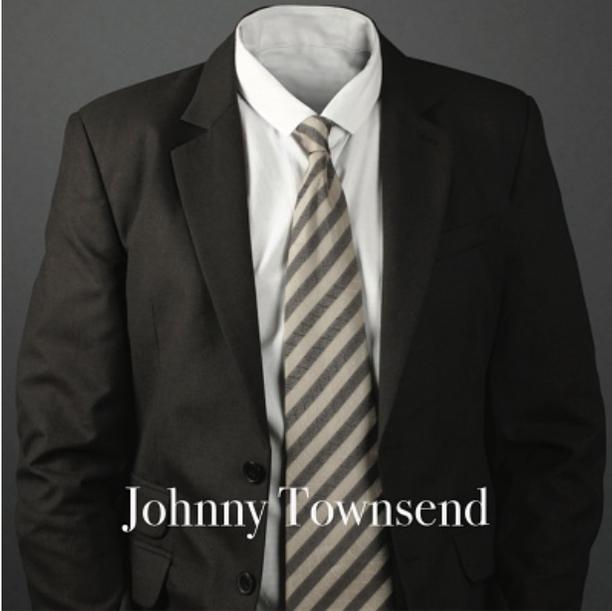


# Racism by Proxy



*Having bias isn't a choice. We're taught bias by people who aren't conscious of their biases, and we in turn unintentionally pass them on to others.*

## **Racism by Proxy**

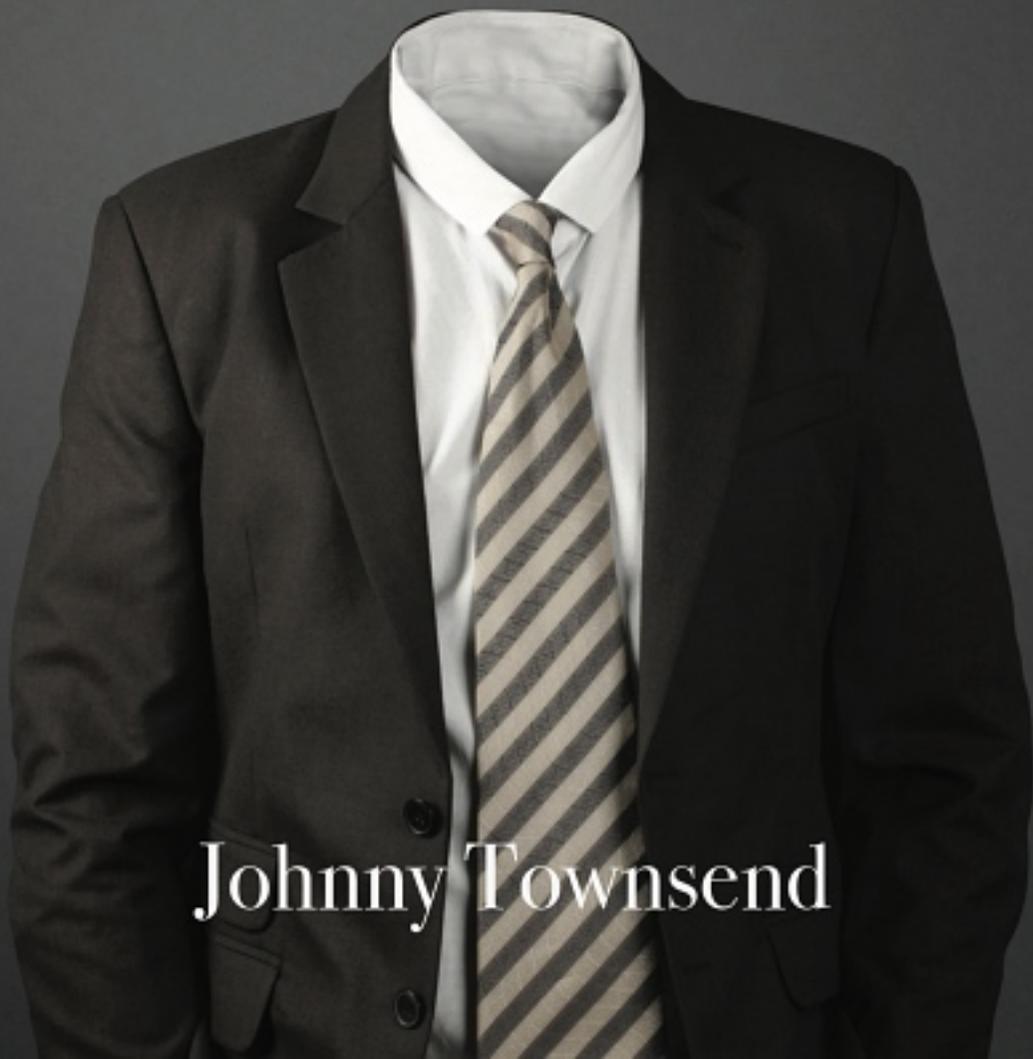
By Johnny Townsend

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# Racism by Proxy

A dark suit jacket, white shirt, and striped tie, representing a proxy.

Johnny Townsend

## Racism by Proxy

Are you biased?

Am I?

The short answer is yes. We *all* are.

Having bias isn't a choice. We can't avoid it. We prefer members of our religion, our country, our political party, and speakers of our native language. We're taught bias unintentionally by people who aren't conscious of their biases, and we in turn unintentionally pass them on to others.

So it's not a "sin" to be biased. It's inevitable.

What matters is not allowing our unchosen biases to exert absolute control over our decisions and behavior.

To do that, however, we must recognize and accept them as real.

In *Racism by Proxy*, essayist Johnny Townsend pushes past shame, guilt, insults, and other useless approaches to show how all of us, even white people of varying privilege, benefit from increasing equity and social justice throughout our communities.

## Praise for Johnny Townsend

In *Zombies for Jesus*, “Townsend isn’t writing satire, but deeply emotional and revealing portraits of people who are, with a few exceptions, quite lovable.”

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

In *Sex among the Saints*, “Townsend writes with a deadpan wit and a supple, realistic prose that’s full of psychological empathy... he takes his protagonists’ moral struggles seriously and invests them with real emotional resonance.”

Kirkus Reviews

*Let the Faggots Burn: The UpStairs Lounge Fire* is “a gripping account of all the horrors that transpired that night, as well as a respectful remembrance of the victims.”

Terry Firma, Patheos

“Johnny Townsend’s ‘Partying with St. Roch’ [in the anthology *Latter-Gay Saints*] tells a beautiful, haunting tale.”

Kent Brintnall, *Out in Print: Queer Book Reviews*

*Selling the City of Enoch* is “sharply intelligent... pleasingly complex... The stories are full of... doubters, but there’s no vindictiveness in these pages; the characters continuously poke holes in Mormonism’s more extravagant absurdities, but they take very little pleasure in doing so... Many of Townsend’s stories... have a provocative edge to them, but this [book] displays a great deal of insight as well... a playful, biting and surprisingly warm collection.”

Kirkus Reviews

*Gayrabian Nights* is “an allegorical tour de force... a hard-core emotional punch.”

Gay. Guy. Reading and Friends

*The Washing of Brains* has “A lovely writing style, and each story [is] full of unique, engaging characters... immensely entertaining.”

Rainbow Awards

In *Dead Mankind Walking*, “Townsend writes in an energetic prose that balances crankiness and humor... A rambunctious volume of short, well-crafted essays...”

Kirkus Reviews

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## I Threw My Confederate Cap Away

I just took an internalized bias test through my workplace for the third year in a row. The results? I show a “strong preference” for white people over black, just as I have on each previous exam. I threw my Confederate cap away decades ago, but it’s not as easy to get rid of the bias.

As a child, visiting my grandparents in Mississippi provided some of my best memories. Making homemade ice cream on the back steps, picking blackberries, walking the cows in for milking, swimming in the creek, shelling pecans. But life on the dairy farm wasn’t all fun and games. Sometimes, the news reported sightings of bears in the area or we’d be warned to keep an eye out for black panthers. No one in the family had ever seen one, but they were the mascot for the single high school in town, so we knew they were real.

Walking with my sister through a pasture the day we heard the latest alert, I saw her stop in fear and point. “I see something black!” she said breathlessly, fixated on something moving beyond the trees along the gravel road. “It has a yellow shirt on!”

It wasn’t a panther.

So we relaxed and played among the flowers, a field of Black Eyed Susans, a name I didn’t learn until I was almost an adult. We’d been taught to use a racial slur to describe them. “N-word navels.”

We made occasional day trips to Vicksburg, the site of some of the heaviest fighting during the Civil War. Dad bought miniature Confederate flags for my sister and me, bought us Confederate caps. Neither of my grandfathers had fought in WWII, and none of the great-grandfathers had fought in WWI, but our family had an illustrious Confederate heritage, so we ran up and down the steep hills celebrating past glory.

Back in Metairie, the middle-class suburb of New Orleans where we lived, my mother forbade me to watch the show *Julia* starring Diahann Carroll. I was also denied access later to the show *Room 222*. “It has a black person in it,” my mother explained.

At one point, my mom wanted to move back to the country and placed an ad to sell our home, describing it as “Tara-style.” It was a square brick box with brick columns, built in 1964.

One year, our family attended weekly meetings for several months to prepare for the Elks parade on Mardi Gras, the most prestigious day of the entire carnival season. We’d follow Rex down St. Charles Avenue and Canal Street. I was going to throw out beads and doubloons! The kids at school would be so jealous!

At the last minute, though, the group voted against participating. It was just too dangerous to be downtown with all those black people. They sometimes threw bottles at white people on the floats.

During my early years, Mom sometimes brought my sister and me to the French Quarter to tour the wax

museum or the natural history museum. We ate beignets at the Café du Monde. We watched movies at the Robert E. Lee Theater on Robert E. Lee Boulevard, ate Italian sweets on Jefferson Davis Parkway. We passed a statue of General Beauregard on our visits to Storyland in City Park. Sometimes, we shopped along Canal Street. Those adventures all ended once there were “too many black people.” My parents did permit me to go down to Lee Circle on Mardi Gras with my best friend and his mom, as long as I promised to be careful. Black people sometimes put razor blades on the tips of their shoes and kicked white people. Best if I wore boots for extra protection.

My suburban public school wasn’t integrated until I reached fifth grade. By the time I reached ninth grade, my parents put my sister and me in a private Baptist school that banned blacks. “We’re not prejudiced,” the headmistress explained. “We just don’t approve of interracial dating.”

One of my classmates was a David Duke fan. The head of the KKK lived only a mile from the school. Several of my other classmates encouraged the rest of us not to elect the lone Hispanic girl in our class as one of the cheerleaders.

But at home I defiantly watched shows like *Good Times* and *The Jeffersons*. I wasn’t prejudiced. Racism was stupid.

Though my parents had both grown up Baptist, we’d all converted to Mormonism in 1971, and in June of 1978, the Prophet announced a new revelation. Black men were

now “allowed” to hold the priesthood. The only local news affiliate to cover the story was WDSU. “They’re owned by blacks,” my mom explained in a what-can-you-expect tone.

My mom sounds like a horrible person, and her racism was clearly destructive. But growing up with her was a mostly wonderful experience. That’s a large part of why “good” people harboring terrible prejudices don’t see themselves as “bad.” It’s almost as if racists like my mother have Multiple Personality Disorder. 97 of their personalities are good, upstanding people. It’s the remaining 3 who are criminally insane. But it’s too uncomfortable to rehabilitate those three, so the other 97 simply go into denial.

It’s not unlike what a friend of mine coping with schizophrenia has had to endure throughout her life, mean voices in her head telling her things that aren’t true, making her and everyone around her miserable until she was finally able to start treating her disease.

When I turned nineteen, it was time for me to “serve” as a volunteer missionary for two years. Mormons have no say over where they’re sent, so waiting for “the call” to arrive in the mail was excruciating. What if I were sent someplace boring? Or scary? One of my aunt’s boyfriends had gone to Japan. The man she eventually married had served in Finland. When my letter arrived from Salt Lake, I ran upstairs and opened it.

When I came back down, my mother's brows furrowed. "Where are you going?" She pressed her lips together to prepare herself for the bad news.

"It's someplace that has food you really like."

My mother's shoulders slumped. "Mexico," she said, shaking her head slowly. "You're going to Mexico."

"It's someplace *else* that has food you like."

My mother's eyes lit up. Then she started jumping up and down, clapping. "You're going to Italy! You're going to Italy!"

Everyone at church was excited, too. "Oh, you'll get to learn Spanish," they said.

"Uh, no, I think they speak Italian in Italy."

"Be careful with the water. You don't want to get sick."

Italy was wonderful and miserable and incredible and depressing, the negatives largely a result of the oppressive missionary lifestyle. Every moment of our lives was regimented, our actions constantly monitored.

In my first area, a young local member, a carabinieri, was so excited to learn I was from New Orleans that he struggled valiantly to blurt out, "South rise again!" in English far better than my Italian. Perhaps I should have found it strange, but one of the songs we had learned in Culture Capsule back in the Missionary Training Center was "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah" in Italian, so perhaps not. My first four assignments were as companion to various

district leaders, the position jokingly referred to as “District N-word.”

