history to our kids. I was delighted to know that a white Crusade student was reading the book *Hidden Figures* to her kids. We need to broaden our circle of friends (burst that “echo chamber”). We need to befriend people who think, vote, and look different from us.
6. As believers, we must love our neighbors as ourselves. This means fighting and decrying racial and ethnic injustices. God calls us to love neighbors in close proximity. Look around. Who are you loving in your most immediate periphery?
7. As believers, we should pray for our pastors who must stand in the pulpit and preach hope and condemn such evil. Our silence communicates, too. We have a policy in our office: silence means hearty agreement. We must pray that our pastors speak out

**IN AMERICA THERE IS  
INSTITUTIONAL RACISM  
THAT WE ALL INHERIT  
AND PARTICIPATE IN, LIKE  
BREATHING THE AIR IN THIS  
ROOM—AND WE HAVE TO  
BECOME SENSITIVE TO IT.**

**—Henry Louis Gates**

against evil, injustices, etc. when they occur. Recall Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

8. As believers, we need to live by the moral mandates of scripture and the gospel. The gospel demands us to cross all types of boundaries, as the gospel intrinsically has a cross-cultural impulse/focus. We need to break from our echo chambers and really get to know our neighbor. For instance, I told the predominantly white audience in Fort Collins these insights about African Americans: (a) We are like a tribal people. When something honorable happens to a fellow African American, vicariously we are all honored. Similarly, when something dishonorable happens to a fellow African American, we feel that pain, too. This can also backfire. For example, my daughter was criticized for talking white by her urban sisters who were bused out to their suburban white high school. The expectation here is that all African Americans should talk similarly. (b) We don't see one event in isolation. Rather, we see and interpret an event like Charlottesville within the entire scope of the racial and historical narrative in America. And (c) most African Americans know that the white life experience is normative in America. That is to say, if a white person did not experience an event, then that event did not occur and/or it is declared to be incredulous.
9. As believers, we need to use social media winsomely, graciously, and wisely. We should engage our mind and heart when using social media.

We need to be careful that we are not inadvertently adding to the hateful rhetoric or stirring the pot. Social media can be used for good; we need to ask God for discernment to use it redemptively.

10. As believers, we should pray for the church to be the church of Jesus Christ. We dare not put our complete trust in the government (although it certainly has a role to play). Rather, this is the moment when the spotlight is on the church to be an exhibition of a new, redeemed society.

11. As believers, once we see and hear something that is amiss, we are implicated; and once implicated we must act for the sake of human flourishing. For more on the notion of being implicated, see "Come and See" in Steve Garber's fine book, *Visions of Vocation* (2014).

I recently began reading Brian Stevenson's book, *Just Mercy*. He grew up in a poor, rural, racially segregated settlement in Delaware. He recounts his grandmother saying this to him: "You

can't understand most of the important things from a distance, Bryan. You have to get close." I wonder if, in our efforts to be safe and distant from the other, the unknown, that we have added to the

fear mongering, indifference, and the stalling of bettering race relations in America. I wonder if retreating to our echo chambers or "ghettos" reinforces our implicit and external biases toward the other. [For more on this see Bill Bishop's *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart* (2009)] I wonder if intentional proximity to the other will help us. I wonder if our lack of proximity explains why, in Christopher Ingraham's words,

"Three quarters of whites don't have any non-white friends." [*Washington Post*, August 2014]

I wonder if Christians really know the scriptures. Because to know the scriptures is to do the scriptures. I wonder if Christians really love God with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind, and all their strength. Because to love God is to do his commands.

I believe the church as a redeemed

**MOST CHRISTIAN 'BELIEVERS' TEND TO ECHO THE CULTURAL PREJUDICES AND WORLDVIEWS OF THE DOMINANT GROUP IN THEIR COUNTRY, WITH ONLY A MINORITY REVEALING ANY REAL TRANSFORMATION OF ATTITUDES OR CONSCIOUSNESS. IT HAS BEEN TRUE OF SLAVERY AND RACISM, CLASSISM AND CONSUMERISM, AND ISSUES OF IMMIGRATION AND HEALTH CARE FOR THE POOR.**

**—Richard Rohr**



society is God's major player in bettering race relations in America. I remain hopeful that the church will lead the way in race relations and reconciliation.

**DH:** What is the single best book or two on the market that you would recommend I read to be better able to think through the crisis of racial inequality in America today? And are there some more you'd say I should go on to read as well? And what about some movies to watch?

