

## Session 1—January 7, 2020

**Topic:** Origins of racist ideas in America and the role of religion in the founding of our society

**Book section:** Cotton Mather (Chapters 1-6)

**Setup:** Chairs in concentric circles facing the podium. Have the touchstones on an easel pad in the corner.

### **Format:**

6:30-6:35: Welcome

6:35-6:50: Keynote remarks by Katie Zawacki

6:50-6:55: Paired discussion: What book has changed your worldview?

6:55-7:05: Framework Overview

- Discussion Touchstones
- Key terms
- Timeline Mini-Summary: Cotton Mather lived as ideas of racial hierarchy were growing alongside capitalism and the slave trade. He made these ideas (hierarchy of races, Christianity as justification for slavery, etc.) mainstream in the exact historical moment that the thinkers who would go on to shape our nation were coming of age

7:05-7:30: Moderated small-group discussion, with the caveat that this is the most challenging section of the book. Focal Questions:

- Does anything in this section resonate with you?
- How does the book's use of the lens of Cotton Mather's lifetime influence your understanding of the development of racism in America?
- Related Questions—on the projector:
  - How did people like Cotton Mather use religion to justify slavery? How and why did people buy into that thinking?
  - What was the role of language in the spread of racist policies and ideas?
  - What was the role of religion in the spread of slavery before 1728?
  - What was Cotton Mather's legacy on the development of American racism?

7:30-7:55: Large group conversation/report-backs

7:50-8:00: Overview of assimilationist vs. segregationist vs. antiracist

## **A Brief Timeline of Racist Thought (Based on *Stamped From the Beginning*)**

**300s BCE:** Aristotle develops the theory of climate and color-based human hierarchy. Various societies whose ideas shaped Western European thought subscribe to Aristotle's climate theory, including the Romans

**0-64 CE:** St. Paul develops the "three-tiered hierarchy of slave relations" (17)

**700-1600:** Ghana, Mali, and Songhay empires thrive in West Africa. Meanwhile...

- **Late 1300s:** Ibn Khaldun and other North African scholars develop the belief that Africans are inferior and that their enslavement/proximity to Europeans will make them more like Europeans. Muslim scholars consider distant groups to be inferior so they can enslave them for their society's financial gain.
- **1444:** Portugal's first auction of African slaves. At this time, Eastern Europeans (Slavs) are becoming less easily captured and enslaved, so the focus shifts to African slaves.
  - The Portuguese also develop the idea that they are spiritually and socially saving the Africans they enslaved
  - Portuguese and Spanish traders spread racist ideas over the next century or so
- **1481:** The word "race" appears in a French poem
- **1492:** Columbus's ships arrive in the Caribbean and Europeans begin enslaving Native Americans
- **1502:** The Portuguese bring African slaves to the Americas. Not long after, the idea spreads that Native Americans are weak and Africans are stronger and more suited to hard labor
- **1550s:** Leo Africanus's manuscript is translated into Latin and spreads racist ideas
- **1570s:** The Curse Theory is developed. "Curse theorists...believed that Black people were naturally and permanently inferior, and totally incapable of becoming White." (32)
- **1590:** William Perkins, a Puritan, says that the enslaved are spiritually equal to, but externally inferior to, their masters (33--"equal souls and unequal bodies". Around this time, language conflates darkness with badness and white with good
- The 16th century is also when capitalism as we know it begins developing. In *How to Be an Antiracist*, Kendi writes that "Prince Henry's Portugal birthed conjoined twins--capitalism and racism--when it initiated the transatlantic slave trade of African people." (156)

**1605:** First chronicled use of Blackface onstage by Queen Anne. Racist ideas circulate throughout English society during the first half of the 17th century

**1606:** The term "race" first appears in a dictionary, linked to the word "descent," and is broken into good and bad races

**1607:** Jamestown is colonized

**1619:** The first ship bearing African slaves arrives in Jamestown

1620: Pilgrims land at Plymouth

1627: The Puritan *Marrow of Sacred Divinity* argues that, while free men and slaves are spiritually equal, "inferiors" [owed] 'subjection and obedience' to their 'superiors' and that related/like people should be "given more love than strangers." (page 39)

1642-1651: The English Civil War causes parliamentarians to flee England for the colonies

1650s-1750s: Puritans found universities that spread the idea of Puritan superiority

1657: A short story circulates the idea that Christianity will make slaves more docile

1662: A new Virginia law declares that children's status comes from their mothers

1663: Cotton Mather is born, the grandson of Puritan theologians Richard Mather & John Cotton

- 1664: *A Christian Directory* argues that slavery is beneficial when slaves are converted to Christianity
- 1660s: Multiple colonies enact laws that say that conversion to Christianity does not alter a slave's status
- 1675-1676: King Philip's War kills thousands of Native and colonial New Englanders
- 1676: During Bacon's Rebellion, united slaves and poor whites burns down Jamestown
- 1684: Bernier expresses a hierarchical theory of races that hypersexualizes and dehumanizes Black people
- 1688: The Germantown Petition Against Slavery is written
- Late 1680s: Cotton Mather argues that all people have good ("white") souls, but that Blacks are inferior. He preaches that hierarchies were created by God
- 1692: The Salem Witch Trials take place
- 1690s: Mather continues publishing and preaching his hierarchy theories
- Early 1700s: Laws across the colonies prioritize White socioeconomic gain at the same time that presses refer to slaves as either criminals or beastlike
- 1728: Cotton Mather dies
  - Throughout his lifetime, (1663-1728), Cotton Mather preached a series of hierarchies that helped keep people like him in power. "Mather obsessed over maintaining the social hierarchies by convincing the lowly that God had put them there, whether it applied to women, children, enslaved Africans, or poor people." (page 62).
  - He also "led the way in producing the racist idea of Christianity simultaneously subduing and uplifting the enslaved African" and in making Whiteness 'standard for humanity' from the perspective of the powerful" (75).
  - These ideas are promoted and circulating as the thinkers who will go on to develop the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the very structure of this nation, are forming their ideas about the world.