Told every day our lack of faith and success was a disappointment to God, I became suicidal for the first time in my life and wanted desperately to go home. Of course, doing so would have labeled me a failure among other Mormons for the remainder of my life. My mother, eager to help, wrote back after my latest unhappy letter. “If you want to come home,” she said, “I’ll hide you in the attic.”

I plodded on, and my time in Italy became a transformative experience. I saw abject poverty for the first time. I witnessed a kidnapping near the train station in Rome. I was caught in a Camorra gang war in Naples. Teens threw heavy rocks at us because they hated Americans. I was spit on and kicked, chased with garden shears, had guns pulled on me. I was approached by dozens and dozens of “gypsies.” A woman asked me to marry her daughter and bring her to the U.S.

I met folks from Ghana and Nigeria and Somalia. An African woman the sister missionaries were teaching was abducted. We never saw her again.

And then I returned to Metairie, struggling with culture shock in my conservative, white neighborhood as I began my sophomore year at the University of New Orleans.

When I saw a young man on campus I’d known growing up, I was surprised to realize for the first time that he was black. I’d always been confused at how different he looked from everyone else in the family, but it had never

occurred to me he wasn't white until I saw him in a different setting.

I returned to Italy a year later, becoming engaged to a former Italian sister missionary I'd worked with who was a Communist. We agreed I should complete my degree in America before we married, and then I'd move back to Italy and teach English.

I absolutely loved literature. Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and more. I even liked Shakespearean sonnets and Middle English lit.

My Chaucer professor chastised the class one day for laughing at a story from the *Canterbury Tales* in which townspeople blamed the bubonic plague on Jews. "Medieval people were so stupid," a student said.

"You don't think people today bear illogical prejudices against certain groups?" the professor asked pointedly.

Years later, I wasn't surprised to run into my professor in a gay bookstore with his black partner.

At church, the first black man in our congregation was ordained a high priest, the most prestigious position at the local level. My father still used the N-word every time he spoke of the man, and he laughed every time I corrected him. I asked another high priest if he felt any of the others in the group were prejudiced. "No," he said. "We believe in equality."

“So you wouldn’t mind if your son married Brother Alfonse’s daughter?”

“Well, we don’t approve of interracial marriage, of course, but that doesn’t mean we’re bigoted.”

How blind, I wondered, could these people be? Thank God *I* wasn’t biased.

As I approached graduation, I realized I still hadn’t managed to change my sexual orientation, despite my continued virginal status. The first mission clearly hadn’t been enough of a sacrifice for Heavenly Father to heal me. So I talked to my bishop and stake president about serving a second two-year mission. I talked to my fiancée about it.

She wasn’t happy. But if I needed to marry a woman, I had to become straight first, not “hope” it would happen miraculously sometime after.

And if worse came to worst, at least missionary life was the closest I could get to marriage with another man.

I finally broke up with my fiancée after I realized I was always going to be gay. I came out while in grad school, was called to a Court of Love, and was excommunicated, my stake president and other members of the High Council telling me I’d denied the Holy Ghost and betrayed God.

It wasn’t until that evening, when I heard one of the high councilmen refer to me as “articulate” that I understood my own problematic use of the word when talking about “educated” blacks. The slur in my case meant, “when they are learned they think they are wise.”

It meant something different for black people but was equally insulting, perhaps more infuriating because the white people like me using it thought we were saying something “nice.”

My excommunication was announced during church services. Friends I’d known for years refused to talk to me.

But I felt genuinely free and soon met my first lover. We lived in a mobile home in St. Rose on the edge of the swamp past the airport. Everyone in the neighborhood lived in trailers and mobile homes.

Everyone was white.

Well, almost everyone. One day, two white neighbors stopped by our place. “We just told that guy down the street he’d better have that black guy staying with him move out or we’d burn them out.” The men laughed. “What do you think about *that*?”

I could hardly say what I was really thinking: “Sure, the two faggots out here in the boondocks are thrilled to hear your violent, bigoted threats.”

We decided to move to the Marigny, just outside the French Quarter. There I noticed the neighborhood public schools always kept their classroom windows open in the sweltering heat and humidity. My elementary school in Jefferson Parish had air conditioning twenty-five years earlier, but schools in Orleans Parish still didn’t. And I’d never known that until I was almost thirty.

Nearly every public school in New Orleans had a mostly black student body, almost half the schools named

after a “generous” slave owner. Virtually every white public school student attended a magnet school for the “gifted.” Nearly all the remaining white kids attended a variety of private Catholic schools or a single private school serving mostly Jewish students.

My first teaching job was at SUNO—Southern University at New Orleans. It was a public university, historically black like its sister campus in Baton Rouge. This was the 1990s, and the mostly black SUNO and mostly white UNO sat hardly a mile apart, two public universities still quite separate and not equal.

For the next ten years, I taught evening classes at SUNO, all the while thinking I wasn’t prejudiced, every semester learning I still was. Some of that realization, unfortunately, didn’t take place until years after I left campus. Looking back, I squirm at some of the things I did and said. I made a particularly awkward comment once in response to a general rebellion over the amount of homework I assigned. “We work during the day, Mr. Townsend. We don’t have time to read all this stuff.”

“You people,” I said. I’d meant it as “you students,” but boy, I sure learned something that evening.

Almost every semester, an angry student would meet with me after class. “You can’t give me a D on this paper! I’m a high school English teacher!”

I was told by the assistant dean, “You’re penalizing the students for being black. You need to understand the background of your students and take that into account when you grade.” While three major grammar errors

would fail a paper at the University of New Orleans, where I also taught, students could have fifteen at SUNO, and I was still expected to award a passing grade. But after I complied, the assistant dean called me back to her office. “You’re trying to keep the students ignorant and keep them in their place!”

In class, we sometimes discussed current topics related to race, and when the Rodney King riots erupted in Los Angeles, one student defended an attack on a white woman, married to a black man, dragged out of her car. My student felt that every white person got what they deserved. When a young white woman, an American college student, was killed by a mob in a South African township where she’d been registering people to vote, one of my students said, “White people always think we need their help. They were right to kill her.”

On my way to work one evening, I heard about the Oklahoma City bombing on the radio and upon arrival asked the assistant dean if she’d heard the news. She ignored me, so I thought I hadn’t spoken loudly enough and repeated the question.

“Maybe the FBI did it!” she finally spat at me. I walked to my class stunned. I hadn’t yet heard of the MOVE firebombing several years earlier.

I received perhaps a dozen pieces of hate mail in my office mailbox one semester. One note simply declared, “The White Man is the Devil,” but most of the letters were long rants. I tried comparing the handwriting on the notes with that of the essays by my students, but I could never

find a match. I even compared the handwriting with that of the assistant dean, who'd told me flat out, "I think you're a racist, and I'm going to do everything I can to get rid of you." It wasn't her handwriting, either.

The moment the dean retired, the assistant dean got her wish, and I was no longer an instructor in the Evening and Weekend College. The truth is... the assistant dean was right about me. I have no doubt I said and did racist things I don't even remember now because I was unaware of their significance and impact. It never occurred to me to study racism because I was convinced I wasn't racist and therefore had no personal behavior or mindset to change. Even in an atmosphere that offered ample evidence to the contrary, I'd chosen to remain ignorant that such a thing as structural racism even existed, much less that I had an obligation to help dismantle it. At the time, I was relieved not to be rehired after the new dean took over. I'd no longer have to face feeling so uncomfortable every day.

Only I did.

The staff in a store on the "black" side of St. Claude refused to wait on me. Once, when I honked impatiently at a car taking too long to turn on Elysian Fields, the black driver made a U-turn and chased me for blocks. I gave up driving, recognizing my growing irritation with traffic wasn't going to improve. I soon found myself almost always the lone white passenger on public transportation. My family was aghast that I'd deliberately *chosen* to do something so reckless and dangerous. I only saw a single white driver in all the years I rode the bus around New Orleans.

A priest walking his dog one night two blocks from my Marigny apartment was shot and killed by a black man during a mugging. A woman jogging a block past that was shot by a black man during her morning jog. A tourist at a bed and breakfast two blocks in another direction was shot and killed by a black man. A friend of mine was murdered in his Marigny apartment by a black man. Another man was found tied to a chair in his apartment after a black man broke in. A man was seriously injured and his wife killed by a black man during a home invasion six doors down from me. Two of my friends were beaten in the French Quarter by black men. Another had his ribs fractured in a mugging Uptown. A white woman I knew was attacked stepping out of her car.

I understood by this point that white people had ensured a black underclass trapped in poverty with limited access to good education and decent jobs. But that didn't keep me from crossing the street when I saw a black man walking down the sidewalk.

Another friend was murdered by a white man during a gay bashing. But in my mind, the killer wasn't "white." He was a "religious homophobe."

One of my white coworkers looked hauntingly like Jeffrey Dahmer. I gasped when I saw him out on Mardi Gras day, leading his black lover around on a chain through the French Quarter.

Another coworker told me he was hoping to get into med school based on his minority status. "What minority are you?" I asked.

“I’m black.”

One of my fuck buddies complained once about the extra layer of discrimination he faced as part of two oppressed groups. “What’s the other group?” I asked.

“I’m black.”

I’m not colorblind. I’m simply inattentive. I didn’t even notice my husband had blue eyes until we’d been together two years. And in New Orleans, “black” covered a wide variety of skin tones.

Do I have any bias, any internalized white superiority?

*Of course I do!* How could I not? I recognize I must constantly and actively combat it every single day.

I learned in a History of the English Language course that the names of some towns in England are of Celtic origin, going back as far as 800 BCE. Some names still exist from inhabitants living on the British Isles even before the Celts. The residents since then have resisted any alteration in the names despite influxes of Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Normans. “Place names are very resistant to change,” my professor explained.

But a simple stroll through the French Quarter of New Orleans showed me that change was possible. Ursulines Avenue used to be named Calle del Arsenal. Governor Nicholls bore the prior name of Calle del Hospital. Decatur Street had previously been named Camino Real y Muelle at one point and Rue de la Levee at another. And Jackson Square had first been Plaza d’Armas.

Working on my genealogy as a teen, I learned the 1850 census was the gold standard for information. I was confused at first to discover that the area my ancestors had lived in almost since their arrival in Mississippi had originally been named Lawrence County. I'd only known it as Lincoln County. Obviously, though, it would not have been named that before the Civil War. Yet despite my family's continued racism, no one seemed to suffer unduly because of the renaming.

Mormons do genealogy so we can perform "proxy work" in temples and baptize our ancestors posthumously. In a university library, I discovered a letter from one of my great-great-grandfathers who fought at the battle of Vicksburg, in which he petitioned his commanding officer to transfer him away from the fighting because he had hemorrhoids. We were all so happy to know he was now Mormon in heaven.

Andrew Jackson was the president who'd signed the Indian Removal Act of 1830, opening the land now known as Mississippi to my ancestors, who all arrived within the following decade. The capital of Mississippi is, unsurprisingly, named after him.

Many among my family and friends talked of Confederate symbols as part of their "heritage." But since the Confederacy only existed for five years, what they're really celebrating is the white supremacy that both pre- and post-dated the Civil War.

Almost all of my white friends and family, like me, never felt they were prejudiced. Some still adamantly deny

it. But if we can't make the most minor effort to change the names of a few streets and university buildings, relocate a few statues to museums, and agree that naming military bases after traitors was a mistake that must be both repudiated and rectified, then our "lack" of prejudice doesn't mean very much.

The problem, of course, is that most white conservatives *don't* think the Confederates were traitors. I'm well aware of how these folks *do* treat traitors.

And I can guarantee they're not waxing nostalgic over me.

After Hurricane Katrina, I relocated to the Pacific Northwest, but on a return visit to New Orleans, I heard the daughter of one of my friends talk about her work with the National Guard immediately after the storm. She was assigned to make sure everyone evacuated. "This one old black man wouldn't leave," she said. "He wanted to stay in his house." She shook her head. "He told me, 'You can't make me leave,' so I told him, 'I can shoot you if you don't.'"

She thought this was a funny anecdote.

After several weeks of Black Lives Matter protests, after taking several more online courses on bias and diversity through my employer in addition to the in-person workshops I participated in over the two preceding years, I was unhappy to discover that my latest internalized bias test still shows I have a "strong preference" for white people over black. If I keep taking this test every year for the rest of my life, I'm not sure the results will ever change

much. Maybe, if I continue to work at it, my score may eventually evolve to, “slight preference.”

The least we can do as “good” white people, and I mean absolutely the very least, is remove monuments to racism from public spaces and rename the streets, university buildings, and military bases honoring those who caused so much suffering and death to our fellow citizens.

If farmers in Mississippi, middle-class churchgoers in Metairie, and so many other white people can still feel the sting of losses incurred over a five-year period more than 150 years ago, can we not manage to feel the slightest empathy for folks who have suffered continually for more than 400 years?

We must make this small token of repentance immediately so we can move on to dismantling more serious aspects of structural and institutional racism.

But that’s the reason for so much resistance to taking *any* step, isn’t it? We want to think we’ve already arrived at our destination, and we dread acknowledging we haven’t, because the rest of that road looks steeper than a hill in Vicksburg, and we know there is no place to rest along the way.

Our journey doesn’t have to be a Trail of Tears, though, or a Middle Passage. It can be a Path to Reconciliation, a double-laned highway to both secular and religious morality.