**LB:** I would suggest you read these four books first:

- Emerson, M., and Smith, C. (2000). *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- King Jr., Martin Luther (1986). "Letter from the Birmingham Jail (1963)." In James M. Washington (Ed.), *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, pp. 289-302. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Layton, Aaron. (2017). *Dear White Christian: What Every White Christian Needs to Know About How Black Christians See, Think and Experience Racism in America*. PCA Committee on Discipleship Ministries.
- Rankine, Claudia. (2014). *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press.

And then go on to deepen your understanding with these:

- Adiche, Chimamanda Ngozi (2013). *Americanah*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Alexander, Michelle (2012). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age*

*of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press.

- Angelou, Maya (1981). *The Heart of a Woman*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Biss, E. (2009). *Notes from No Man's Land*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press.
- Black, E. (2003). *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*. New York, NY: Four Walls Eight Windows.
- Bordewich, Fergus M. (2005). *Bound for Canaan: The Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America's First Civil Rights Movement*. New York, NY: Amistad (HarperCollins).
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1994). *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover.
- Hirsch, James (2002). *Riot and Remembrance: America's Worst Race Riot and Its Legacy*. New York, NY: Houghton.
- Jones, James H. (1993). *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment*. New York: Free.
- King Jr., Martin Luther (1968; renewed 1986). *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- McCall, Nathan (1994). *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America*. New York: Random House.
- McIntosh, P. (1990). *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. Independent School, 49, 31.
- McWhorter, John H (2000). *Losing the Race: Self-sabotage in Black America*. New York: Free.
- Skloot, Rebecca (2011). *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. New York:

Broadway Paperbacks.

- Steele, Shelby (1998). *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Williams, Juan (1987). *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*. New York, NY: Viking.

And here are a few films that would suggest viewing with a mixed audience in order to deepen the discussion to follow:

- *Guess Who is Coming to Dinner* (1967)
- *Watermelon Man* (1970)
- *Mississippi Burning* (1988)
- *A Family Thing* (1996)
- *Crash* (2004)
- *Ray* (2004)
- *The Grace Card* (2010)
- *The Help* (2011)
- *Red Tails* (2012)
- *The Butler* (2013)
- *42* (2013)
- *Race* (2016)
- *Chi-Raq* (2015)
- *Get Out* (2017) ■



**Luke Bobo** works as the director of resource and curriculum development at *Made to Flourish* ([www.madetoflourish.org](http://www.madetoflourish.org)). He is a visiting instructor at Covenant Theological Seminary (St. Louis, Missouri), at Carver Baptist Bible College, Institute, and Theological Seminary (Kansas City, Missouri), and at Cru's Institute of Biblical Studies (IBS). He has written three books and several articles. He has been married to Rita Holmes for nearly 35 years and they have two wonderful children, Briana and Caleb.

# Being Human in a World of Machines



Some questions never go away. We may ignore them, or be too distracted or addicted or busy to notice them, but they still don't go away. And even when times are particularly dark, there will be artists and thinkers and

storytellers and poets to remind us they still require an answer.

In 1982 one such storyteller was Ridley Scott. The question he raised in his film, *Blade Runner*, was both ancient in essence and up-to-date in its specificity: What does it mean to be human in a world of machines? Now director Denis Villeneuve adds the next chapter of the story in *Blade Runner 2049*. And in the process, the question, still so vital and imperative, is raised in updated form, once again—to our benefit if, that is, we have ears to hear.

The world imagined in the *Blade Runner* films is one in which human beings live side by side with robots essentially indistinguishable from people. These “replicants” are manufactured, used essentially as slaves, and are extinguished (it’s called “retired”) without regret—they are not human, after all. Still in their dying they bleed red blood that looks identical to human blood splattered on the clothing of the Blade Runners (a branch of the police) who hunt them down.

The first film was set in 2019, so the second one takes place thirty years later. In order to help us see how things have changed, Villeneuve commissioned three short films that bring us up to date. You can find them on YouTube: *Blackout 2020*; *2036: Nexus Dawn*; *2048: Nowhere to Run*. I won’t bother to write out the timeline of the story through the two films and three shorts since they are worth seeing and so much has been written about them anyway. Though you can see *Blade Runner 2049* without watching the previous version and three shorts, I encourage you to watch all of them because a single question animates all of them, and they tell a single narrative. (A number of versions of *Blade Runner* are available—watch the Final Cut.)

