

## Transcript 117

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast. On today's episode we're going to be discussing something that we've been receiving quite a few questions about over the last several years. We get a lot of questions about Marxism. What is Marxism or even we get questions where people are misusing the term Marxism, at almost using it the exact opposite of what it actually means.

Shea Houdmann

So joining me today is Professor Doug Groothuis professor philosophy at Denver Seminary, and also the author of the new book *Fire in The Streets*, where Marxism is a major aspect of that book. So Doug welcome to the show today.

Douglas Groothuis

Thank you. Happy to be here.

Shea Houdmann

Doug, tell our listeners a little bit about you, your background and maybe what led you to write a book on this topic.

Douglas Groothuis

Yes, well I'm a philosophy professor. I've been one for this is the start of my 30th year at Denver Seminary. So very interested in apologetics, social issues, things in that neighborhood. And especially after the riots of 2020, I began to receive a lot of questions for interviews and podcasts and so on about what's the philosophy behind this? What is critical race theory? So I did a number of these interviews. I wrote a few articles and I realized that I needed to write a book about it as a Christian, philosopher. So the book was written fairly quickly, not on the cheap. I think it's solid, it's about 200 pages of text and about 500 footnotes. So I wanted to equip the church to think well about these issues of racial injustice. What is the meaning of America? Do we have what it takes in our founding principles to address the kind of problems that we face? I wanted to see, I wanted people to see the philosophical background and basis for critical race theory, which really comes out of Marxism.

Shea Houdmann

Let's make that my intro question to you is like what is Marxism? And maybe why should we care?

Douglas Groothuis

Right, well, Marxism has been one of the most influential philosophies in the history of the world. It animated the Russian Revolution in 1917 and was the philosophy of Lenin and Stalin, and that led to the deaths of, God only knows, how many people who were executed by the state because they were not sufficiently revolutionary. So if you consider all the political killing of the Soviet Union, China, Cambodia, and so on. In the 20th century, some people have put that number at 100 million. Mao Tse-tung is the worst of all. He is responsible perhaps for 60-70 million deaths of his own people during his 50 year reign of terror.

Douglas Groothuis

So all these governments are influenced by Marxism. Now there were different versions of Marxism. And really, whenever you see a Marxist root for a philosophy that should catch your attention. Because Marxism originally is certainly based on atheism, Marx said the foundation of all criticism is the criticism of religion, and he really meant Judaism and Christianity. So that has to be gotten out of the way, so his idea was that religion puts people to sleep and it makes them passive in the face of injustice. And Marxism is a conflict oriented worldview. It's understood in terms of economic conflict. So the owners, those who control the means of production, the bourgeois are always exploiting the workers or the proletariat, and eventually tensions will get so high that this will result in a revolution where the workers overthrow the owners, the factory owners, the people that own lots of property and control production. And this will lead to something called the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is supposedly short lived. And then there will result a classless, completely fair and equitable society. So this vision is really a utopian hope. Then somehow, the injustices and the unfairness of this world can be overcome through political revolution and Marxism is not a reformist perspective, it's a revolutionary perspective.

Douglas Groothuis

So a revolution wants to completely overturn what came beforehand. And if you're a reformer, you're trying to bring, let's say, the American Civil government into alignment with its best ideas. Someone like Martin Luther King did that in his famous speech in Washington he talked about the glorious documents of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. So he didn't say overthrow them and let's burn down the whole system and start over again. He wanted the United States to stay true to its best ideals.

Douglas Groothuis

Now that's very different than any form of Marxism. And Marxism always promises much more than it can deliver. Marxism in the 20th century as I said, has been responsible for 10s of millions of deaths. Now I mean deaths where the civil government executes its own people for not being revolutionary enough, for being counter revolutionary, and so on.

Douglas Groothuis

Because the way it's set up is that this dictatorship of the proletariat stage of Marxism never makes a transition into a peaceful, equitable society with no private property and no class structure. It just means that a certain number of people, that is, the politicians were not accountable to the people, unlike in a Republic that we have. The politicians gain the power and they have to forever be rooting out counter revolutionary ideas. Ideas that are not true to the vision of the society.

Douglas Groothuis

So when we get to critical race theory, the essential idea of society being incessant conflict is retained. But what's added to the economic factor is race basically race and sexual orientation. So the idea is you still have the oppressors, but the oppressors are not just those who own the means of production, the bourgeois, but the oppressors are white males. And so being white gives you privilege, it makes you part of a white supremacist society, and by virtue of simply being white, you are an oppressor over people of

color, principally black people, but they consider Hispanics and other racial minorities in the United States.