Because while the road to Hell may be paved with good intentions, the signs pointing the way are posted by resentment and a refusal to accept the truth.

So let's choose to march—humbly, haltingly, boldly, however we can—toward equity.

Throwing away our bias may be harder even than losing the weight we gained eating Grandma's homemade pecan pie.

But justice is a choice. And we can make it.

## Successful Citizens Are the Key to a Successful Nation

Many Americans worry that the U.S. is losing ground to China, Russia, or other rising global powers. We think drilling for more oil or banning immigrants or enacting harsher prison sentences will get us back on top or, at the very least, keep us from slipping further off the winner's podium.

However, those aren't the most effective strategies for making America #1. We can't succeed without making the success of everyday Americans not only "possible" but routine. Here are seven difficult ways for the U.S. to win, and one easy way to lose:

First, we must **reduce income inequality**. A living wage is not a giveaway. By definition, folks are working for it. We must raise the minimum wage so that no one working 40 hours a week lives below the poverty level. We also need a comparable minimum Social Security payment. And there's a great deal of evidence that Universal Basic Income is effective.

Affordable housing must actually be affordable if we are to decrease our growing homeless population.

Many of our most successful corporations are already headquartered elsewhere or have sent a majority of their jobs overseas. When we can only ensure success for the top 1% of our population, we have no leverage to keep

corporations or their jobs—and the funds to pay them—here.

We need **universal healthcare**. Every other industrialized nation in the world, and even a few developing countries, guarantee healthcare to all their citizens. If we want to attract and keep the best minds and talents, healthcare must be part of the incentive package. Dental, vision, and mental healthcare must be included as well. We can't keep a competitive economy when over half a million Americans are forced to declare bankruptcy every year over medical debt.

When the number of Americans affected by crushing medical debt is added to the number of full-time workers living below the poverty level on subsistence wages, we already have a population so heavily burdened we can only continue to slip further away from a leading position in the global economy.

The U.S. must ensure **tuition-free college and vocational training**. Like universal healthcare, free or nearly free postsecondary education is guaranteed by many other countries. Some of the best international students will go elsewhere for their education and then work in those other countries as well. We're creating our own competitors. And we can't even concentrate on developing our homegrown students because millions here simply can't afford our skyrocketing tuition.

Even those who take out student loans are then burdened for twenty or thirty years with debt that prevents them from buying a home, making other consumer

purchases, having more children, or making financial investments in their own future. And their future is America's future.

Just as a sports team can't be successful unless its players are given the training and other resources they need, a country that refuses to ensure that its citizens are skilled and educated cannot hope to remain a world leader.

**Universal pre-k and subsidized childcare** are non-negotiable if we want successful adults. Workers don't mysteriously materialize out of nowhere at the age of eighteen, prepared to make America's economy competitive. We must begin by valuing childcare and childhood education. And in a digital economy, for kids to succeed in school, they need free access to high-speed internet.

Is such access a "right"? It doesn't really matter. Full access to high-speed internet is *necessary* if we hope to have a skilled population that can compete on the world stage.

Strong, capable adults come from nurtured, educated children.

**Fare-free public transportation** allows even the poorest folks to get to work and back. It's also essential if we want to address the climate crisis. Those with no transportation or access to childcare may be good stay-at-home parents, but they're certainly not contributing to a successful global economy. They often, however, are forced to depend on public assistance. It doesn't matter if poverty and dependence are technically our goals if they're

still the consistent outcome. If we want workers to get to work, we must make achieving that something less than a daily Herculean effort.

We must **decriminalize addiction, provide subsidized rehab, and eliminate private prisons**. The war on drugs has led the U.S. to inflict enormous casualties on its own citizens. Legalizing some recreational drugs and decriminalizing others will save our country hundreds of millions of dollars a year, plus create taxable income. It also allows us to stop deliberately destroying the lives of millions of our citizens, a plus even if it didn't save money, which it does. Our current system of creating millions of unemployable workers each year with felony convictions ensures increasing poverty—or criminal enterprise as the only viable way to earn money. Destroying our own populace isn't an effective way to compete globally.

The last and arguably most important way to maintain or raise our position is to **tackle the climate crisis head-on**. We must become a global leader in products and services for greener forms of energy. We need to find the most effective, least destructive ways to incorporate wind, solar, thermal, or other methods of extracting and storing energy.

Burying our head in the tar sands won't change reality. *Whichever* country develops the best technology and infrastructure to move us away from fossil fuels, to remove carbon from the atmosphere, and to deal with the no longer preventable changes that are now too late to avoid, *will* be the leader of the world. If that's not us, it will be China or

Russia or India or someone else. It won't be—*can't* be—the U.S.

We'll *have* to do it eventually, of course, whether we want to or not, whether we come in last or not, so we may as well make a goal to be the best at it.

There are all sorts of other things we could implement—require all high school graduates to master two foreign languages, require a semester abroad for every college degree, or a year of teaching ESL to immigrants. We could require community service instead of military service and retrofit buildings with energy-efficient windows or solar panels or whatever, teaching marketable skills in the process. There are many other things we could do to improve our country, but we only NEED these seven.

And we'll pay for these things one way or another. Prisons aren't cheap. Neither are riots in response to racism and other forms of oppression. Cleaning up oil spills or water polluted by fracking isn't free. Neither is the destruction caused by longer wildfire and stronger hurricane seasons. Droughts and floods aren't cheap. Neither is relocating coastal communities.

We can divert hundreds of billions from our military budget and still fund at a level four times that of either China or Russia. We can tax corporations and the wealthy at the same levels we did in the 1950s and have more than enough funds to implement these changes.

So what's the **one easy, sure way for America to fail**? Choosing austerity programs. This, of course, can be broken down into smaller pieces—pitting workers against

each other, taxing everyone except the rich, cutting back on every form of assistance, trickle-down economics—but it's all basically the same thing. When we structure every benefit to favor the top 1% of citizens and weigh down the other 99%, we ensure with absolute certainty that 99% of our population will not be able to compete effectively with the Chinese or Russians.

Just as it's easier to deface property than to construct it, just as it's easier to burn a book than to write one, it's easier to choose austerity over the difficult programs we'll need to lift our country.

It boils down to this: do we *want* healthy, educated, well-balanced adults? Then we'd better not start two decades after their most formative years. Do we want a skilled, educated, debt-free population capable of competing globally in every major industry? Then we'd better stop throwing up as many barriers as possible. We must accept responsibility for the workforce we do—or don't—create.

None of these winning strategies is easy. But then, no one wins a gold medal by putting off strenuous workouts. No one is named valedictorian for shrugging off chemistry and literature classes. No one wins a Nobel Peace Prize for justifying mass incarceration and extrajudicial killings.

There's only one way to be competitive on the world stage, and that's by making our citizens successful. We don't *have* to do it, of course. We *can* let the inertia of our current poor policies keep dragging us down.

That's certainly the easier path.

But if we want to succeed, we'll need to stop deifying oppression in all its forms. We must change our downward course by telling officials already in office exactly what we demand, and only support those candidates in future elections who are willing to take immediate action.

Sound hard?

Well, you didn't think it would be easy, did you?

So let's get to work.

Section 4:  
Withstanding Criticism and  
Disappointment

## Make the Apocalypse Great Again

I never thought of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* as a documentary. A world where real people interacted with living cartoon characters was preposterous. But as I watched the former president's lawyer melting on camera during the last days of the administration, I realized the movie was downright prophetic—scripture for the surreal times we live in.

At the Baptist high school I attended, we watched a film about the Tribulation. Three young women find themselves left behind after the Rapture and decide, a bit late, to become Christians. They're persecuted, betrayed, and in the end face execution. The final scene reveals a guillotine, with the main character screaming in terror when she realizes her fate.

As a Mormon, I'd also been raised with an apocalyptic worldview. Latter-day Saints didn't believe in the Rapture, but we did believe in years of suffering before Armageddon ushered in the Second Coming. Following the Prophet's orders, my parents stored a Year's Supply of food and other provisions. My dad bought guns so we could defend our stash from hungry neighbors. My Patriarchal Blessing promised me strength and wisdom to lead others through the perilous times ahead.

Anticipating the inevitable horrors was as normal as looking forward to high school graduation, two years as a

full-time missionary, a college education, temple marriage, and raising children of my own. Dread was simply part of life.

And now, as I watch right-wing Christians mount an insurrection, as I hear them threaten to kidnap or hang or otherwise execute Satan-worshipping cannibals, as I hear their claims that space lasers ignited wildfires in California, that an artificial, mechanized Biden ordered fake snow to blanket Texas, as I watch them worship a golden statue of their pagan messiah, I'm... baffled.

I *thought* I would feel terror in the face of impending doom. And I suppose I do. But what I feel most is befuddlement.

*This* is the buffoon people have chosen to follow to their damnation? *These* are the doctrines they believe? That alien lizard people, in cahoot with Jews, control D.C. and the media? That folks who want to stop the slaughter of Black people are their arch enemies? That tearing brown children away from their parents—not incidentally, but as a political strategy—is God's will?

We all watched while maskless “patriots” smirked with glee, refusing to protect other elected officials from a deadly virus, as they hid from a rampaging mob.

These “Christians” laughed. Giggled.

I'd watched the first three seasons of *Handmaid's Tale* with growing anxiety, understanding how close we were to such a dystopian world.

I didn't expect we'd instead be living the *Life of Brian*.

How did we get demagogues channeling Elmer Fudd?

Why is our intrigue that of Boris and Natasha?

Throughout my youth, I feared that those following the Beast would be brutish, terrifying, cruel, and vindictive. And they certainly are.

What I didn't expect was that they'd *also* be pathetic and absurd.

As we debate replacing our racist national anthem, perhaps we should consider Ella Fitzgerald's, "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered," surely a song more befitting our current *Twilight Zone* political environment.

Almost half the country has willingly, on purpose, chosen hero worship over policy.

I lived a stone's throw from Pompeii when I worked as a missionary in Naples. I studied the Fall of the Roman Empire after I resumed my college classes back in the U.S. The long, complex history of that region seemed deeply sad, painfully tragic.

I had no idea that witnessing the Fall of the American Empire, with millions of people choosing, on purpose, to create the tribulations of the Last Days of their own free will, would be so... embarrassing.

I'd grown up anticipating the End of Times as something akin to a worldwide Nazi concentration camp. I'd read up on Holocaust literature to prepare myself for what lay ahead.

Instead, we got the Marshmallow Man from *Ghostbusters*. The Penguin from *Batman*. Vizzini from *The Princess Bride*.

We follow the news in a daze, feeling both perplexed and ashamed. We're Mary Tyler Moore, torn between laughing and crying during the funeral of Chuckles the Clown.

But we must stop feeling shocked, stop asking ourselves if this is all really happening.

It is.

If we want America to remain a free democracy, or even a free republic, we'd better start addressing the basic needs we all have—for healthcare, a living wage, and college education or vocational training for all.

Because the enemy isn't the false messiah or those who worship him. The enemy is ignoring the gaping needs that created them.

## Troll Others and Be the Worse for It

I don't use social media much, even though authors trying to build a following are "supposed" to. There's a climate crisis on social media almost as dangerous as the one we see wreaking havoc across the globe through melting glaciers, stronger hurricanes, and longer fire seasons. Aside from slogging through deliberate disinformation, we too often end up in arguments with actual friends. You know, the kind we've known in real life for years, not folks we've met in cyberspace.

Studies suggest that people who spend too much time on social media, especially those who start their day with it, often feel more depressed or anxious or irritable. We've all heard the term "doomscrolling."

So I spend less and less of my time online. But I do check in briefly a couple of times a day because I have friends I'm not able to keep up with any other way. Thankfully, I know a few folks who go out of their way to post mostly positive or useful information.

Recently, I read a post lamenting Biden's refusal to forgive student loan debt. Not all of the debt, of course, or \$50K of it, not even \$10K. He's "considering." He's "studying the issue." He wants to make sure that if he does it, he does it "right."

I typed a quick comment. "And so we wait and wait and wait and wait and..."

Then I moved on with my day, hopping onto my stationary bicycle to get in a little exercise while watching another episode of *The Art of Crime*, a fun show about mismatched detectives solving murders in Paris related to famous works of art.

Hours later, I checked back in on social media to do my second and final tour of the day.

And saw a response to my earlier comment. “Keep waiting. No one owes you anything.”

I hate to admit I was shocked.

You’d think by this point I’d be well aware of the vitriol out there. And this was relatively tame compared to other comments I’ve received. But my own comment hadn’t indicated I wanted *my* student loan forgiven. I’ve been paying down on it for over twenty years. While I would be happy to have the last of it forgiven, my remaining debt is manageable. I was thinking about the millions of others still paying on \$60K or \$80K or \$110K loans.

And I was also pointing out that all this “deliberation” was no more than a show. Any national leader who can’t make up their mind on an issue that’s been in the headlines for years is either not paying attention (hardly something to boast about) or stringing us along (not such a great thing to boast about, either).

But this troll went out of her way to be mean.

When I first came out and started going to gay bars, other men would warn me about this bar or that one. “Lots of trolls over there.”

Trolls, I learned, were old, lecherous gay men no one wanted to be with. They’d grope you without permission. Some of the nicer older men I met in those early years would make an effort not to be too aggressive. “I don’t want to be a troll,” they’d tell me.

I hoped I’d never become one myself.