My reading of things is that the *Blade Runner* films have a significance that will continue to ripple through our culture. The best instances of popular cinema tell stories that imbed themselves in the imagination, helping to shape the social imaginary of those who watch them. And they shape a social conversation so that the narrative, images, and ideas flow out more widely to touch even those who did not watch the movies. The *Blade Runner* films touch on ideas too important to be ignored and raise issues of perennial importance, so the conversations that result are ones Christians who love Jesus as Lord will not want to miss. “Like other sacred texts,” critic A. O. Scott writes in *The New York Times*, “the film invites doctrinal arguments and esoteric inquiries.”

Film critic Brian Tallerico puts it well:

*Unlike a lot of reboots or long-delayed sequels that merely remix the themes and characters of the beloved original*

to give viewers the hollow comfort of familiarity, Denis Villeneuve and his team are remarkably ambitious, using the topics raised by *Blade Runner* to continue the conversation instead of just repeating it to make a buck. To that end, they have made one of the most deeply philosophical and challenging sci-fi films of all time, a movie that never holds your hand as it spirals the viewer through its gorgeous funhouse of the human soul.

The primary question the films are exploring is of deep significance. What does it mean to be human? Asked in every generation in every culture, how we answer it makes a difference in the laws we pass, the values we espouse, the relationships we cherish and discard, the ways we treat those different from us, and the hopes and fears we have whenever the specter of death draws near. And because the films are posing this question in our world, the question of our humanity is raised in a technological world full of machines. How does our setting affect our understanding of and our personal sense of humanity?

The films are quite brilliant in the way they imagine the world of our future. The striking visual design and landscapes—both of crowded urban areas and the rural wastes beyond their edge—do not just suggest what our surroundings might be like in a few years but they serve as a powerful metaphor for what life will be like—and more importantly, is like. The world that Scott and Villeneuve imagine for the future has distinct echoes of today, for blessing and for curse.

Replicants exist in both films, though the technology has improved dramatically. In the first film the dilemma arises when the machines become aware of

death and desire to live. They gain self-knowledge and rebel against the built-in lifespan that will cut their existence short. Is this what makes biological machines human? The second film takes an even greater myth as the basis of the dilemma: what if the replicants are able to give birth? The creation and fall narratives in scripture provide a great expression of the ultimate hope of humankind—God’s promise of a redeemer is linked to the birth of a child. St. Paul even speaks mysteriously of being “saved through childbearing” (1 Timothy 2:15) and somehow, even in dire straits, the birth of a child evokes joy and a rekindling of hope.

There is an oppressiveness depicted in *Blade Runner 2049* that should make us distinctly uncomfortable. White men dominate and, though there are strong women in the story, it seems the world of the future remains strongly misogynist in imagery, advertising, and the toys men can download for pleasure. Critic MaryAnn Johanson sums up the problem this way:

*2049 is unpleasantly retro in its depiction of women, too many of whom are literally slavishly devoted to men: the AI companion, whose name is Joi, who adores K, and a replicant named Luv (Sylvia Hoeks), who is programmed so that she cannot disobey her creator, Niander Wallace (Jared Leto), the new replicant slavemaster, replacing Tyrell of the original film. (Really? Joi and Luv? Come on. Oh, and there’s also a female prostitute character, hooker with a heart of gold Mariette [Mackenzie Davis], because of course there is. If there are any male sex workers or male devoted-AI-companions in 2049 Los Angeles, we never meet them.)*

This is our world, with its misogyny





made more open and socially acceptable.

Good science fiction is never ultimately about other worlds or the future. It is about us and our world and the questions we need to ask if we are to make sense of life. *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* are good science fiction. The issues they raise and the questions they pose do not have easy answers, especially today when civil conversation about the things that matter most is sadly rare. And that's exactly the sort of conversation that discerning Christians need to nurture. ■

**Sources:** Brian Tallerico online ([www.rogerebert.com/reviews/blade-runner-2049-2017](http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/blade-runner-2049-2017)). A. O. Scott online ([www.nytimes.com/2017/10/02/movies/blade-runner-2049-review-ryan-gosling-harrison-ford.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/02/movies/blade-runner-2049-review-ryan-gosling-harrison-ford.html?_r=0)). MaryAnn Johanson online ([www.flickfilosopher.com/2017/10/blade-runner-2049-movie-review-rickety-retro-replicant.html](http://www.flickfilosopher.com/2017/10/blade-runner-2049-movie-review-rickety-retro-replicant.html)).

