

TALKING POINTS



Unsettling Truths

The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery

Available November 5, 2019 | \$17, 224 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4525-5

"With thorough research, Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah share the foundational truths of American history and theologies that have influenced us for over five hundred years, correcting the purposefully hidden erasure of what actually happened on this land and why it continues to this day. Unsettling Truths is a righteous and integral narrative that must be heard and absorbed if we are to move forward with any sense of national dignity and morality."

Randy Woodley, Distinguished Professor of Faith and Culture at George Fox Evangelical Seminary, author of *Shalom* and *The Community of Creation*

You Cannot Discover Lands Already Inhabited

Injustice has plagued American society for centuries. And we cannot move toward being a more just nation without understanding the root causes that have shaped our culture and institutions. In this prophetic blend of history, theology, and cultural commentary, Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah reveal the far-reaching, damaging effects of the "Doctrine of Discovery." In the fifteenth century, official church edicts gave Christian explorers the right to claim territories they "discovered." This was institutionalized as an implicit national framework that justifies American triumphalism, white supremacy, and ongoing injustices. The result is that the dominant culture idealizes a history of discovery, opportunity, expansion, and equality, while minority communities have been traumatized by colonization, slavery, segregation, and dehumanization. Healing begins when deeply entrenched beliefs are unsettled. Charles and Rah aim to recover a common memory and shared understanding of where we have been and where we are going.

- What is the Doctrine of Discovery?
- Why is the Doctrine of Discovery inherently tied to Christianity?
- How and when did the narrative of white supremacy develop in Western society?
- How does the concept of American exceptionalism come into play when tackling white supremacy and racism?
- What is the meaning behind the idea that our "self-perception emerges from a dysfunctional theology"?
- How does the practice of lament help us come to reconciliation?
- What are some of the "unsettling truths"?
- What is "social reality"?
- Why is it important to change our ideas surrounding the "discovery" of America?
- How has the American church focused more on the idea of empire rather than relationship?
- How have we conflated Old Testament Israel with US history and the idea of a "promised land"?
- How was the Doctrine of Discovery written into the US founding documents?
- What are some examples of mass genocide against Native peoples?
- How, given all our history with exceptionalism and "discovery," does the church move forward in reconciliation?



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In this prophetic blend of history, theology, and cultural commentary, Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah reveal the damaging effects of the "Doctrine of Discovery," which institutionalized American triumphalism and white supremacy. This book calls our nation and churches to a truth-telling that will expose past injustices and open the door to conciliation and true community.

Mark Charles, a man of Navajo and Dutch American descent, is a speaker, writer, and consultant on the complexities of American history, race, culture, and faith. He is the author of the blog *Reflections from the Hogan* and was the Washington, DC, correspondent and columnist for *Native News Online*. He has served on the boards of the Christian Community Development Association and the Christian Reformed Church of North America. He and his family live in Washington, DC, and he's running as an Independent candidate for the 46th president of the United States.

Here, in his own words, Charles describes why he's writing this book.

Ya'at'eeh. Mark Charles yinish'ye.' Tsin bikee dine' nishlih. Doo to'aheedliini ba' shi'chiin. Tsin bikee dine' baa' shi chei. Doo' todichini baa shi' nali.'

Hello. My name is Mark Charles. In the *Diné* culture, when you introduce yourself, you always give your four clans. We are a matrilineal people, and our identities come from our mother's mother. My maternal grandmother is American of Dutch heritage, and so I say *tsin bikee' dine'*, which translates as "the Wooden Shoe People." My paternal grandmother is from the Water Flows Together People. My maternal grandfather is also from the Wooden Shoe clan, and my paternal grandfather is of the Bitterwater clan, one of the original clans of our *Diné* people.

My mother, Evelyn Natelborg, and my father, Theodore Charles, were married less than two years after the historic Supreme Court ruling of *Loving v. Virginia*. This ruling, in 1967, invalidated all antimiscegenation laws in the United States. Believe it or not, prior to 1967, interracial marriage was still illegal in many states throughout the US. I encourage you to pause and ponder that for a moment. And it was not until 1967 that interracial marriage was legalized at the federal level throughout the entire United States.