These days, it looks like thousands and thousands of folks, men and women of all ages, mostly straight but sometimes gay, happily choose to be the most disgusting trolls possible, trolls far more repulsive than any of the old, lecherous men I ever met.

Online trolls aspire to be the Fred Phelps of cyberspace. Their guiding motto isn’t “What would Jesus do?” but “What would Joe McCarthy do?” They want to cultivate hatred and anger like crops, boasting of their wins as if they’d presented the prize pumpkin at a county fair.

Compassion is their Kryptonite and they do whatever they can to destroy it.

We’ve all dealt with these folks. They’re inescapable, and giddily so. One of their key rhetorical strategies is to misframe the question. My support for forgiving student loan debt isn’t because I think the government or any other American “owes” it to us.

But leaders can recognize the many ways having an educated population not saddled with debt is good not only

for them but for everyone else as well. If anything, we owe it to ourselves.

When I first began facing my affectional orientation, I started attending a “Coming Out” support group. One evening, I said something about feeling mystified that gay men, who understood firsthand how awful discrimination was, could in turn discriminate against women or Black people or anyone else.

“Ah,” one of the moderators said, “that’s because you have internalized homophobia.”

“Huh?”

“You still think that as a gay person you have to be better than straight people. It’s like a woman wanting better grades to show she’s as smart as her male classmates. It’s like a Black person speaking better than white coworkers to show he’s as competent. But gay people are entitled to be just as imperfect as anyone else.”

Decades later, I still disagree with that concept. Of course, the moderator was right that we don’t need to prove ourselves to anyone. The reason we develop empathy is to make society better, and we can only develop that empathy by putting ourselves in someone else’s situation. While I may never understand more than a fraction of what it is to face other forms of bias, I know *enough* to be able to extrapolate and act accordingly. I know enough to be open to learning more.

No one, not even the most privileged among us, can reach adulthood without having experienced *some* form of

oppression or cruelty or injustice. If we fail to use those experiences to learn how to treat each other more humanely, that's a choice we've made. And it's nothing to boast about.

Do we *owe* anyone kindness or justice? Do we *owe* anyone healthcare or education or a habitable planet?

If we're trolls, the answer is quite clearly no.

I hope, though, we can aspire to something a little greater. That enough of us will finally understand the best way to lift ourselves is to lift everyone around us, too.

## To Be an Ally or Not to Be

White activists should confront the epidemic of police killings of unarmed blacks. Straight folks should fight for LGBTQ rights. Christians should protest discrimination against Muslims. Men should demand passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Some oppressed or marginalized groups actively seek allies, but others see them as infiltrators complicit in their oppression. Rebuffing allies, though, is playing into the hands of those who keep their power by manipulating women and gays and blacks and Latinos and Native Americans to attack each other. Divide and conquer has been a successful strategy for centuries. We must resist the temptation to turn away allies and instead work to develop solidarity.

Shortly after I came out, I attended a Single Adult activity at church. One of the young women made a comment about a gay character on TV, a remarkable event back in the mid-1980s. “Can you believe how perverted the world is getting?” she asked.

I watched how my best friend, the only person in the room who knew my secret, reacted. He said nothing. Afterward, I asked him why.

He immediately grew angry. “People always want me to stick up for them! This is your fight, not mine!”

I suppose he was right, but I remember thinking, “How does an oppressed group ever gain any power if no one in the majority ever joins their fight?” Even as a closeted, self-loathing, celibate gay man, terrified of being found out, I stood up for gays. I could have done it during the Single Adult activity, but I wanted to see what my friend would do.

Or wouldn't do.

Some of my older white friends were Freedom Riders in the Deep South. They put their lives on the line. They don't want credit for it. They would just prefer to be allowed to contribute to the cause of justice and equality without being vilified as “trying to make this about them.”

I understand rage. Being excommunicated from the Mormon Church for insisting on my right to seek love and companionship of my choosing left me bitter for years. Growing up in the south, where even “nice” people used the N-word, I was surprised the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles didn't spread across the entire country. Even with abundant exposure to black points of view, with years of interaction with blacks at all levels of society, I constantly discovered more layers of implicit bias I never realized I had.

Blacks certainly need to call us out when we do or say stupid or harmful things. To be clear, of course, it's not anyone else's job to teach us everything. There are tons of material we can access to teach ourselves. But we can't master all the information overnight, and we can't delay

joining the fight for equality until we've perfected our knowledge and character.

Recently, a friend on Facebook posted a link to a new song by Taylor Swift called "You Need to Calm Down," where she stands up for gay rights. Some responded with an article from *The Onion*. "Taylor Swift Inspires Teen to Come Out as Straight Woman Needing to Be at Center of Gay Rights Narrative." Then someone complained about Taylor Swift's father who was such "a monster" that the Indigo Girls wrote a song about him.

I don't think Taylor Swift is responsible for her father's behavior. I also don't think that because Taylor is a white, rich heterosexual that we should label her work as an ally self-serving. If her song serves us, I'm fine with it serving her as well.

I don't need perfect allies.

There are no perfect allies.

I'm not sure how effective Taylor Swift or anyone else would be if they had to take a vow of poverty or undergo conversion therapy before joining the fight.

We can correct or chastise or guide or debate, but it is self-defeating to toss allies into a moral waste bin.

In fourth grade, I saw a friend of mine being picked on during recess. A complete wimp then as now, I summoned up what little courage I had and walked up to the bullies. "Leave him alone," I said, using all the wit and wisdom at my disposal.

The bullies walked away, and my friend turned to me in anger. “I don’t need your help!” he shouted before storming off.

I expect my friend was more embarrassed than angry, but even if I may have felt slightly hurt, my overwhelming reaction at the time was bewilderment. In his situation, I’d have welcomed any help I could get. And I *had* been in his situation many times.

I saw *To Kill a Mockingbird* for the first time as an adult and immediately loved it. Many years would pass before I’d recognize the “white savior” issue. But I do wonder how else that story could have been told. Should a black lawyer have come to town? Should the black townspeople have rioted and burned the courthouse down? All viable options, I suppose. Stories can be told in many ways, and clearly more stories must be told from multiple black perspectives.

But white people have a stake in equality, too, and the character of Atticus Finch had every right to make what little contribution he could.

And really, the story isn’t even about racism. That’s just a vehicle for the real point, standing up to do the right thing even when most of your friends and peers are against you, even when you do it at great personal and professional risk. The point could have been made using homophobia instead of racism as the background. It could have been women’s rights or anti-Semitism or pollution or anything else. It was the standing up that mattered, though using a black character as a vehicle for the white character to defy

unjust societal norms is problematic as well. There's also the problem with Atticus dismissing the woman who claims to have been raped. I'm not sure Harper Lee used the best scenarios to make her point.

But I'm also not sure books and movies and authors have to be perfect to be useful.

The English movie *Pride* tells the true story of gay activists in the 1980's who rallied behind striking coal miners. Some gays refused to help, saying that the strikers were exactly the kind of guys who'd beaten them up as kids. Then lesbians broke from the group because they didn't want to be lumped with the men. And many of the strikers didn't want to be associated with either faggots *or* dykes.

After a homophobic union leader forces the gay activists out, other union supporters discover that the gay group has raised more money to support them than any other group.

Thirty years later, coal miners were among the strongest supporters when gay rights finally came up for a vote in the country.

"Androcles and the Lion" is effective as a fable because it tells a universal truth.

History has proven time and again that solidarity makes us stronger than we can ever be when we allow oppressors to divide us and waste our time and energy fighting each other instead of directing our energies against them.

No one wants to be undermined by an ally's misguided approach. Gay people don't want heterosexuals calling all the shots in their organizations. Women don't need men telling them the "right" way to protest. Blacks don't need whites ordering them about.

But debates over strategy and policy are essential. Allies need to be able to participate in those discussions, even if they aren't—and shouldn't be—in charge. Solidarity is always a work in progress, but the rewards are worth the effort.

I am a white gay male, an ex-Mormon atheist. Women's equality is essential for me if I'm to have a good life. Racial equality is essential for me to have a good life. Workers' rights are essential for me to have a good life.

Martin Luther King, Jr. stated it clearly. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

I have a moral obligation to help oppressed groups to which I don't belong.

I also have self-interest.

Members of every oppressed group need to fight for their rights. Members of every other oppressed group, and every decent human being belonging to every privileged group, must join together in solidarity to fight for the rights of all who don't have them now. Equality and justice aren't scarce resources. The more we give to more people, the more there is for everyone.

We can't abdicate our responsibility out of fear we'll be reprimanded and embarrassed. Let's be the best allies

we can be, and let's accept the imperfect help offered to us in our own battles anywhere we can find it.

## Virtue Signaling, Mansplaining, and Whitesplaining

How often do you scroll through social media and find a post that begins, “This is just a test to see who is a real friend, who will read this post to the end and then copy and paste—not Like or share—and write ‘done’ in the comments...”

I always stop right there. Whether or not I’m a “real friend,” I know this person isn’t if he or she feels compelled to test me all the time.

A woman I know likes to discuss important theological, political, and moral points with others. If a man joins in and says anything that isn’t 100% in agreement, he’s immediately called out for mansplaining. His only options are to say nothing, be a yes man, or be a misogynist. In this woman’s mind, he cannot ever offer anything useful of his own.

To be fair, many men *are* guilty of every aspect of mansplaining—arrogance, condescension, insensitivity, ignorance, and everything else that goes along with the term. The same is true when white people try to take part in discussions of race, bias, and privilege. And I see people of almost every race, gender, sexual orientation, and physical ability send out virtue signals, trying to shame others who aren’t as woke as they are.

As a white, cisgender male, albeit gay, I'm constantly aware that my experience makes almost anything I say on issues of bias and discrimination suspect. I'm far more likely than most to have biases I'm still unaware of even after decades of observation and attempts at self-awareness and improvement.

As a writer, I learned early on that any hope I had of producing a good story or essay depended largely on how much outside input I could gather on my work. The more friends and writers who critiqued my work, the better my revision would be. And if I could enlist others to critique the next version of the piece as well, the following revision would be even stronger.

Just because I benefit from critiques doesn't mean I don't have something useful to contribute of my own, something worth critiquing in the first place.

Listening, though, really hearing not only what people say but why they say it, is the only way to benefit from those critiques. So often in college workshops, when students would hear what other classmates or the instructor had to say, the student being critiqued would respond, "Well, you just don't understand what I'm going for here. You read it too fast. You didn't give it enough thought." On and on, they'd defend their original version of the work, their ego so deeply invested in "being a good writer" that they were afraid to admit they weren't already brilliant.

All throughout high school and college, I heard, “You have such potential as a writer.” But I didn’t want “potential.” I wanted to *be* a good writer.

In the current atmosphere of virtue signaling, many of us are so afraid to be labeled racist or sexist or homophobic or xenophobic that we insist on defending our position rather than admit that it might need a little revising. When we talk to a black colleague, we try to “subtly” insert a list of all the good things we’ve done to combat racism. We mention how we learned so much living in a mixed neighborhood. We want to be absolved of the crimes of our ancestors. We want to be absolved of our own past actions. We want to be absolved of our ongoing complicit support of the powerful structural racism everywhere in our culture.

An abuse victim doesn’t owe their abuser a pat on the back for being so magnanimous as to stop abusing them or, more accurately, abusing them a little less.

I’ve been writing for fifty years. I’ve been publishing for almost thirty. I took writing workshops as an undergraduate and again in grad school before going on to earn a second Master’s degree in writing. I’m a professional proofreader, a volunteer slush pile reader, a judge in writing contests. I’ve published hundreds of stories and essays, over 50 books. And I’m under no delusion that “I’ve arrived.” I will *always* need others to point out where I need to tighten the wording, delete an unproductive concept, add a vital point I’d somehow completely omitted.

The correct response in these situations is, “Thank you for taking the time to point out what I did wrong.”

My mother dreamed of being a writer. When my parents first married, they saved every penny, never splurging on so much as a Coke. But my mom asked my dad to pay for a correspondence course so she could become a writer. And after successfully finishing her first story, she sent it off to a magazine. The editor was even kind enough to offer a brief critique along with his rejection.

My mother never wrote another story.

Whatever that loss meant to her, I can’t know. I only discovered all this when going through her papers after she died. But the loss to me is enormous. I grieve that she had no one in her life to encourage her to learn and grow and become that writer she surely had the potential of being. The blow to her ego when she discovered she wasn’t competent right from the start crushed her spirit and was so shameful it was easier to give up her goals altogether than forge her way ahead.

And yet even my reflections here subtly convey the message that *I* was stronger than she was. *I* was better.

“You read three books on anti-racism? Well, *I* read five.”

“You cried when terrorists bombed people in Paris? Well, *I* cried when people were bombed in Syria.”

“You donated to ten environmental groups? Well, *I* was part of a blockade to stop an oil tanker.”

OK. You're better than I am. I concede the point. But this bizarre morality contest does nothing to advance justice and equality. Most of us are far more likely to run from an experience that will lead to shame than embrace it, and those who care about these issues come to the battle already primed for humiliation. How many times have we let a secret go untold, a bad decision uncorrected, because we were too embarrassed to let our loved ones know about it?

It's almost impossible, unfortunately, for us to avoid judging others when we've put so much effort into our own writing or gym workouts or small business, much less our anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic work, which reflects our innermost core.