More pics and credits on the back cover.

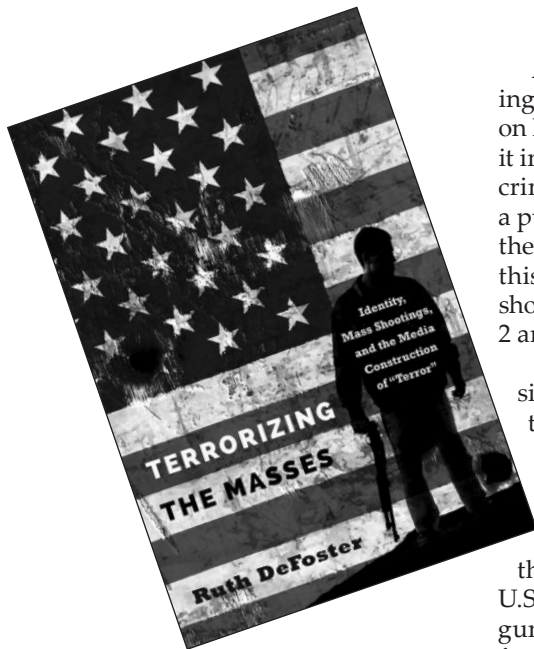


## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your initial or immediate reaction to the film? Why do you think you reacted that way? Do you tend to enjoy science fiction as a cinematic genre? Why or why not? In what ways can science fiction do a better job than realism in revealing the deeper, spiritual aspects of reality?
2. In what ways were the techniques of film-making (casting, direction, lighting, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?
3. What was made attractive? How is it made attractive?
4. With whom did you identify in the film? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? How do you know? Discuss each main character in the film and their significance to the story.
5. Discuss the issues and questions raised in this review. What is the biblical or Christian perspective on them? Why are they not deemed as attractive explanations in our culture? How can you talk about them in a creative and intelligent way to people who do not share your deepest convictions and values?
6. The Christian conviction is that human beings bear the likeness or image of God by virtue of his creation (Genesis 1:26-31). Yet the scriptures never define exactly what that image includes, though Christians have often proposed various possibilities. How might the silence of the scriptures at this point be important? What does the notion of bearing God's image speak into the questions raised by the *Blade Runner* films?
7. There is a hint of overriding sense of mystery or even transcendence in *Blade Runner*. What evoked this and what does it add to the film? Is it present in *Blade Runner 2049*?



# Shaped by Media in an Age of Toxic Masculinity



A question: how often do mass shootings occur in America? Well, it depends on how you define the term. Let's define it in a restrictive way, as excluding other crimes such as robbery, as occurring in a public or open place, and as involving the deaths of at least four victims. With this definition the number of mass shootings in America averages between 2 and 20 each year.

But if we define mass shootings simply as any shooting that takes the life of at least four victims, the number increases dramatically.

"June 12, 2016. A gunman opens fire in an Orlando nightclub, leaving 49 dead and many wounded. It was the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history—until... October 1, 2017. A gunman opens fire on a country music festival in Las

Vegas. At least 59 were killed and 527 were injured. Since Orlando, at least 585 people have been killed and 2,156 have been injured in mass shootings." There is 477 days between those two dates, *The New York Times*

notes, and in that period there were 521 mass shootings.

It's all very horrifying regardless of how we define the term. Yet it is also a bit confusing because how we define the term matters. Should a bungled store robbery in which four innocent bystanders are tragically killed be identified as a mass shooting if the robbers opened fire in an attempt to elude capture? Is that the same sort of crime that occurred in the Orlando nightclub

and the Las Vegas concert? Does it require the same response?

Even one mass shooting is a tragedy, a deep grief that should rock our souls. Families have lost loved ones, lives have been shattered by death or by being maimed, people feel less secure than they did the day before and perhaps view others with greater mistrust and suspicion. How we define these things changes how we see them and how we as individuals and as a nation respond to them.

But the situation is more complicated still. Not only can the term mass shooting be used differently in different reports about different incidents, the term terrorism is even more difficult to define. Is the store robbery an act of terrorism if the perpetrator is Muslim?

What if a terrorist organization claims responsibility even though there are no known links or contacts between the shooter and the organization? What if the perpetrator states their purpose is to instigate a holy war even though

they are not Muslim?

In *Terrorizing the Masses*, communications scholar Ruth DeFoster concludes that how the media reports these incidents is less than helpful if the goal is to help us understand what's actually going on in the world.