In 2004, after pastoring a small church called the Christian Indian Center for two years, I moved with my family from Denver, Colorado, to the Navajo Reservation, located in the Four Corners area of the southwestern United States. The Navajo nation still resides on much of what we call *Diné'tah*, our traditional lands located between four of our most sacred mountains. The eleven-year period we lived on our reservation was one of the hardest yet most rewarding experiences of my life. Never have I felt more lonely, isolated, and marginalized from both the church and our country yet more secure and grounded both in my humanity as well as in my identity as the son of a Navajo father and an American mother of Dutch heritage. And it is from that space that I would like to invite you into a conversation about race, culture, and faith.

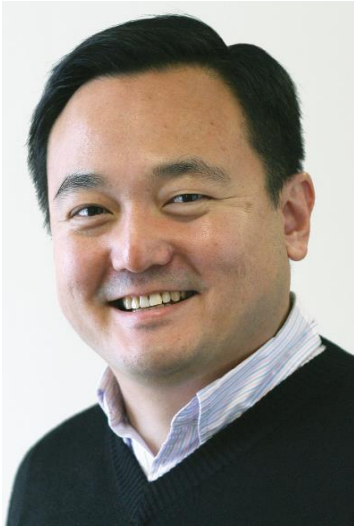
This dialogue will not be easy. It will involve a history many would be happy to forget, and it will challenge a mythology that most would prefer to remain unchallenged. But it is a necessary conversation and one that has been put off for far too long. You may find significant portions of the book uncomfortable and disquieting. That's okay. I encourage you to stay engaged. This conversation will not be easy, but I am convinced that we can get to a better place.



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Soong-Chan Rah (ThD, Duke Divinity School) is Milton B. Engebretson Professor of Church Growth and Evangelism at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois. He and his family live in Chicago. His books include *The Next Evangelicalism* and *Prophetic Lament*.

Here, in his own words, Rah describes why he’s writing this book.

My name is Soong-Chan Rah. I was born in Seoul, South Korea, and immigrated to the United States shortly after my sixth birthday. Raised in an immigrant family, an urban environment, and in the context of economic poverty, I have experienced a range of life settings in the American social fabric. I was raised in a single-parent family in the inner city of Baltimore and in the suburbs of Washington, DC. My father faced many challenges as an immigrant to the United States. His failure to adjust to life in America and his inability to carve a path forward as a Korean in a white man’s world were both factors in the breakup of our family.

Despite these significant challenges, my mother’s deep commitment to her children and her spiritual strength equipped her to keep our family together. She worked long hours at an inner-city carry-out complete with bulletproof plexiglass. She would follow this day job with a night shift at an inner-city nursing home, working as a nurse’s aide. Despite working these long hours, money was always short, so our family was on food stamps and the school free-lunch program for several years. Years later, a United States president would label single moms who received help from the government as “welfare queens” with a strong implication of their laziness. I know of no single human being who worked harder than my mother to keep her family together. To this day, I am stunned by the power of the collective imagination to embrace a false narrative that became the norm for many Americans.

For our family, connection to our immigrant church community and commitment to education served as the way out of the “hood.” The Korean immigrant church of my youth provided our family with the spiritual resources of a faith community that embodied Christ. The immigrant church arose from a context of struggle, pain, and suffering. Even in the midst of these struggles, this church would thrive and grow as it sought to serve and lift up the downtrodden of our society. Education was valued in our home and in the Korean immigrant church. As a consequence, I have spent an inordinate amount of time in school. I have pursued theological studies partially as a result of how education and faith have intersected in my life.

I have had the distinct pleasure of serving multiethnic and multicultural Christian communities, often in the urban context. After many years in pastoral ministry, God directed me toward fulfilling my call to ministry through the academic world, specifically at North Park Theological Seminary, where I have sought to integrate my passion for Christian ministry with academic thought.



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