I used to believe there would be a point when I'd accomplished achieving the eradication of my personal biases and could then focus only on "helping society." It's disconcerting to realize I'm always going to do and say things that are racist and sexist. Not intentionally, I hope, but as my first writing instructor pointed out, "It doesn't matter what you meant. What the reader is seeing is X." Just as I'll always need critiques from others to help me sharpen my writing skills, I'll need to be called out by allies to help me succeed in anti-racism and anti-sexism. What I don't need, what no social justice movement needs, are those who invest so much of their energy telling everyone else how stupid and insensitive they are.

My first day in Organic Chemistry 1001, the professor stood in front of the room and said something along the lines of, "Most of you are pre-med. You think you're so

smart. But I'm going to make sure at least half of you fail this class."

When I heard my professor smugly condemning his students, I dropped the class and signed up with another professor, one whose goal was to teach us, to help us succeed, not show how superior he was. Sure, as a student, it was ultimately my responsibility to learn the material, regardless of the goals or competency of the instructor. So I took responsibility for putting myself in an environment where I could learn the most.

I made A's in both Organic Chemistry 1001 and 1002. I also chose professors whose main goal was to teach, not belittle, for the other five chemistry courses I needed. I made A's in all of them.

Bully for me.

That hardly means I'm a chemistry pro. The classmate leading our study group went on to earn a PhD and become a chemistry professor, sharing photos online of her work with poison dart frogs in Central America. But even she is still always learning. And her goal is to engage students, not alienate them.

On Facebook recently, I read a post from the friend who accuses every man of mansplaining. She was lambasting progressives who "voted for Trump." For the past three years, she's made repeated claims about how this supposedly large number of her friends completely swayed the election against Clinton. As the protests against police brutality intensified and COVID continued to run amok across the nation, she said something along the lines of, "I

guess this plan of progressives to elect Trump is working out pretty well for you, isn't it?"

I was tempted to respond, "Are you insane?" but that was exactly what she was looking for, some fool who would dare argue with her, an opportunity to lash out at her "friends." It was clear she would rather cause more division by "proving" she was right than actually do anything to bring people over to her position, a position she felt was essential if progress was to be made. But she would risk that progress just to have the opportunity to bait someone to disagree so she could eviscerate them. That way she could prove her superiority, which was far more important than anything else.

If no legitimate discussion can be had on a topic without "opponents" being labeled as racist, sexist, ignorant, stupid, and biased, then no progress can be made at all. That's bad enough if the people trying to communicate are on "opposite sides." But when we're supposedly on the same side, just in slightly different positions on that side, and all conversation is cut off, then being the most virtuous, the smartest, the most anti-racist, the most feminist, the best pro-LGBTQ person alive isn't much help to anyone, even to that most remarkable, incredible person.

As a writer, I had to read hundreds of books just to have a baseline of what competency looked like. I had to seek out writing workshops, ask for Independent Study courses to create extra workshops. I had to pursue a second Master's degree even though doing so wouldn't help further my career, only help me hone my craft. I accept that

I need to put in the same level of work to become a better human rights advocate.

It's not pleasant to learn I've said or done something insensitive or damaging. But if I have, denying it won't change the facts. I committed a long time ago not to stop writing like my mother did, just because an authority figure didn't approve of my contribution. I will never be the world's greatest writer. I will also never be the world's most understanding, most powerful, most effective advocate of racial and gender equality. I'll never come up with the best ideas to address the climate crisis. Even after I listen to valid criticism and improve, I'll still fall short.

Can there be *any* excuse that despite years of hearing vague mentions of Juneteenth, it wasn't until the year George Floyd was killed that I finally looked it up?

Diversity trainers often begin their training with the warning, "You're going to have to accept feeling uncomfortable." If I'm mortified when a proofreader points out that I spelled "harelip" as "hairlip," that I used the word "whom" incorrectly, that I neglected to do my research and included anachronisms in my historical fiction, I'm certainly going to feel self-loathing when I realize I've contributed yet again—now, today—to a cultural bias that crushes and kills others.

But my "feeling bad" about my actions hardly makes me the victim here. It's incredibly self-centered for white folks to make a discussion on race all about us, but in the end, I'm the only racist whose behavior I have any chance

of modifying. So I'll channel the positive and the negative as best I can to do that.

Sometimes, I can develop a remarkably decent essay in two hours. Yet I've been working for several weeks on this one, knowing that within another few weeks or months, I'll look back and cringe over some stupid, ignorant thing I said. I'm not so blind I can't see that all my mansplaining and whitesplaining in these pages isn't a blatant attempt to deflect from my shortcomings. I'm giving myself an out, a pass, spending far more energy on proving I'm really and truly one of the good guys than on repairing damage.

I can accept that others are better at anti-racism than I am. But I must also acknowledge that "good" people are still perfectly capable of racist behavior. If we must, let's go ahead and believe that we're good.

*So what?* We need to stop making self-validation the goal. The goal is to dismantle racism.

Writing about it forces me to face disturbing realities rather than push them aside. I hope that reading my work helps others keep the problem in focus as well.

I've benefitted from my privilege for six decades. I'll never "arrive" at "redemption." Because there is no redemption. There is at best progress. Whatever "potential" I have, it's not a potential for perfect understanding and action.

But I won't be silent just because I make mistakes. Because I do believe that Silence = Death, that Silence =

Betrayal. And that the greatest mistake of all is to cede the obligation to solve problems to someone else... and the work required to make those solutions a reality.

## Keeping the Pantry Full: Freedom and Justice Demand Constant Vigilance

“I can’t wait till the Mueller report comes out.”

“I can’t wait until the mid-term elections in 2018.”

“I can’t wait till we elect a new president in 2020.”

“We’ll never achieve equality until we abandon capitalism and adopt socialism.”

“I can’t wait until the mid-term elections in 2022.”

Almost everyone I know is working hard to get us out of the terrible political predicament we’re currently in, but only a handful seem to recognize that none of these things is a permanent fix. Justice, freedom, and equality don’t have fairy tale endings. There’s no moment after which we can live happily ever after. Maintaining freedom and justice and equality will be a constant battle, not only in our lifetimes but forever.

Have we ever heard someone say, “I finally got all the weeds out of my yard. I never have to worry about that nasty task again”?

Have we heard anyone say, “Whew. I’m finally down to my ideal weight and BMI. Now I can stop exercising and watching what I eat”?

Or “I finally have the right to marry, and I’ve married the man of my dreams. It’s all coasting from here”?

Whatever our personal end goals are for “progress,” whether that be electing anyone other than Trump, or trying to get Democrats to move to the left, or to implement full-fledged socialism, Election Day is not the end of the struggle. The “Revolution” is not the end.

The work we do is hard. We want it to be over. We want to “win” and finally have a chance to breathe, but the painful truth is we can never relax.

Critics of reform point out that reforms can always be undone. That’s true. But revolution and complete overhaul can be undone, too. The people’s revolution in Russia didn’t bring about lasting change. Within a decade, socialism had been corrupted into communism. Before long, Russia and then the Soviet Union were oppressive tyrannies. After “the revolution” in Cuba, its citizens still faced a dictatorship that threw LGBTQ folks and dissenters into prison.

*Everything* can be undone. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t push Dems to the left, that we shouldn’t try to shift to Democratic Socialism, that we shouldn’t bring about Trotsky socialism. It just means that whatever path we choose, we must realize our end goals are no more secure than anyone else’s. Your system may very well be better than my system, but it’s every bit as susceptible to failure as any other.

That’s because human beings will be implementing and sustaining each and every type of system we ever develop, and no humans of any persuasion are perfect. It seems a trite and obvious point, but every day I see people

who think that if they get *their* way, if *their* idea of the perfect candidate or perfect policy or perfect economic or political system is victorious, we'll finally be OK.

We can be better, but we'll never be OK.

That doesn't mean we fall into cynicism or despair. We just need realistic expectations.

Protecting and preserving something great is a never-ending battle. Religious fanatics in the past decade have destroyed Persian artifacts dating back nearly 2000 years. Catholic invaders 500 years ago destroyed every Mayan book they could find. Thousands of temples, churches, synagogues, and mosques around the world, some of them hundreds of years old, have been destroyed over the years by enemies of the worshippers who met there.

We can preserve national parks against predators (you know, coal and oil companies, loggers, off-road recreational vehicles) every day for decades and decades, but all that work can be undone overnight once one of those predators finally gets in. It's far easier to cut down a 2000-year-old tree than it is to protect it every day against every possible threat.

Holocaust survivors are murdered 70 years after their liberation from the camps. We can clean up Superfund sites, and they can be polluted once again. We can develop antibiotics, and bacteria can evolve to withstand them.

Our work demanding justice and equality doesn't have an end date. There will *never* be a time when we can let our guard down.

This necessity for constant vigilance is true in every other part of our lives. Why in the world would we expect something different in the political and economic world? Because *those* things are simpler, smaller, and easier to control?

We must fight to make the world a better place, but we must do so with the understanding that such an endeavor requires a permanent commitment. Every advance we achieve must be supervised and monitored. We must always maintain oversight. We must continually keep pressure on all involved to preserve each and every victory.

Part of that is recruiting and training the next generation, and the one after that, to take over the fight when we're too old and tired to keep going. Another part is to let them come up with ideas and plans of their own. We can tag team with others so we can take a temporary break in the battle when we're weary.

Because while we're edified by helping, we can also be damaged by the emotional investment it requires.

It helps to remember that past leaders may have been tremendous heroes but that doesn't make every word they wrote scripture. If bacteria can adapt to new conditions, we can, too.

We just returned from the dentist with clean teeth and a clean bill of health, with no cavities or gum disease? That's great, but we'd better keep brushing and flossing. If a new prophylactic treatment becomes available, we'd be wise to include it.

Folks in AA take things “one day at a time.” They understand a universal truth, that one must always maintain constant vigilance, that even thirty or forty years of sobriety can be lost with a single night of drinking.

When my doctor told me I had to do three or more daily finger sticks to monitor my diabetes, I insisted on using a 14-day continuous glucose monitoring device instead. “It’s not as good,” he insisted. “You need instant results.”

“Doctor,” I replied, “you’re going to need to deal with the patient you have, not the one you wish you had.”

When I recounted the story to my husband, he said, “That’s the way we handle our marriage, isn’t it? We deal with the partner we have, not the one we wish we had.”

It sounds offensive, but the reality is that no patient is perfect, no spouse is perfect. If we refuse to treat patients until they’re perfect, a lot of sick folks are going to die. If we will only marry and stay married to perfect spouses, we’re going to be alone a very long time.

Likewise, we need to deal with the political system we have, not the one we wish we had. We can certainly work to improve the system or change it altogether but abstaining from participation in the meantime when so much is at stake is itself complicit behavior.

Once we get the exact candidate we want, though, once we establish the reforms, laws, and economic systems we want, we can still never let our guard down.

We just got back from the grocery and filled our fridge? Would any of us ever consider that a *final* victory?

In any event, I've said my piece. Everything should be fine now. And it's time for some happily ever after semi-annual maintenance sex with my husband. He seems reluctant to head into the bedroom with me, though I really don't understand why. I bathed last month, didn't I? I'm good.

## About the Author

Johnny Townsend earned an MFA in fiction writing from Louisiana State University. He was also awarded a BA and MA in English, as well as a BS in Biology. A native of New Orleans, Townsend relocated to Seattle in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. After attending a Baptist high school for four years as a teenager, he volunteered as a Mormon missionary in Italy and then held positions in his local New Orleans ward as Second Councilor in the Elders Quorum, Ward Single Adult Representative, Stake Single Adult Chair, Sunday School Teacher, Stake Missionary, and Ward Membership Clerk. In the secular world, Townsend worked as a bookstore clerk, a college English instructor, a bank teller, a loan processor, a mail carrier, a library associate, a receptionist, and a professional escort. He worked selling bus passes, installing insulation, delivering pizza, cleaning residential construction sites, rehabilitating developmentally disabled adults, surveying gas stations, translating documents from Italian into English, preparing surgical carts for medical teams, and performing experiments on rat brains in a physiology lab.

Townsend has published stories and essays in *Newsday*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, *The Seattle Times*, *The Orlando Sentinel*, *Bay Area Reporter*, *The Army Times*, *The Humanist*, *The Progressive*, *Medical Reform*, *Christopher*

*Street*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Glimmer Train*, *Sunstone*, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, in the anthologies *Queer Fish*, *Off the Rocks*, *Moth and Rust*, *The Kindness of Strangers*, and *In Our Lovely Deseret: Mormon Fictions*. He helped edit *Latter-Gay Saints*, a collection of stories about gay Mormons, and he is the author of 50 books.

Most of those books are collections of Mormon short stories, of which several were named to Kirkus Reviews' Best of 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. In addition to his Mormon stories, Townsend has written a collection of Jewish stories, *The Golem of Rabbi Loew*, based on his years as a Jew. He has also written one non-fiction book, *Let the Faggots Burn: The Upstairs Lounge Fire*, having interviewed survivors as well as friends and relatives of the 32 people who were killed when an arsonist set fire to a gay bar in the French Quarter of New Orleans on Gay Pride Day in 1973. He is an Associate Producer of the feature-length documentary *Upstairs Inferno*, directed by Robert Camina.