*Confronted with mass shootings in a post-Columbine, post-September 11 world, journalists and commentators tend to shunt shooters into one of two*

**NONE OF US ARE IMMUNE TO THE INFLUENCE OF THE MASS MEDIA. NONE OF US ARE IMMUNE TO THE INFLUENCE OF POPULAR CULTURE.**

—**Ruth DeFoster**

neatly delineated camps—“crazy” or “political.” And in coverage of mass shootings with any hint of a link to Islam, Arab or Muslim identity, or any interest by the shooter in Islamic extremism, the two categories shift to “crazy” (or “disturbed”/“unbalanced”) or “terrorist.”

The designation of terror in media coverage is not rooted in policy, nor is it rooted in scholarship. Rather, this designation is prompted primarily, even solely, by the racial and religious identity of the perpetrator, and informed by the cultural iconography of September 11. Joseph Stack, who penned a political manifesto and flew a plane into a building, was not identified as a terrorist. Wade Michael Page, a white supremacist who opened fire on a Sikh temple in Wisconsin in 2012, was not identified as a terrorist, despite the fact that his ostensible aim in the attack was to spur a “racial holy war.” Scott Michael Greene, who is charged with ambushing and killing two police officers in Iowa in November 2016, was not identified as a terrorist. The Fort Lauderdale airport shooting in January 2017, committed by a mentally ill military veteran who believed the U.S. government forced him to watch ISIL recruitment videos, was not framed as an act of terror. Neither was the white nationalist, Alexandre Bissonnette, who opened fire on a Quebec City mosque in January 2017, although some broadcast media identified him as a “lone wolf.”

But shootings and bombings with Muslim culprits—whether they are mentally ill or not—are always framed as acts of capital-T Terror. The Tsarnaev brothers in Boston. Syed Farook and Tashfeen Malik in San Bernardino. Nidal Hasan at Fort Hood. And Omar Mateen in Orlando.

Consequently, a concise definition of what qualifies an act as “terrorism” in

broadcast news is as follows: *A violent criminal act, committed by a Muslim culprit (or culprits), that targets civilians with the intent to intimidate, coerce or otherwise terrorize a broader population, whether or not the culprit is a member of any larger organized group, and irrespective of the mental health of the culprit(s).* [p. 197–198]

In the Christian view of things, at the beginning our first parents were called of God to name the animals (Genesis 2:18–20). That part of the creation narrative not only inspired Bob Dylan to write a playful song, it is also a mythic clue as to the significance of naming. What we call things matters, and matters even more in a fallen world where we see only dimly and in part. On the one hand,

the process of observing, identifying, discriminating, and describing created reality is the essence of science, and Adam and Eve’s task hints at the glory that would follow as history unfolded. And on the other hand, the name we assign to things changes how we see them and react to them. Imagine this: an unknown male in a hoodie walks past my house four times in the course of an hour. Will I not look out my window differently if I am asked about the street thug casing the neighborhood vs. a man getting some exercise on a chilly autumn day?

How we identify—and how the

media identifies mass shootings and acts of terrorism are of real importance. It can affect how safe we feel, how we vote, how we pray, how we see and act towards our neighbors, and the policies we support on so many issues from immigration to policing to justice to gun control to international relations to religious freedom. All of this is something Christians must think about well if we are to help heal the divisions tearing apart the frail fabric of American democracy.

The author of *Terrorizing the Masses* is a dear friend whom I have known since she was a little girl. If that makes me sound old, it’s because I am old. I take no credit in Ruth DeFoster’s pilgrimage, though if I could it would be an honor. Her calling is in journalism, her vocation is

teaching, and her passion is truth and justice. *Terrorizing the Masses*, based on her doctoral research is her first book but hopefully it will not be her last.

*Terrorizing the Masses* is not easy or comfortable reading. Much of it details the results of her research into how the media has reported on mass shootings. Rather than have us take her word for the conclusions she draws, DeFoster walks us through the data to her conclusions, so the book will seem a bit dense for some readers who simply want the conclusions handed to them.

*Terrorizing the Masses* is also not easy or comfortable because some

**THE GREAT ENEMY OF THE TRUTH IS VERY OFTEN NOT THE LIE, DELIBERATE, CONTRIVED AND DISHONEST, BUT THE MYTH, PERSISTENT, PERSUASIVE, AND UNREALISTIC.**

—John F. Kennedy

of what DeFoster concludes from her research is unsettling. “Mass shootings are performances,” she shows, “almost always meticulously planned in advance, with an eye towards achieving posthumous infamy” [p. 200]. Almost always perpetuated by males, they represent a horrifying attempt to prove one’s manhood in a world where a misguided masculinity meets a freewheeling gun culture.

