

EPILOGUE
to
ONE NATION UNDER CURSE
(Updated September, 2017)

I hope you enjoyed *One Nation Under Curse*! It's been eight years since I wrote the book, and as I have traveled around the country speaking on the state of race relations in the United States, I've come across several frequently asked questions that I would like to address in this new epilogue section. I've spoken on college campuses, at government functions, and to business and professional groups. I've been interviewed on radio and television throughout the nation and internationally. I've spent hundreds of hours answering questions from journalists and audience members. Let me share answers to some of those questions.

Why did I write the book? And, why now?

Eight years ago, both of my daughters were teenagers and had lived their lives with security precautions always in mind. The Klan group I had led looked upon children as merely extensions of their parents. If the parents were enemies of the Klan, then the children were fair game for harassment, intimidation, even kidnapping, until those children reached the age of eighteen. Then, after that, the Klan usually treated them like they were their own persons and could make their own choices.

My daughters being targeted was a real threat. Even though they grew up knowing fully of my past, hearing me speak many times, and though they were aware of assassination attempts on my life, nevertheless, I sensed they didn't understand the gravity of the situation and merely thought we were the most overprotective parents on the planet. I wanted them to read the full account and understand the precautions we took, which included homeschooling them both all

the way through high school as well as only allowing them to be with people who had been approved and checked out.

It seems to have worked out as planned. Both of my daughters came to me, individually, after having read the book and told me that they now understood; they “got it” and thanked me for taking such precautions during those growing up years. They are both married with families of their own now.

How is the book selling?

The Readers’ Favorite International Book Awards named *One Nation Under Curse* the best nonfiction book in the Religion/Philosophy category in 2012. This has helped the book sell well over the years, and news about it has found its way around the world as I have done TV and radio interviews as far away as Australia. I’ve been notified that a copy of the book has been added to the Oxford University library in England; it has prompted a best-selling author in Germany to travel to America to interview me and subsequently write my official biography which has been released throughout Europe. It’s written in German. I don’t read German. I assume it says good things about me.

What are you doing now?

After 31 years serving as a Senior Pastor in the Free Methodist Church, I stepped down from the pulpit to devote myself more fully to speaking and to working with my students at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida where I now serve as an Associate Professor of Communication, teaching courses such as public speaking, keynote speaking, persuasion, interpersonal communication, and small group communication, to name a few. However, being out of the pulpit lasted less than two years. Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church, an historic African-American congregation in nearby Bartow, Florida, invited me to serve on staff as an

Associate Pastor in charge of discipleship ministries. The senior pastor, Dr. Lanelle Pickett, Sr., heard me speak at a city council event promoting diversity. I challenged the pastors in the audience that day that if they wanted to build a multi-racial church, then the first step was to make sure there were different races represented in the leadership on the platform each Sunday. Pastor Pickett challenged me to put my money where my mouth was and come help him to reach out to whites as well as blacks. I am overwhelmed at the thought of a black church, started over 125 years ago by freed slaves, now welcoming a reformed Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan onto their platform and into their pulpit. Such, indeed, is the grace of God at work.

What is your message in a nutshell?

I continue my speaking engagements, emphasizing our need to move beyond diversity to what I call, *conversity*. Diversity pertains to the idea of division, differences, what separates us and makes us different from one another, and there is a place for that. We need to learn that everyone is not like us; everyone has not had the same experiences as we have; everyone does not think like we do – and that’s okay. We learn to respect differences in people. But, if we are to experience racial healing in this nation, we must move beyond our diversity to *conversity*. The prefix *con* means with, like, the same as. *Conversity* focuses on how we are the same; how we are alike; how much we have in common. And, regardless of the color of your skin, you have the same basic desires, hopes, and dreams for your future as people of other races do. Let’s celebrate our diversity; let’s explore how we perceive life differently because of our experiences; but let’s not stop there. Let’s move beyond our differences and celebrate how much we have in common and work together so those hopes and dreams can be realized for everyone.

What is your take on the current state of race relations in America?

When I wrote *One Nation Under Curse*, the nation had just elected its first African-American president. Many were convinced that we were living in a “Post-racial” society. Race was no longer an issue. Blacks had achieved the ultimate – the White House. All was well on the racial front. Looking back, we can all see how naïve we were. I had truly hoped that we had turned a corner as a nation, but, deep down, I knew that nothing had really changed – except for the worst. The Klan and other white supremacist terrorist organizations simply used President Obama’s time in the White House to convince people that everything wrong with this country is because we had a black man as president. Racist organizations continue to recruit, indoctrinate, and train their growing number of members for what they have been hoping for since the 1960s – an all-out race war. The idea of such wasn’t even on the average American’s radar ten years ago. Now, with racial tensions continuing to grow, it seems more than merely plausible.