Townsend sang in the New Orleans Gay Men's Chorus for a time and performed in the priests' chorus in the opera *Aida*. He has a collection of Victorian ceramic tiles, wooden dinosaur carvings from Bali, and the entire set of Calvin and Hobbes comic strip compilations in Italian. In addition to speaking English and Italian, he's also studied French, Spanish, Russian, Hebrew, Old English, and American Sign Language. Townsend is an avid movie fan, whose three favorite Hitchcock films are *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Strangers on a Train*, and *Rear*

*Window*. He gives regularly to environmental conservation groups, medical charities, groups that support single-payer healthcare, human rights organizations, and to various documentaries and other projects he finds on crowdfunding sites.

The University of Utah in Salt Lake City has a Special Collection of Townsend material, including all his books, the magazines and newspapers that have published his work, his correspondence, photographs, and even a portrait painted by a prominent gay artist. ONE Archives in Los Angeles, the national LGBTQ archive, has his UpStairs Lounge materials and his 20 original gay quilts.

Johnny Townsend is married to Gary Tolman, another former Mormon who worked in the same mission in Italy. They still speak Italian to each other regularly.

## Books by Johnny Townsend

Thanks for reading! If you enjoyed this book, could you please take a few minutes to write a review online? Reviews are helpful both to me as an author and to other readers, so we'd all sincerely appreciate your writing one! And if you did enjoy the book, here are some others I've written you might want to look up:

Mormon Underwear

God's Gargoyles

The Circumcision of God

Sex among the Saints

Dinosaur Perversions

Zombies for Jesus

The Abominable Gayman

The Gay Mormon Quilter's Club

The Golem of Rabbi Loew

Mormon Fairy Tales

Flying over Babel

Marginal Mormons

Mormon Bullies

The Mormon Victorian Society

Dragons of the Book of Mormon

Selling the City of Enoch

A Day at the Temple

Behind the Zion Curtain

Gayrabian Nights

Lying for the Lord

Despots of Deseret

Missionaries Make the Best Companions

Invasion of the Spirit Snatchers

The Tyranny of Silence

Sex on the Sabbath

The Washing of Brains

The Mormon Inquisition

Interview with a Mission President

Weeping, Wailing, and Gnashing of Teeth

Behind the Bishop's Door

The Moat around Zion

The Last Days Linger

Mormon Madness

Human Compassion for Beginners

Dead Mankind Walking

Who Invited You to the Orgy?

Breaking the Promise of the Promised Land

I Will, Through the Veil

Am I My Planet's Keeper?

Have Your Cum and Eat It, Too

Strangers with Benefits

What Would Anne Frank Do?

This Is All Just Too Hard

Glory to the Glory Hole!

My Pre-Bucket List

Blessed Are the Firefighters

Wake Up and Smell the Missionaries

Quilting Beyond the Rainbow

Gay Sleeping Arrangements

Racism by Proxy

Let the Faggots Burn: The UpStairs Lounge Fire

Latter-Gay Saints: An Anthology of Gay Mormon Fiction (co-editor)

Available from [BookLocker.com](http://BookLocker.com) or your favorite online or neighborhood bookstore.

Wondering what some of those other  
books are about? Read on!

## **Invasion of the Spirit Snatchers**

During the Apocalypse, a group of Mormon survivors in Hurricane, Utah gather in the home of the Relief Society president, telling stories to pass the time as they ration their food storage and await the Second Coming. But this is no ordinary group of Mormons—or perhaps it is. They are the faithful, feminist, gay, apostate, and repentant, all working together to help each other through the darkest days any of them have yet seen.

## **Gayrabian Nights**

*Gayrabian Nights* is a twist on the well-known classic, *1001 Arabian Nights*, in which Scheherazade, under the threat of death if she ceases to captivate King Shahryar's attention, enchants him through a series of mysterious, adventurous, and romantic tales.

In this variation, a male escort, invited to the hotel room of a closeted, homophobic Mormon senator, learns that the man is poised to vote on a piece of anti-gay legislation the following morning. To prevent him from sleeping, so that the exhausted senator will miss casting his vote on the Senate floor, the escort

entertains him with stories of homophobia, celibacy, mixed orientation marriages, reparative therapy, coming out, first love, gay marriage, and long-term successful gay relationships. The escort crafts the stories to give the senator a crash course in gay culture and sensibilities, hoping to bring the man closer to accepting his own sexual orientation.

## **Let the Faggots Burn: The UpStairs Lounge Fire**

On Gay Pride Day in 1973, someone set the entrance to a French Quarter gay bar on fire. In the terrible inferno that followed, thirty-two people lost their lives, including a third of the local congregation of the Metropolitan Community Church, their pastor burning to death halfway out a second-story window as he tried to claw his way to freedom. A mother who'd gone to the bar with her two gay sons died alongside them. A man who'd helped his friend escape first was found dead near the fire escape. Two children waited outside a movie theater across town for a father and stepfather who would never pick them up. During this era of rampant homophobia, several families refused to claim the bodies, and many churches refused to bury the dead. Author Johnny Townsend pored through old records and tracked down survivors of the fire as well as relatives and friends of those

killed to compile this fascinating account of a forgotten moment in gay history.

## **The Abominable Gayman**

What is a gay Mormon missionary doing in Italy? He is trying to save his own soul as well as the souls of others. In these tales chronicling the two-year mission of Robert Anderson, we see a young man tormented by his inability to be the man the Church says he should be. In addition to his personal hell, Anderson faces a major earthquake, organized crime, a serious bus accident, and much more. He copes with horrendous mission leaders and his own suicidal tendencies. But one day, he meets another missionary who loves him, and his world changes forever.

## **Marginal Mormons**

What happens when a High Priest becomes addicted to crack cocaine? Do gay people have positive near-death experiences or unhappy ones? Is there a way to splice the empathy gene into the genome of every human? Can a schizophrenic woman on anti-delusional drugs still keep her belief in an intangible God? Will a childless biochemist be able to find fulfillment by taking part in a mission to Mars? Not every Latter-day Saint has a mainstream story to tell,

but these soul-searching people are still more than the marginal Mormons headquarters would like us to believe.

## **Missionaries Make the Best Companions**

What lies behind the freshly scrubbed façades of the Mormon missionaries we see about town? In these stories, an ex-Mormon tries to seduce a faithful elder by showing him increasingly suggestive movies. A sister missionary fulfills her community service requirement by babysitting for a prostitute. Two elders break their mission rules by venturing into the forbidden French Quarter. A senior missionary couple try to reactivate lapsed members while their own family falls apart back home. A young man hopes that serving a second full-time mission will lead him up the Church hierarchy. Two bored missionaries decide to make a little extra money moonlighting in a male stripper club. Two frustrated elders find an acceptable way to masturbate—by donating to a Fertility Clinic. A lonely man searches for the favorite companion he hasn't seen in thirty years.

## **Dragons of the Book of Mormon**

A supporter of Prop 8 is forced to attend his boss's gay wedding. A devout Latter-day Saint struggling to pay his bills wonders if he should keep paying tithing, even after being excommunicated. A reporter seeks the identity of Salt Lake's new superhero—a masked man wearing temple clothes who mysteriously shows up at crime scenes. A woman is murdered in the temple on her wedding day. One of the Three Nephites is missing in Pasadena. Mormons survive the zombie apocalypse because of their two-year supply of food storage.

## **The Last Days Linger**

The scriptures tell us that in the Last Days, wickedness will increase upon the Earth. When leaders of the Mormon Church see a rise in the number of gay members, they believe the end is upon them. But while “wickedness never was happiness,” it begins to appear that wickedness can sometimes be divine. At least, the stories here suggest that religious proscriptions condemning homosexuality have it all wrong. While gay Mormons may be no closer to perfection than anyone else, they're no further from it, either. And sometimes, being gay provides just the right ingredient to create saints—as flawed as God himself.

## **Mormon Madness**

Mental illness can strike the faithful as easily as anyone else. But often religious doctrine and practice exacerbate rather than alleviate these problems. From schizophrenia to obsessive-compulsive disorder, from persecution complex to sexual dysfunction, autism to dissociative identity disorder, Mormons must cope with their mental as well as their spiritual health on a daily basis.

## **Human Compassion for Beginners**

The battle to direct legislation and policy often seems to be a fight between greed and compassion. Emotions run so high that family members stop speaking to one another and long-time friendships fall by the wayside. But the problems being debated—climate change, universal healthcare, LGBTQ rights, gun regulation, economic inequality, and the separation of church and state—desperately need to be resolved.

## **Breaking the Promise of the Promised Land: How Religious Conservatives Failed America**

By aligning themselves over the past 60 years with the most conservative wing of the Republican Party, Mormons became leading contributors to the cultural

and moral decay of America. Mormon prophets have long declared that God set America apart for the righteous. It was to be a land of freedom, justice, and peace, a place where the Lamanites could blossom as the rose, a country so righteous that the affairs of the entire world would be conducted here during the Millennium.

But when Mormons tired of being “a peculiar people” and chose to side with the most repressive evangelicals, they chose to make America the land of the imprisoned, poor, and oppressed. While declaring their allegiance to the Prince of Peace, they’ve chosen to support policies that have kept America at war almost non-stop for the last six decades.

## **Am I My Planet’s Keeper?**

Global Warming. Climate Change. Climate Crisis. Climate Emergency. Whatever label we use, we are facing one of the greatest challenges to the survival of life as we know it.

But while addressing greenhouse gases is perhaps our most urgent need, it’s not our only task. We must also address toxic waste, pollution, habitat destruction, and our other contributions to the world’s sixth mass extinction event.

In order to do that, we must simultaneously address the unmet human needs that keep us distracted from deeper engagement in stabilizing our climate: moderating economic inequality, guaranteeing healthcare to all, and ensuring education for everyone.

And to accomplish *that*, we must unite to combat the monied forces that use fear, prejudice, and misinformation to manipulate us.

It's a daunting task. But success is our only option.

## **What Would Anne Frank Do?**

In a world already plagued by the effects of late-stage capitalism—economic inequality, voter suppression, healthcare inequality, racial injustice, and escalating climate crisis—how do we continue fighting for meaningful progress in the middle of a pandemic?

These essays and op-eds from the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the *Seattle Times*, and *LA Progressive* show us that unity can be divisive, morality can be immoral, and facts can be fabricated. But no one ever said fighting against manipulation and willful ignorance was easy.

In this collection, author Johnny Townsend offers encouragement and insight gained from his own

experience as a climate crisis refugee and human rights advocate.

## **This Is All Just Too Hard**

Raised to expect “the apocalypse” during his lifetime, author Johnny Townsend tackles the serious issues of our day using both his Mormon background and his secular humanist beliefs.

The only way to successfully deal with a global pandemic, or public health under any conditions, is to move to a system of universal healthcare. Additional ingredients for dismantling structural and institutional racism include ensuring tuition-free college and vocational training, universal taxpayer-funded childcare and pre-k education, fare-free public transportation, automatic voter registration, elimination of the Electoral College, ranked choice voting, plus nationwide vote-by-mail as well as in-person voting. If we are to improve the health of our citizens and our nation, we must reduce the extraordinary amount we spend on the military and police, and demand that the ultra-wealthy and corporations pay their fair share toward the public good.

Such policy changes are also essential if we wish to mitigate the worst effects of climate change, a

global catastrophe that will impact virtually every person on the planet.

Townsend's essays show us that while societal progress is always hindered by inertia, the multiple crises we're facing provide us an opportunity to move forward.

## **Blessed Are the Firefighters**

We don't need "affordable" healthcare. We need *universal* healthcare. We don't need "access" to education. We need tuition-free college and vocational training.

In these essays, Johnny Townsend erases the weasel words and gets right to the point. The only way any of us can live in a safe, healthy society is if we all do. Every worker needs a living wage. But more than that, we need a thriving wage, and Universal Basic Income is a practical starting point.

It's not enough to give coal miners and oilfield workers "good" pay. They also need jobs that promote the health of their communities and the rest of the country. Since we have no choice but to transition away from fossil fuels, we must provide both training and new work opportunities for those who will be displaced as we confront an ever-worsening climate crisis.

Pursuing gender and racial equality, LGBTQ rights, the elimination of for-profit prisons, the separation of church and state, and making peace more profitable than war form the core of any successful strategy for success.

## **Wake Up and Smell the Missionaries**

Two Mormon missionaries in Italy discover they share the same rare ability—both can emit pheromones on demand. At first, they playfully compete in the hills of Frascati to see who can tempt “investigators” most. But soon they’re targeting each other non-stop.

Can two immature young men learn to control their “superpower” to live a normal life... and develop genuine love? Even as their relationship is threatened by the attentions of another man?

They seem just on the verge of success when a massive earthquake leaves them trapped under the rubble of their apartment in Castellammare.

With night falling and temperatures dropping, can they dig themselves out in time to save themselves? And will their injuries destroy the ability that brought them together in the first place?

## **Racism by Proxy**

Are you biased? Am I?

The short answer is yes. We all are.

Having bias isn't a choice. We can't avoid it. We prefer members of our religion, our country, our political party, and speakers of our native language. We're taught bias by people who aren't conscious of their biases, and we in turn unintentionally pass them on to others.

So it's not a "sin" to be biased. It's inevitable.

