

# Valuation

After a painstaking search in the dusty records of an Kentucky recorder's office, my friend Jacqueline Palmer found her ancestor Franklin Dale. Palmer and her cousins scanned large volumes to find clues and signs of life. All that remains are the legal entries in a book, and that's where they discovered a ledger that indicated the portion of shares investors held on each enslaved soul. She tells the story in a Dayton Tedx video due out this month. Palmer's great-grandfather and other family members had been reduced to commodities, with investors holding shares of their black bodies. Astonishingly, the portfolio of one self-styled entrepreneur included a 1/144th share of a human being.

Disgusted, but not surprised, Palmer remembered the prevailing thinking at that time caused a nation to apportion congressional representation by recognizing and counting African Americans, but only 3/5ths of each of them. That's a big discount. That's the term that William "Sandy" Darity uses to determine the quality and value of the lived experience of black life and financial worth in the U.S., when measured against that of white lives and net worth. Darity, a professor of Public Policy at Duke University and his wife, folklorist Kristen Mullen, co-authored the book *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the 21st Century*, published last April. "The discount rate on black humanity has been enormous" Darity and Mullen wrote in *From Here*. "A variety of metrics indicate that even after the end of Jim Crow black lives are routinely assigned a worth approximately 30 percent that of white lives."

Ancient moral wisdom found in the Bible rebukes this history, and the system that birthed and perpetuates it. How do we know this? I point you to the Bible's repeated declaration that "God hates dishonest scales." The Bible explains that false balances are an abomination to the Lord. They represent the criminal tools used to steal and cheat. They are the infrastructure that furthers the aims of those who lack scruples, to the benefit of their progeny and prosperity. The scales, hold the appearance of integrity, equity, and due process. One may not be able to detect the faulty calibration with the naked eye, yet it's there. One cannot always trace the human actor that set the scales askew in the first place, but God assures us that He sees the actor and the system. "Shall I acquit someone with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights?" (Micah 6:11, NLT\*).

One needs no forensic accounting to see the current evidence of this illegitimate value system, Darity said during a Brookings Institute session "Reparations: Whether, Why and How?" The disparate impact of the Coronavirus on black lives now takes center stage, leading other areas in which blacks take a greater hit, like health and environmental justice, food and housing insecurity.

Last year we watched this value differential at work, illustrated in Kenosha, Wisconsin in stark relief. There Jacob Blake a black, 29 year-old, father suffered a police-involved shooting in front of three of his children while unarmed. As a result of the shooting, Blake was paralyzed from the waist down, and handcuffed to a hospital bed. When protestors converged upon the small city to demand justice of police officers, Kyle Rittenhouse, a white, 17 year-old showed up with an automatic weapon. Rittenhouse walked, undetected and un-arrested, until he was confronted by protesters, at which

point (or points), he is alleged to have shot three people, killing two of them. What makes this story evergreen is the surprising, and disgusting overwhelming financial support for him. His \$2 million bond was paid by interested donors, including presumed believers who visited the Christian crowdfunding site "Give Send Go." We don't have space to cover the nearly \$200 million raised, post-election, to support recounts, and runoffs to support a status quo with which more than half of the country's white voters agree.

I'm so glad we live in a universe where the Creator God values us all individually so much that He has logged the number of hairs on our heads. This God gave all to have us in His life. In His hands and feet Jesus bears the marks of His Divine stake in us. "How can I give you up?" Jesus said, and where can we go from Him? the Psalmist asks. He has assessed our future, and immeasurable inheritance as a son and daughter of God. Until then, He has given us the distinct privilege to call out the lingering imbalances that attempt to legitimize faulty human valuation, particularly because of race and ethnicity.