*Examining the history of mass shootings in the United States, three factors are predominant in nearly every case: (1) severe, preexisting, untreated mental illness, (2) easy (usually legal) access to high-powered weaponry, despite the fact that the majority of mass shooters suffer from the type of mental illness and/or drug abuse that should have prevented them from accessing firearms. And finally, (3) the powerful influence that an immersive environment of toxic masculinity, informed and inflected by the cultural iconography that accompanies large scale violence, plays in creating a context in which men choose to become mass shooters.*

*In the case of each of these severely disturbed men (and indeed, there’s a chicken-and-egg definitional problem inherent in any mass shooting, as one must be severely disturbed to even seriously contemplate this type of violence) identifying the specific element or factor that ostensibly pushed each man to the “brink” of this violence is irrelevant. Mass shooters do not “snap”—they consistently and predictably move down a path toward these episodes of violence. [p. 201–202]*

Many young men today grow up fatherless, either through the fragmentation of divorce or the abandonment of families to crushing busyness from demanding

jobs, fitness regimens, lengthy commutes, and the interruptions of cell phones and other devices. Popular culture tends to glorify revenge in the place of justice accomplished by strong men with guns who take on the world and are remembered for their virile masculinity and body count. In a world in which gender can be confused and confusing and where misogyny is dismissed as either comedic or locker room normalcy, the church seems incapable of mentoring young men into adulthood because a robust Christian theology of the body, heroic virtue and spiritual friendship has been long lost.

*Terrorizing the Masses* is a book length exercise in discernment that seeks out the truth even when that truth is buried in good intentions, popular perspectives and widely accepted practices. DeFoster’s conclusions will not please those who are captive to ideologies of either the right or the left. It will please only those for whom hard truths and sharp clarity beats prejudices and easy answers repeated so often that they soon become unquestioned and unchallenged. Sad to say, I am uncertain how many Christians will be in that number.

So, I hope you will take *Terrorizing the Masses* seriously even though it is not the sort of book we can read and forget. Knowledge bears its own responsibility. DeFoster’s book requires people of good will to think more deeply, to consume media news with more intelligent care, to ask more probing questions, and to be willing to lean against some of the things most of us have heard so often we simply take them for granted. ■

**Resource recommended:** *Terrorizing the Masses: Identity, Mass Shootings, and the Media Construction of “Terror”* by Ruth DeFoster (New York, NY: Peter Lang; 2017) 207 pages + bibliography + index.

## RESOURCE

Hearts and Minds bookstore is a well-stocked haven for serious, reflective readers. When ordering resources, mention Ransom Fellowship and they will contribute 10 per cent of the total back to us. ■

**Resource:** *Hearts and Minds bookstore, [www.heartsandmindsbooks.com](http://www.heartsandmindsbooks.com)*







#### Film credits: *Blade Runner* (1982)

Director: Ridley Scott  
 Writers: Hampton Fancher and David Webb Peoples  
 Based on the novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick  
 Producers: Hampton Fancher, Ridley Scott, Brian Kelly and others  
 Cinematography: Jordan Cronenweth  
 Starring:  
 Harrison Ford (Rick Deckard)  
 Rutger Hauer (Roy Batty)  
 Sean Young (Rachael)  
 Edward James Olmos (Gaff)  
 M. Emmet Walsh (J. F. Sebastian)  
 Daryl Hannah (Pris)  
 USA, 1982, 117 minutes  
 Rated R (violence)

#### Film credits: *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)

Director: Denis Villeneuve  
 Writers: Hampton Fancher, Michael Green  
 Based on characters from the novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick  
 Producers: Ridley Scott, Yale Badik, and others  
 Cinematography: Roger Deakins  
 Starring:  
 Ryan Gosling (K)  
 David Bautista (Sapper Morton)  
 Robin Wright (Lieutenant Joshi)  
 Ana de Armas (Joi)  
 Jared Leto (Niander Wallace)  
 Edward James Olmos (Gaff)  
 Harrison Ford (Rick Deckard)  
 Sean Young (Rachael)  
 USA, 2017; 164 minutes  
 Rated R (violence, some sexuality, nudity, and language)