What matters is not allowing our unchosen biases to exert absolute control over our decisions and behavior.

To do that, however, we must recognize and accept them as real.

In *Racism by Proxy*, essayist Johnny Townsend pushes past shame, guilt, insults, and other useless approaches to show how all of us, even white people of varying privilege, benefit from increasing equity and social justice throughout our communities.

## What Readers Have Said

Townsend's stories are "a gay *Portnoy's Complaint* of Mormonism. Salacious, sweet, sad, insightful, insulting, religiously ethnic, quirky-faithful, and funny."

D. Michael Quinn, author of *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*

"Told from a believably conversational first-person perspective, [*The Abominable Gayman's*] novelistic focus on Anderson's journey to thoughtful self-acceptance allows for greater character development than often seen in short stories, which makes this well-paced work rich and satisfying, and one of Townsend's strongest. An extremely important contribution to the field of Mormon fiction." Named to Kirkus Reviews' Best of 2011.

Kirkus Reviews

"The thirteen stories in *Mormon Underwear* capture this struggle [between Mormonism and homosexuality] with humor, sadness, insight, and sometimes shocking details... *Mormon Underwear* provides compelling stories, literally from the inside-out."

Niki D'Andrea, *Phoenix New Times*

“Townsend’s lively writing style and engaging characters [in *Zombies for Jesus*] make for stories which force us to wake up, smell the (prohibited) coffee, and review our attitudes with regard to reading dogma so doggedly. These are tales which revel in the individual tics and quirks which make us human, Mormon or not, gay or not...”

A.J. Kirby, *The Short Review*

“The Rift,” from *The Abominable Gayman*, is a “fascinating tale of an untenable situation... a *tour de force*.”

David Lenson, editor, *The Massachusetts Review*

“Pronouncing the Apostrophe,” from *The Golem of Rabbi Loew*, is “quiet and revealing, an intriguing tale...”

Sima Rabinowitz, *Literary Magazine Review*, [NewPages.com](http://NewPages.com)

*The Circumcision of God* is “a collection of short stories that consider the imperfect, silenced majority of Mormons, who may in fact be [the Church’s] best hope... [The book leaves] readers regretting the church’s willingness to marginalize those who best exemplify its ideals: those who love fiercely despite all obstacles, who brave challenges at great personal risk and who always choose the hard, higher road.”

Kirkus Reviews

*Johnny Townsend*

In *Mormon Fairy Tales*, Johnny Townsend displays “both a wicked sense of irony and a deep well of compassion.”

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

*Zombies for Jesus* is “eerie, erotic, and magical.”

Publishers Weekly

“While [Townsend’s] many touching vignettes draw deeply from Mormon mythology, history, spirituality and culture, [*Mormon Fairy Tales*] is neither a gaudy act of proselytism nor angry protest literature from an ex-believer. Like all good fiction, his stories are simply about the joys, the hopes and the sorrows of people.”

Kirkus Reviews

“In *Let the Faggots Burn* author Johnny Townsend restores this tragic event [the UpStairs Lounge fire] to its proper place in LGBT history and reminds us that the victims of the blaze were not just ‘statistics,’ but real people with real lives, families, and friends.”

Jesse Monteagudo, *The Bilerico Project*

In *Let the Faggots Burn*, “Townsend’s heart-rending descriptions of the victims... seem to [make them] come alive once more.”

Kit Van Cleave, *OutSmart Magazine*

*Marginal Mormons* is “an irreverent, honest look at life outside the mainstream Mormon Church... Throughout his musings on sin and forgiveness, Townsend beautifully demonstrates his characters’ internal, perhaps irreconcilable struggles... Rather than anger and disdain, he offers an honest portrayal of people searching for meaning and community in their lives, regardless of their life choices or secrets.” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2012.

Kirkus Reviews

The stories in *The Mormon Victorian Society* “register the new openness and confidence of gay life in the age of same-sex marriage... What hasn’t changed is Townsend’s wry, conversational prose, his subtle evocations of character and social dynamics, and his deadpan humor. His warm empathy still glows in this intimate yet clear-eyed engagement with Mormon theology and folkways. Funny, shrewd and finely wrought dissections of the awkward contradictions—and surprising harmonies—between conscience and desire.” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2013.

Kirkus Reviews

“This collection of short stories [*The Mormon Victorian Society*] featuring gay Mormon characters slammed [me] in the face from the first page, wrestled my heart and mind to the floor, and left me panting and wanting more by the end. Johnny Townsend has created so many memorable characters in such few pages. I went weeks thinking about this book. It truly touched me.”

Tom Webb, A Bear on Books

Johnny Townsend

*Dragons of the Book of Mormon* is an “entertaining collection... Townsend’s prose is sharp, clear, and easy to read, and his characters are well rendered...”

Publishers Weekly

“The pre-eminent documenter of alternative Mormon lifestyles... Townsend has a deep understanding of his characters, and his limpid prose, dry humor and well-grounded (occasionally magical) realism make their spiritual conundrums both compelling and entertaining. [*Dragons of the Book of Mormon* is] [a]nother of Townsend’s critical but affectionate and absorbing tours of Mormon discontent.” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2014.

Kirkus Reviews

In *Gayrabian Nights*, “Townsend’s prose is always limpid and evocative, and... he finds real drama and emotional depth in the most ordinary of lives.”

Kirkus Reviews

*Gayrabian Nights* is a “complex revelation of how seriously soul damaging the denial of the true self can be.”

Ryan Rhodes, author of *Free Electricity*

*Gayrabian Nights* “was easily the most original book I’ve read all year. Funny, touching, topical, and thoroughly enjoyable.”

Rainbow Awards

*Lying for the Lord* is “one of the most gripping books that I've picked up for quite a while. I love the author's writing style, alternately cynical, humorous, biting, scathing, poignant, and touching.... This is the third book of his that I've read, and all are equally engaging. These are stories that need to be told, and the author does it in just the right way.”

Heidi Alsop, Ex-Mormon Foundation Board Member

In *Lying for the Lord*, Townsend “gets under the skin of his characters to reveal their complexity and conflicts... shrewd, evocative [and] wryly humorous.”

Kirkus Reviews

In *Missionaries Make the Best Companions*, “the author treats the clash between religious dogma and liberal humanism with vivid realism, sly humor, and subtle feeling as his characters try to figure out their true missions in life. Another of Townsend’s rich dissections of Mormon failures and uncertainties...” Named to Kirkus Reviews’ Best of 2015.

Kirkus Reviews

In *Invasion of the Spirit Snatchers*, “Townsend, a confident and practiced storyteller, skewers the hypocrisies and eccentricities of his characters with precision and affection. The outlandish framing narrative is the most consistent source of shock and humor, but the stories do much to ground the reader in the world—or former world—of the characters... A

*Johnny Townsend*

funny, charming tale about a group of Mormons facing the end of the world.”

Kirkus Reviews

“Townsend’s collection [*The Washing of Brains*] once again displays his limpid, naturalistic prose, skillful narrative chops, and his subtle insights into psychology... Well-crafted dispatches on the clash between religion and self-fulfillment...”

Kirkus Reviews

“While the author is generally at his best when working as a satirist, there are some fine, understated touches in these tales [*The Last Days Linger*] that will likely affect readers in subtle ways... readers should come away impressed by the deep empathy he shows for all his characters—even the homophobic ones.”

Kirkus Reviews

## Acknowledgment of Prior Publication

- “All or Nothing Racism,” published in *What Would Anne Frank Do?* BookLocker.com, June 2020
- “Ban All Routine Traffic Stops,” published in *LA Progressive* on 30 May 2020
- “Before Things Turned Violent,” published in *Resistance: DoveTales, an International Journal of the Arts*, Summer 2020 issue III
- “Beheading Rats, Harassing Women, and Making Artificial Cerebrospinal Fluid,” published in *Blessed Are the Firefighters*, BookLocker.com, Feb 2021
- “Better Off Dead,” published in *LA Progressive* on 14 April 2021
- “Cages, Camps, Jails, and Prisons,” published in *Breaking the Promised of the Promised Land*, BookLocker.com, Sept 2019
- “Chimney Sweeps, Typesetters, Tobacco Farmers, and the Police,” published in *LA Progressive* on 13 June 2020
- “Church Courses to Overcome Unconscious Bias,” published in *LA Progressive* on 9 April 2021
- “Deadnaming our Military Bases,” published in *LA Progressive* on 21 June 2020
- “Don’t Feed the Humans: Criminalizing Compassion,” published in the *Orlando Sentinel* on 18 June 2019

- “Do We See the Person in ‘Homeless Person’?” published in *Am I My Planet’s Keeper?* BookLocker.com, Feb 2020
- “Exposure Isn’t Enough,” published in *LA Progressive* on 1 April 2021
- “Facing our Biases without Self-Loathing,” published in *LA Progressive* on 8 July 2020
- “First Responders: Police, Firefighters, and... Mental Health Officers?” published in *LA Progressive* on 27 December 2020
- “Go and Sin a Little Less,” published in *LA Progressive* on 28 March 2021
- “Is Critical Race Theory ‘True’?” published in the *Salt Lake Tribune* on 3 June 2021
- “I Threw My Confederate Cap Away,” published in *Flip Sides*, Wising Up Press: Decatur, GA, April 2021. Eds. Charles Brockett and Heather Tosteson
- “It’s Their Culture I Don’t Like,” published in *LA Progressive* on 24 April 2021
- “Keeping the Pantry Full: Freedom and Justice Demand Constant Vigilance,” published in *LA Progressive* on 4 September 2020
- “Learn the Truth: Facing Revisionist History,” published in *LA Progressive* on 14 May 2021
- “Let’s Rehearse Anti-Racist Strategies,” published in *LA Progressive* on 16 July 2020
- “LGBTQ Lit for Mormons,” published in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, 2 July 2017

- “Make the Apocalypse Great Again,” published in the *Salt Lake Tribune* on 4 March 2021
- “Mandatory Courses on Race, Gender, and Social Justice,” published in *LA Progressive* on 23 Nov 2018
- “More Social Justice, Less Civil Disorder,” published in *LA Progressive* on 25 July 2020
- “Mormons Must Stop Practicing Racism by Proxy,” published in the *Salt Lake Tribune* on 19 June 2020
- “Mormons Should Make Jesus Semitic Again,” published in *Main Street Plaza* on 5 July 2020
- “Oh, Say Can You Unsee,” published in *LA Progressive* on 31 July 2020
- “One-Tenth More Empathy to Create Real Change,” published in the *Salt Lake Tribune* on 30 April 2021 and republished in *LA Progressive* on 2 May 2021
- “Perfectionists against Self-Improvement,” published in *Main Street Plaza* on 12 May 2021
- “Prerequisites for a Livable Society,” published in *LA Progressive* on 9 May 2021
- “Privilege Doesn’t Mean Life Is Perfect,” published in *What Would Anne Frank Do?* BookLocker.com, June 2020
- “Protesting at a Black Lives Matter Rally Revealed More of My Biases,” published in *LA Progressive* on 11 June 2020
- “Racist Gods,” published in *LA Progressive* on 17 March 2021
- “Resisting Bigotry One Day at a Time,” published in *LA Progressive* on 12 July 2020

- “Sex Is Work,” published in *Blessed Are the Firefighters*, BookLocker.com, Feb 2021
- “Subsidizing Cultural Appreciation,” published in *Am I My Planet’s Keeper?* BookLocker.com, Feb 2020
- “Successful Citizens Are the Key to Beating China and Russia,” published in *LA Progressive* on 5 May 2021
- “Suppression of Information Is a Human Rights Abuse,” published in *LA Progressive* on 5 July 2020.
- “That Time I Wasn’t Killed by the Police,” published in *LA Progressive* on 28 July 2020
- “Things to Say to the Police While Being Murdered,” published in *What Would Anne Frank Do?* Booklocker.com, June 2020
- “To Be an Ally or Not To Be,” published in *Breaking the Promise of the Promised Land*, BookLocker.com, Sept 2019
- “Train Up a Child in the Bias He Should Know,” published in the *Salt Lake Tribune* on 7 August 2020
- “Trick-or-Treating with the Homeless,” published in *Am I My Planet’s Keeper?* BookLocker.com, Feb 2020
- “Troll Others and Be the Worse for It,” published in *LA Progressive* on 7 May 2021
- “Virtue Signaling, Mansplaining, and Whitesplaining,” published in *LA Progressive* on 20 June 2020
- “When Protesting Genocide Is a Racist Act,” published in the *Salt Lake Tribune* on 12 May 2019
- “White Racist for Black Lives Matter,” published in *LA Progressive* on 22 July 2020

## Additional Resources for White Allies

There's far more available than the few items listed below. This short list is just to offer a few starting options. I've included many items about oppression in general, as all forms work to divide allies, and solidarity with others is the best way forward.

