



FAITH & CULTURE



IF NOT FOR US:

Black Contributions to the Body of Christ & the American Story

Week 1 – Faith & Culture: Why This Week Matters

Black faith in America was not simply inherited—it was forged in the struggle for freedom. Enslaved Africans were introduced to Christianity through systems designed to control them, yet they encountered a God who stood with the oppressed. From that tension emerged a vibrant, resilient Black Christianity rooted in liberation and hope.

Sojourner Truth, born into slavery, became a traveling preacher who boldly proclaimed that God did not create people to be owned. Her faith challenged racism and sexism, reminding the nation that Christianity demands dignity for all. Frederick Douglass, also born enslaved, used Scripture to expose the hypocrisy of a nation that called itself Christian while practicing slavery. He taught that true Christianity stands with the oppressed rather than the oppressor.

Alongside them were countless unnamed Black believers who built the Black church in hush harbors, praise houses, and small congregations. They read the Bible through the lens of bondage and deliverance, identifying with Israel's journey from Egypt to freedom. Their theology was not abstract; it was lived and sung in the midst of hardship.

Without these voices, American Christianity would have been shaped more by power than by justice. Black faith preserved the heart of the Gospel—that God sides with the vulnerable and calls people toward freedom and love.



ARTS & MUSIC



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Week 2 – Arts & Music: Why This Week Matters

African drumming and call-and-response traveled across the Atlantic and became the heartbeat of Black worship and Black music in America. These traditions gave birth to spirituals, gospel, jazz, rhythm & blues, hip-hop, and neo-soul—each generation telling its story through sound.

Mahalia Jackson carried gospel music into the Civil Rights Movement, strengthening leaders and communities through song. Duke Ellington and John Coltrane transformed jazz into a spiritual language. Aretha Franklin fused church and soul, shaping the sound of a nation. Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Lauryn Hill, and Kendrick Lamar used music to speak about injustice, faith, and hope.

Black music has always been more than entertainment—it is testimony, protest, prayer, and prophecy. These artists turned suffering into beauty and injustice into truth. Through their creativity, America learned how to lament, how to rejoice, and how to imagine freedom.

Without Black music and art, America would still have sound, but it would lack soul and conscience.



LEADERSHIP & JUSTICE

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Week 3 – Leadership & Justice: Why This Week Matters

The Civil Rights Movement was not a moment—it was part of a long Black struggle for dignity that continues today. Martin Luther King Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and John Lewis forced America to confront segregation, voter suppression, and racial violence. Their faith taught that justice is a sacred calling.

Today that legacy continues through movements like Black Lives Matter and modern struggles for immigrant and human rights. When families are separated, when immigrants are treated as criminals, and when communities are marginalized, the church is called to remember its biblical responsibility to care for the stranger and the oppressed.

Black leadership continues to remind America that faith without justice is hollow. Without these voices, the nation would have laws but no moral compass.



SPORTS & INNOVATION

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Week 4 – Sports & Innovation: Why This Week Matters

Black excellence has reshaped how America understands possibility. Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier. Muhammad Ali used his voice to challenge racism and war. Serena Williams and Simone Biles transformed women's athletics.

Black innovators also changed daily life: George Washington Carver revolutionized agriculture; Garrett Morgan invented the traffic signal; Madam C.J. Walker built a major Black-owned business; Katherine Johnson helped send astronauts into space; Marie Van Brittan Brown invented home security; Mark Dean co-created the personal computer.

Their perseverance expanded who gets to be seen as brilliant, capable, and worthy. Without Black innovators and athletes, America would still move forward—but it would not know how far it could go.