

# Suggested Reading List:

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## **Crossing into the Urban Culture**

As a former missions pastor, I know the importance of cross-cultural missions. Wayne Sneed and David Frazier are both mission icons from Memphis who stress the importance of cross-cultural awareness on the mission field. With that in mind, I am learning and reading, and wanted to share a few books with you that I have read:

How Black is the Gospel by Tom Skinner

Letters to a Birmingham Jail by Bryan Loritts

Recovering from Racism by Larry Lloyd (from Memphis)

My Friend, My Enemy by William E. Pannell

Reconciliation Blues by Edward Gilbreath

Radical Reconciliation by Allan Boesak and Curtiss DeYoung

Black and Free by Tom Skinner

Divided by Faith by Christian Smith and Michael Emerson

Disunity in Christ by Christena Cleveland

The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander

Each of these books is insightful. I am far behind in the learning curve in understanding church and evangelicals through the eyes of African Americans. Racial Reconciliation is almost a cliché nowadays, and we have a far way to go. I recently visited the Civil Rights Museum. The history of slavery and the absence of white evangelicals are akin to the history of the Holocaust and the absence of the church. I am starting with a historical perspective to ensure I have a full understanding of the “Roots” and issues beginning with the time of Africans arriving as slaves to America.

Tom Skinner wrote **Black and Free** in 1968. Although written over 45 years ago, it gives a haunting perspective of what took place near the Civil Rights movement. Patrick Morley who is CEO of Man in the Mirror says this book is must reading for every white seeking sensitivity toward their African American brothers and sisters. It is one of many good books to read for this purpose. Here is a quote that I found challenging as a pastor: “Wherever black Americans have moved in, white Americans have packed up and moved out. They take with them their evangelical witness. So today we’re finding ourselves with large cities heavily populated by minority groups, but no sound, evangelical Gospel witness at all.” Memphis is fortunate to have both black and white churches with solid evangelical foundations in existence since the time of 1968. We may have evangelical Gospel witness in the city, but that does not mean we have equality or unity. I think in the area of education today, it is true that the white evangelical has left the city. We now have municipal school districts separate from the old city school system. Education inequality remains a key issue in the inner-city.

Skinner has a fascinating perspective on foreign missions. Many a white missionary has gone to Africa to reach the black man with the gospel. Millions of dollars are spent for foreign missions. Skinner says “But he won’t cross the street. He won’t spend sixty cents to go to the other side of town to reach a group of people with the same black skin, where there is no language barrier.” And then Skinner goes in for a very pointed comment: “To the shame of many white, evangelical, conservative Christians in the United States, they do not support financially, morally, spiritually or in any other way, works that are

attempting to communicate the message of Jesus Christ to black people in America.”

Well, as a past missions director, Skinner may be right on target. Many have not gone across the street relationally and intentionally and we have under supported urban missions. Fortunately, this is on the radar of evangelical Christians, and this is in discussion across the city.

KCB would be in alignment with Skinner’s concerns. Part of my work is focusing on inner-city churches and coming alongside what they are already doing. I am also hoping to develop strategic partnerships with suburban churches to come alongside as well.

I am coming as a cultural learner to the urban culture. I hope that I will be able to have deep conversations about racial reconciliation. I realize I have much to learn, unlearn, and relearn. The task of moving reconciliation forward will not be easy, and it begins with my awareness of what it means to be white, evangelical, and male and what it means to be black and evangelical and minority status. I have to put myself in the “shoes” of another and be willing to accept others as equals and share the power as equals. Racial issues are a sensitive subject and can get people “turnt up” quickly. Pray for my humility and that my heart would be pure and well received.