America was once thought to be a melting pot. A metaphor that brings to mind the mixing of several different ingredients together and then watching them melt into a new entity that doesn’t really match any one of the original ingredients. It’s a picture of people from many different countries coming to America and merging into our culture, leaving their old culture behind them. They flavor the American culture, but that’s all they do. There is one culture now for everyone. I don’t really believe America was ever like that, and most would agree. In all the major cities, you had black sections, white sections, and even Polish, German, Russian and Asian sections. There wasn’t much melting taking place.

The new metaphor making the rounds is the Salad Bowl concept. All the ingredients are mixed together but they can easily be distinguished one from another. They make a great flavor together, but you can still deconstruct the salad by picking out the radishes, cucumbers, carrots, etc. So, the metaphor teaches us that in America, we still maintain our different cultures but

when we combine them they make a tasty mix in which we can still discern the culture of black America, white America, Hispanic America, Asian America, etc. The salad bowl metaphor is a good goal to strive for, but we are hardly there. And, we are not even heading in that direction as I write this.

Let me offer you yet another metaphor; one that much better pictures where we are as a country with regards to race relations. America is not a melting pot, nor is it a salad bowl. It's a veggie tray. A veggie tray has all the makings of a great salad, but the vegetables are kept separate in their own little compartment. They're all on the same tray, but they are still separate and woe to the OCD hostess who must deal with keeping the broccoli out of the cauliflower area! As a nation, we all work together; we all go to school together; we all ride the same bus together. But go to any school or workplace cafeteria, and you'll still see most of the blacks sitting with other blacks, Hispanics with Hispanics, and whites with whites. Self-segregation does nothing but perpetuate the "we versus them" attitude.

What is your challenge to leaders in America?

My message, regardless of the group I am speaking to, remains the same. We can fight institutional racism through changing laws, improving education, and scrutinizing law enforcement and judicial proceedings more closely, and we should. My own personal motto is, "If it's not justice FOR all, it is not justice AT all." But, laws will only go so far. Racism must also be fought on an individual level. It is, at its root, a personal issue and a spiritual issue that must be dealt with on the individual level. Laws can make people do things, change their actions. But, laws do not change a person's heart. Laws do not change a culture. Laws are those rules that people ignore if they feel they can get away with it.

Legislation has gone about as far as it is going to. What is needed now is something much deeper and much more difficult to achieve. We need a full-blown culture shift. We need a change in the nation's attitudes, not just in how we treat each other when "Big Brother" is watching.

I recently returned from a meeting on Capital Hill in Washington, D.C. where I joined forty-nine other national thought leaders in the area of race relations. We were gathered for a private meeting to develop a plan for racial reconciliation for the country that will be presented to President Trump and his White House staff. This Congressional Gracism Forum on Racial Reconciliation, convened by Dr. David Anderson of the BridgeLeader Network, Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner of the Skinner Leadership Institute, and Jim Wallis of Sojourners, is just one indication of how serious the race problem in America has become. That those to the right of center politically would join together with those left of center; that whites would come together with people of color even at a time when the nation is polarized along racial lines, political lines, and social-economic lines indicates that, clearly, there is a real and dangerous problem and we can ignore it no longer.

After President Trump was elected, there was a wave of fear that came over many people of color in this country. Right after the inauguration, I addressed my black congregation. This is not the time to be afraid. This is the time to be encouraged. President Trump didn't cause the racial divisions in this nation. Neither did President Obama. They have been simmering just beneath the surface for decades. Now, they are starting to bubble to the top. I am encouraged that, finally, white America is beginning to realize that there is a problem, and we are on a trajectory headed for disaster if we maintain our current course. But if we are willing to

acknowledge there is a problem, then we can sit down and discuss it and begin to find solutions and change the course of our nation.

I challenge church leaders to model for your congregations how you would like them to live. Do you have different races represented on your leadership teams? When visitors come to your church and see only one race represented on the platform, if it does not match their skin color, they are unlikely to come back. They must see the pastor modeling good race relations if they are going to do it themselves.

I challenge business leaders to look at their organizations. Is there diversity at every level? If not, why not? Take a hard look at who is being promoted. Does your company or school reflect the diverse population mix we now have in this country?

I challenge parents to look at their own households. Do your children have friends of other races? Do you? Are they welcomed into your home? Our children follow our examples – and yes, they are watching. And listening. And making mental notes on their parents' views of people who are not like themselves.

