

The Souls of Politics

Jim Wallis, *The Souls of Politics* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Co., 1995).

Racism is America's most scarring form of idolatry. Preface xi

The signs of crisis is

Violence is not the problem; it is a consequence of the problem.

Poverty, by itself, does not necessarily generate violence; it's the loss of hope that creates violence. When children of my neighborhood are planning their funerals instead of their future, it is a sure sign that we, as a society, have lost our sense of hope. 7.

Kids killing kids is not just a crime problem; it is a parable of pain that points to illness in our cultural soul. The most painful and dangerous sign of the crisis is what is happening to our children. When our children become our poorest citizens; our most at-risk population; the recipients of our worst values, drugs, sickness, and environmental practices; our most armed and dangerous criminals; the chief victims and perpetrators of escalating violence; an object of our fears more than our hopes, then their plight has become the sign of our crisis. When children talk about their favorite kinds of caskets instead of bikes or cars, it is a sign that we can no longer ignore. *Social oppression and cultural breakdown are the twin signs of our age.* One has to do with structural injustice and the other with the collapse of values. Wallis, *Souls*, 8-10.

An African American and a constitutional lawyer, Yale professor Stephen Carter claims that the American doctrine of the separation of church and state forbids the establishment of any religion by the states but not the influence of religious values in the public square. Along with others, such as historian Garry Willis, Carter suggests that religious faith has always helped shape American politics and that such influence can serve very positive as well as terribly negative ends. Wallis, *Souls*, 38.

Our public life reflects our moral values, one way or the other. We've all seen how politics can reflect our worst values of selfishness, greed, divisiveness, fear, and power. Yet we long to see how politics could reflect our best values of compassion, community, diversity, hope, and service. Reconnecting politics to our best values is now the most important task of political life. The old political morality has left us paralyzed. Our times cry out for a new political morality, one that will provide the ground for new possibilities.18.

In the U.S., 40% of the poor are children. Close to half of black and Hispanic children live in poverty while in the wider society 10 percent of U.S. household own almost 70 percent of the nation's wealth. Introduction xviii.

The new study showed that 42 percent of black men in Washington D.C., were either in jail, awaiting trial, or on parole. It further revealed that 90 percent of African-American men in the city would be arrested at some time in their lives. The United States already has more people incarcerated, in numbers and per capita, than any country in the world – costing more, per prisoner per year, than a Harvard education. 95

A former head of three state prison systems predicted a vast network of prison camps for poor black and Latino men that would leave the inner cities empty of all but single women with children in more and more desperate poverty. 96.

Racism: The United States of America was established as a white society, founded upon the near-genocide of one race and then the enslavement of yet another. 98.

The systematic violence, both physical and spiritual, committed first against indigenous people and then against black Africans was, indeed, the original sin of the American nations. In other words, the United States of America was conceived in iniquity. 100-101.

What has not changed is the systematic and pervasive character of racism in the United States and the condition of life for the majority of black people. 102

In the Old Testament, the subject of the poor is the second most prominent theme. Idolatry is the first, and the two are often connected. 178.

In the New Testament, one out of every sixteen verses is about the poor. In the Gospels, the number is one out of every ten verses; in Luke's Gospel one of every seven, and in the book of James one of every five. 178.

The way of Jesus and the prophets isn't just a welfare program; it calls for a change of heart, a revolution of the spirit, a transformation of consciousness. 181.