### **Race (Black):**

- “4 Little Girls” (documentary about the Birmingham church bombing that killed four girls)
- “Africa’s Great Civilizations” (PBS documentary featuring Henry Gates, debunking myths about Africa)
- “American Experience—Freedom Riders” (PBS documentary of civil rights movement in the 1960s)
- “American Experience—Scottsboro: An American Tragedy” (PBS documentary of the legal battle from 1931 that gave birth to the civil rights movement)
- “Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution” (PBS documentary)
- “The Central Park Five” (PBS documentary about the wrongful incarceration of five Black and Latino teens who are eventually freed after the real rapist’s confession)

- “Dark Girls” (documentary about discrimination based on varying shades of dark skin)
- “Dreamland: The Burning of Black Wall Street” (documentary)
- “Driving While Black” (PBS documentary)
- “Finding Your Roots” (almost any episode of this PBS series featuring a Black guest will do: Epatha Merkerson discovers the sale of her ancestor was directly related to the survival of Georgetown University, Questlove learns that his ancestor came on the very last slave ship to the US, Gloria Reuben discovers her ancestor who came from Africa on the Middle Passage in 1817, country singer Roseanne Carter Cash learns that she has African ancestry on both sides of her family, and Wanda Sykes, Michael Strahan, Maya Rudolph, John Legend, and many others have fascinating histories that help viewers understand the enormity of the impact “history” still has on the lives of Black Americans today)
- “Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America” (book by Ayanna Byrd that details the many ways Black hair is used to discriminate at school, in the workplace, and elsewhere)
- “The Hate U Give” (fictionalized story about a teen who witnesses an unprovoked police killing)
- “I am not your Negro” (documentary about novelist James Baldwin)

- “If Beale Street Could Talk” (film adaptation of a James Baldwin novel about a young couple in Harlem, the young woman fighting to prove her husband’s innocence)
- “Just Mercy” (fictionalized account of the true story of an attorney fighting racism in the criminal justice system)
- “Let the Fire Burn” (documentary covering the police attack on MOVE, a Black power group, leading to the death of 11 people and the destruction of 61 homes)
- “March” (trilogy of graphic novels about the civil rights movement)
- “Racially Charged: America’s Misdemeanor Problem” (short documentary by Brave New Films)
- “Reconstruction: America after the Civil War” (PBS documentary)
- “Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair” (book by two evangelical Christians—one white and one Asian—calling for Christians to come with a working plan for reparations)
- “Secrets of the Dead: America’s Untold Story” (PBS documentary, 4 parts, revealing overlooked history including slave escapes to a free Florida in the 1700s, the first free Black settlement in America, how free Blacks and Native Americans worked together in St. Augustine and other locales, before the U.S. took over Florida)
- “Selma” (fictionalized account of the march in Selma)

- “Slavery by Another Name” (PBS documentary showing how the laws were manipulated to continue enslaving Blacks after the end of the Civil War)
- “Slavery and the Making of America” (PBS documentary showing some of the history)
- “Spies of Mississippi” (PBS documentary about anti-civil rights spies trying to undermine the civil rights movement)
- “Trial of the Chicago 7” (Fictionalized account of the trial after the riots in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. It shows how an 8<sup>th</sup> defendant, a Black man, received NO attorney representation and was physically gagged when he complained. Also includes info about the Black Panthers.)
- “Tulsa, 1921: Reporting a Massacre” (book by Randy Krehbiel and Karlos Hill about the destruction of “Black Wall Street” and murder of at least 300 in a white supremacist attack)
- “The Tuskegee Airmen” (PBS documentary about a group of African American fighter pilots during WWII)
- “Underground Railroad: The William Still Story” (PBS documentary)
- “Wilmington’s Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy” (Pulitzer Prize winner David Zucchino’s account of white supremacists overthrowing an elected government, murdering at least 60 Black men in the process)

**Race (Native American):**

- “Beans” (feature film based on the 78-day standoff between a Mohawk community and the government of Quebec, winner of Canadian Screen Award)
- “Biography: Sitting Bull, Chief of the Lakota Nation” (documentary)
- “Exterminate All the Brutes” (HBO documentary on white supremacy, covering 500 years of U.S. history)
- “Geronimo and the Apache Resistance” (documentary)
- “The Great Indian Wars 1540-1890” (documentary)
- “House Made of Dawn” (Pulitzer-prize winning novel by N. Scott Momaday)
- “In Search of History: Navajo Code Talkers” (documentary by The History Channel about the only unbreakable military code, developed by Navajo Marines)
- “Life on the Rez” (long news report by Lisa Ling)
- “Native America” (PBS documentary about indigenous peoples of the Americas)
- “Our Spirits Don’t Speak English: Indian Boarding School” (documentary about forced boarding schools for Native Americans to wipe out their cultures and languages)
- “Reel Injun” (documentary analyzing the depiction of Native Americans in film)

- “Smoke Signals” (fictionalized account of Pacific Northwest indigenous friends)
- “Trail of Tears” (documentary about forced relocation of Native Americans)
- “We Shall Remain: America Through Native Eyes” (PBS documentary about Native Americans)
- “Wind River” (film about missing and murdered Indigenous women, and how conflicts over jurisdiction make this a catastrophic and largely ignored problem)

**Race (Asian American):**

- “The Big Sick” (feature film based on the true story of a Pakistani American comic’s awkward relationship with his white girlfriend’s parents when she falls into a coma)
- “The Chinese Exclusion Act” (PBS documentary about U.S. refusal to accept Chinese immigrants for over 60 years)
- “The Karate Kid” (feature film about a bullied teen who is taught karate by a Japanese neighbor and who learns more about Japanese culture through their friendship)
- “London River” (feature film about a white British Christian woman and a Black French Muslim man searching for their children after a terrorist attack in 2005)

- “They Called Us Enemy” (graphic novel by Star Trek actor George Takei, recounting his time in a Japanese American internment camp)
- “Time of Fear” (PBS documentary about Japanese American internment camps during WWII)
- “The Wedding Banquet” (feature film about an Asian American gay man in a committed gay relationship who pretends to marry a woman to please his parents visiting from Taiwan)

**ADA/Disabilities:**

- “37 Seconds” (Japanese actor with cerebral palsy portrays an artist who wants to find a career drawing manga)
- “Atypical” (Netflix series about a teen with autism)
- “The Best Years of Our Lives” (feature film that won several Oscars, set immediately after WWII, starring a man who’d lost both hands in the war)
- “Children of a Lesser God” (feature film about a deaf woman, played by Marlee Matlin, the only deaf actress so far to win an Oscar)(she’s also acted in several other shows and films, if folks want to see more stories with deaf characters)
- “Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution” (Shows the development of the activism leading to the passage of the ADA. Helps us understand the physical obstacles and emotional disregard millions of folks must endure. Includes a powerful scene showing disabled folks

literally crawling up the steps of the Capitol to demonstrate the lack of accessibility.)

“Elephant Man” (fictionalized account of the true story of a badly disfigured man who was treated as a circus animal until rescued by a doctor)

“Mask” (feature film starring Cher playing a mother whose son was born disfigured)

“Murderball” (documentary about athletes who play wheelchair rugby)

“The Punk Syndrome” (documentary about a punk rock band whose members are all mentally impaired)

“Shallow Hal” (Primarily about a man who learns to see the inner beauty of others, mostly in terms of obesity and looks, but it also showcases a disabled actor in a supporting role.)

“Sound of Metal” (Oscar-winning film about a heavy metal drummer who begins to lose his hearing)

“Spencer2TheWest” (YouTube channel hosted by a man whose legs were amputated when he was a child, explaining how he drives, swims, goes to the bathroom, etc.)

“Temple Grandin” (feature film about a woman with autism who succeeds as a scientist)

“The Upside” (feature film about a quadriplegic white man who hires a Black ex-con to assist him)

- “What You Think I’m Thinking” (A short film, 12 minutes. Featuring a severely disfigured Black burn survivor who goes on his first date since the accident.)
- “Wonder” (feature film starring Julia Roberts and Owen Wilson, about a young boy with facial abnormalities making friends at school)

**Judaism/Islam:**

- “The Chosen” (feature film based on a novel by Chaim Potok about the friendship between an Orthodox Jew and a Hassidic Jew, showing that there are many sects among Jews. They aren’t a single religion.)
- “Fiddler on the Roof” (musical about a poor Jewish milkman whose daughters break tradition by choosing their own husbands)
- “The Kite Runner” (film based on the novel about an Afghani immigrant living in California who visits an old friend in Pakistan he’d been too scared to help during an assault years earlier)
- “The Life Ahead” (Netflix movie starring Sophia Loren as a Holocaust survivor in Italy taking in a young Muslim orphan from Senegal)
- “Schindler’s List” (feature film by Steven Spielberg telling the true story of a complicated war criminal who still saves 1200 Jews during the Holocaust)
- “Train of Life” (French film about an Eastern European Jewish community during the Holocaust who try to

escape by stealing a train and pretending to be a transport to the death camps)

“Two Strangers Who Meet Five Times” (award-winning short film, 12 minutes, by Marcus Markou, about a white racist and a Muslim whose chance encounters change their lives)

“Unorthodox” (Netflix series about a young woman who breaks away from an ultra-Orthodox Jewish community)

“Yentl” (musical starring Barbra Streisand as a woman in Eastern Europe who disguises herself as a man so she can study Talmud)

### **Gender:**

“The Accused” (Jodie Foster won an Oscar for her role. The film accepts the usual accusations thrown at rape victims—she was drunk and high, she was dressed provocatively, she was flirting with the rapist—and shows that none of that justifies or excuses the assault)

“American Experience: The Codebreaker” (PBS documentary about Elizebeth Smith Friedman, whose codebreaking skills helped bring down a Nazi spy ring during WWII, gangsters, and others)

“American Experience: The Vote” (PBS documentary, 2 parts, showing the long struggle of women to win the right to vote)

- “Erin Brockovitch” (Fictionalized true story of an impoverished single mom who takes her entry level job and gathers evidence of Pacific Gas and Electric poisoning water, winning compensation for the survivors)
- “He Named Me Malala” (documentary about a young woman fighting for the right of girls to be educated, who is shot in the head but survives and eventually wins the Nobel Peace Prize)
- “Made in Dagenham” (Fictionalized true story of women auto workers in the UK fighting for equal pay.)
- “Suffragette” (Fictionalized account of women winning the right to vote)

## **LGBTQ:**

- “The Celluloid Closet” (analyzes depictions of LGBTQ folks in film from silent movies to the present day)
- “Disclosure” (Interviews with trans folks, many of them POC, discussing the importance of representation)
- “Kinky Boots” (feature film telling the true story of a failing shoe manufacturer who revitalizes his company by making boots for drag queens)
- “Let the Record Show” (book by Sarah Schulman about the history of ACT UP, an AIDS protest group)
- “Mass Appeal” (The story of an alcoholic priest and a bisexual seminarian who stand up for each other. Stars Jack Lemmon.)

“Pride” (feature film about a group of LGBTQ activists in the UK who raise funds for striking coal miners who don’t like them)

“The Times of Harvey Milk” (documentary about the first openly gay elected official in the US)

### **Social Justice/Labor:**

“American Experience: Civilian Conservation Corps” (PBS documentary on this government labor program during the Great Depression)

“American Experience: Triangle Fire” (PBS documentary about horrific working conditions in a New York factory that led to the deaths of 146 employees, mostly young women locked inside a burning building, and the labor reforms that resulted from the disaster)

“Five Past Midnight in Bhopal: The Epic Story of the World’s Worst Industrial Disaster” (book by Dominique Lapierre and Javier Moro about lax safety protocols leading to the death of roughly 15,000 people during a leak of poison gas)

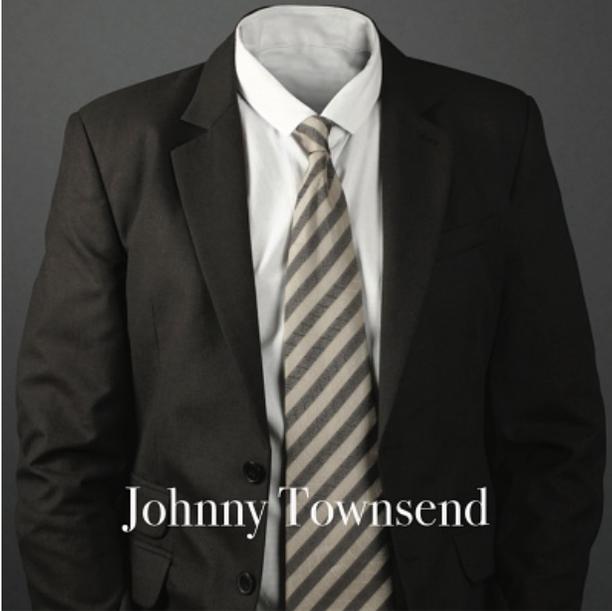
“The Hamlet Fire: A Tragic Story of Cheap Food, Cheap Government, and Cheap Lives” (book about how economically depressed townspeople are forced to take dangerous, low-paying jobs)

“Invisible People” (YouTube channel featuring interviews with homeless people)

“Mine Wars” (documentary about oppression of miners)

- “Prisons Make Us Safer: And 20 Other Myths About Mass Incarceration” (book by Victoria Law)
- “Radium Girls” (feature film about real-life hazardous working conditions that killed workers)
- “The Unexpected Guest: How a Homeless Man from the Streets of L.A. Redefined Our Home” (book by Michael Konik detailing how he and his wife took in a homeless man for several months)

# Racism by Proxy



*Having bias isn't a choice. We're taught bias by people who aren't conscious of their biases, and we in turn unintentionally pass them on to others.*

## **Racism by Proxy**

By Johnny Townsend

**Order the book from the publisher [BookLocker.com](http://BookLocker.com)**

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