As I travel the country speaking to various audiences, I like to ask them to raise their hands if they have friends of other races. Almost every hand goes up. Then, I explain to them what I mean by “friend.” A friend is not someone you work with or go to school with – that’s a coworker or fellow student. A friend is not someone who bags your groceries at the market that you call by name because you’ve read it on their nametag. A friend is not the waitress at your favorite restaurant that knows you because you are a regular. No, a friend is someone you say, “Hey, my family is having a little barbeque at our house this weekend; how about bringing your wife and kids over?” or, “How about joining me and my wife for dinner and a movie tomorrow night?” That’s what I mean by friends. Friends are not friends because their work situation or

school situation or even church situation puts them together and they see one another on a regular basis because they have to. Friends are people we choose to have in our lives. We spend our free time together because we want to, not because we have to.

After giving them my definition of what a friend is, I ask them, “Now, with that definition in mind, raise your hand if you have friends of other races. Then I invite the audience to look around. In most audiences, we go from 90 percent of hands raised the first time to about ten percent or less indicating they really have multiracial friendships.

How do you build such authentic friendships? You must be intentional. It will not just happen on its own. Many had hopes that the newer, younger generations would just automatically build such friendships because of growing up with integration in the schools and workplaces. But I witness self-segregation on behalf of those in their teens, 20s, 30s, and 40s on a regular basis. Yes, it’s true that we are more comfortable with those whom we perceive to be the most like us, but if we want to break the curse of racism over this nation, it is going to take intentionally moving out of our comfort zone and modeling healthy race relations to our own generations and the generations to come. We have to “Intend to Befriend.”

I had a sad but interesting confrontation with a lady during Q & A after I had addressed a community forum in a Midwestern city that was facing racial tensions. It was also humbling as this lady had just heard me speaking on the subject of bringing the races together in the community, and she obviously missed the point of my message entirely. She stood up and posed her question, “Dr. Harris, I have a problem and I think you are the right person to ask about it, considering your background. We have had a black family buy a home and move into my neighborhood recently. We were an all-white neighborhood. Their children are going to school with my children. They are even riding on the same bus! I know that crime is going to increase;

there's going to be a drug problem in the neighborhood, and my property value is going to go down. What should I do?"

I have to admit that I was tempted to walk off the stage at that point and never make any public appearances ever again. But, instead, very seriously, as the crowd waited in a very awkward, hushed, silence, I began, "Ma'am, I know exactly what you need to do in this situation. But, first, let me make sure I fully understand what's going on here. You said this family bought their house in your neighborhood. They aren't renting it; they bought it?" She nodded affirmatively. "And did they pay market value for the home?" Again, she nodded affirmatively. Somehow, I felt that she would know exactly how much they had paid. "And you said they had children who ride the bus and go to school with your children?" Again, yes. "So, I can assume that their children and your children are probably similar ages?" Again, yes.

"All right, that is what I needed to know to give you an answer. What that tells me is that this black family and your family seem to have quite a bit in common. This black family is probably on about the same economic level as your family since they were able to purchase a home in your neighborhood, and I assume that most houses in your neighborhood are similar in price. It also tells me that since you both have children about the same age and going to the same school, you have that in common as well. I'm also guessing you picked that neighborhood to live in and raise your family in because it was a good, safe, place to do so. I'm guessing this black family picked your neighborhood for those same reasons. So, since you have so much in common with this family, here's what you need to do, Ma'am. You need to make a pie or bake a cake or some cookies, whatever you want, and take them over and welcome your new neighbors to the neighborhood. It will be the first step in building what could be a long-lasting friendship."

She promptly got up and left the auditorium amidst the chuckles of about a thousand other audience members.

How can I get in contact with you?

I would love to hear what you thought of *One Nation Under Curse*. Please visit my website at www.HarrisSpeaks.com and leave me a note! You can also find more of my writings, videos of TV appearances, and other tools you can use to help you communicate the racial healing message to your family, church, and community.

Some final thoughts.

We are fast approaching the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first African slaves on American shores. Since August 20, 1619, blacks have been enslaved, discriminated against, and suffered unspeakable injustices because of the color of their skin. Four hundred years is too long. The time has come and is now here. America is at a crossroads. Will we own up to the racism and bigotry that this country was founded upon and renounce it? Or will we suffer the consequences of our centuries of sin?

The Klan has attempted on three occasions to assassinate me, to silence my voice crying out against racism, white supremacy, and segregation. Oh, by the way, in case you're wondering, they haven't been successful. What they don't understand is that even when I am gone, my voice will live on through my writings, speeches, audio and video recordings. They may silence the messenger, but the message is out there and will continue to speak as long as we remain One Nation Under Curse.

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