



HANDOUT THREE: THE POWER OF MEMORY THREAD, INTERVIEW ARCHIVE

Directions: Underline key phrases and new details as you watch and listen to the interviews.

BRYAN STEVENSON

"I mean, the kind of work that I think we need to do in this country, the truth work that I think will be followed by recovery, and restoration, and rehabilitation, and reconciliation, that truth work won't be achievable if we're not motivated, if we're not pushed. We're different than the other countries that have done effective truth and reconciliation work. In South Africa, there's a consciousness about apartheid that you don't see in this country. People are really clear. They had a formal truth of reconciliation process. The apartheid museum in Johannesburg is a narrative museum. It insists that you understand the damage done by apartheid.

And you'll go there and you'll see, even in the constitutional court, all these emblems that are designed to make you never forget apartheid. But in South Africa, a black majority took power. The people who had been victimized by apartheid had the capacity, had the authority to begin to shape the narrative. If you go to Rwanda, you'll see a country where there is truth and reconciliation. The genocide museum there. There are human skulls in the space because people want to express their grief so powerfully, so clearly, that they're comfortable with that. In that place, you can't spend time in Rwanda without someone talking to you about the genocide. They want every person who visits to understand what happened there. That truth dominates, but the ethnic group that was terrorized and targeted is now kind of allied with the people in power. So there was this transition in power.

When I go to Berlin, Germany, I'm struck by the evidence of a commitment to truth and reconciliation. You can't go 100 meters in Berlin without seeing markers and stones that have been placed next to the homes of Jewish families that were abducted during the Holocaust. The Holocaust memorial sits in the middle of Berlin, Germany. It speaks truth to power in very plain ways. But Germany lost the war. There was a transition in power. And even though it is Germans that are leading this effort, it comes from a point of humility. The challenge we face in this country is that there hasn't been a change in power. It's the children, and the grandchildren, and the great-grandchildren of people who owned slaves, people who participated in lynchings, people who were comfortable with segregation that still have enormous influence over what happens.

Who gets heard, who doesn't get heard. If we're going to change things. If we're going to actually commit to truth and reconciliation, we have to be motivated by something. I think there are things we can hear in these spaces that can motivate us. I think there are things that we can feel. I do often sometimes believe that we are watched by those who were enslaved, those who were lynched, those who were segregated, and they want to see if we're willing to bear witness to their suffering, and trauma, and injury. If we're willing to give voice to what needs to be said about what a just society requires.

We have a lot of rhetoric in this country about equality, and fairness, and liberty, and we're very proud, but we should also be ashamed that we tolerated slavery for two centuries. To what we did to native people, that we looked the other way where thousands were being lynched, that we codified and allowed the law to be a tool of segregation and oppression. We should be ashamed of that. But we shouldn't fear that shame. Ya know, we got a faith tradition in America where we said to people, if you repent, if you confess, if you acknowledge what you've done wrong, there's something beautiful waiting for you on the other side. There is redemption, there's restoration, there's restoration.

And in every faith tradition, we hold that motto out, but we just haven't done it collectively with regard to this history. I think it's time for us to do it. I'm really not interested in talking about this history because I want to punish America; I really want to talk about it because I want to liberate us. I think there's something better waiting for us in this country than another century of conflict, and tension, and burden, and exclusion because we won't face the history and the legacy of our past. There's something better waiting for us, but to get there we're gonna have to be willing to tell the truth. For me, that means being able to hear the things that I haven't heard before, that I haven't paid attention to before, to hear the sounds of suffering that our legacy creates.