Douglas Groothuis

So the idea is that society is always racist. Also that the civil rights reforms of the 1960s were not very effective. Derek Bell makes that claim, and so the revolution has to continue and we can't be pacified with supposed progress that has been made previously. So there's a, you know, there's a continuity between Marxism and critical race theory. And a pivotal figure there would be the philosopher of the new left Herbert Marcuse. Who died in 1979. He basically took Marxist ideas and added some ideas of Freud, and said the way to really liberate people is not merely economic liberation, getting rid of private property and capitalism, but also sexual liberation. A sexual revolution that lets loose this pent up energy that the the bourgeois class has imposed, or rather the sexual restrictions that the bourgeois class has imposed on people.

Douglas Groothuis

So the engine of revolution is not merely economic discontent because he and the other people in the Frankfurt School realized that a lot of the workers in the West were fairly content with their lives. They didn't cause a revolution the way the way Marx thought they should. And so Marcuse and others had to say, well, you're really more oppressed than you think. You are sexually repressed and that needs to be let loose in order to create a better, more harmonious, freer, more hedonistically engaged society.

Douglas Groothuis

And one thing I like to point to to make this connection. Between Marx and critical race theory, is some of the leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement. They're kind of an activist wing of critical race theory. One of them went on a YouTube video a few years ago and said we are trained Marxists. And several of the leaders were actually mentored by Angela Davis, who was a 60s radical black professor, still alive. I think she's in her 70s or 80s now, and she was mentored by the man I just mentioned Herbert Marcuse. So you have Marx influencing Marcuse, Marcuse, influencing Angela Davis, Angela Davis influencing Black Lives Matter. And when you really get down to the core ideas of critical race theory, you see that rootage in this Marxist conflict worldview.

Douglas Groothuis

And there's another aspect I could add to it, and that is the idea that the people who are the oppressors, that is the bourgeois owners, those who control the means of production, and then also you add to that racial factors in critical race theory. These folks are not to be trusted. Their viewpoints are disqualified because they are the oppressors. They see everything through a lens of how to benefit themselves and extract wealth and goods from other people. So there's the claim in critical race theory it's called standpoint epistemology that only the oppressed understand the way society is. So especially, let's say if you are black, a woman, a sexual minority. This is called intersectionality. You have three points of oppression. You have the proper vantage point on the status of minorities, people of color in the American system, just by virtue of your ethnicity or your sexual orientation.

Douglas Groothuis

Now that's of great concern to me as a philosopher, and I think it should be to anyone, because that's not how knowledge works. Now I don't understand what it's like to be a black man or a black female, obviously, but if you have experienced prejudice and racism as let's say as a black female, you know your experience matters and I should listen to that, but that doesn't mean you're an expert on American history or on the history of slavery, or in economics or political theory, or anything else. We've got to do more research to talk about those kind of things. But the way critical race theory works is that the oppressors have controlled everything. And they've squelched and silenced the oppressed. And so now it's the oppressed's turn to grab the microphone, so to speak and tell the oppressors the way the world really works.

Shea Houdmann

Interesting I keep hearing in addition to Marxism thrown out there a lot of people use critical race theory, almost like it's a boogeyman, though this is critical research, that's from critical race theory, so help us with a I don't know, I know there's no real simple way to define it, but what are some examples of critical race theories that are happening in our culture and why is it important that we are cognizant of them?

Douglas Groothuis

The term critical race theory is thrown around a lot now, especially with respect to public schools, because the issue is how do you teach American history? How do we talk about racism, slavery, Jim Crow, redlining things like that and sometimes it's set up as a false dichotomy, which is a fallacy. It's basically thought that if you teach critical race theory, you are honest about the racial sins of America, and if you're critical or critical race theory, you want to whitewash American history and not talk about our national sins.

Douglas Groothuis

Well, you should talk about the sins of the United States, but also the virtues of the United States and you can address the evils of racism and the Jim Crow period, especially in the South, lynchings and so on, without buying into this Neo Marxist, Cultural Marxist worldview. You can just do good history and then also teach the principles of the American founding, which is the equality of all people is made by God, life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These rights are given by God. The five freedoms of the 1st amendment. The freedom of religion, and speech, and press, and assembly, and petitioning the government for the redress of wrongs.

Douglas Groothuis

So, it's not an either or but when you start talking about American Society as intrinsically racist, racism as America's original sin, this is what the 1619 project argues that America is not really based on a vision of freedom, but on slavery, period. I think that's a very one sided, inaccurate view. When you start talking about things as systemically racist, systemically oppressive. When you talk about things like white privilege, all whites are racist and need to confess their racism. When you talk about the standpoint epistemology and when race becomes the most significant thing about everybody, right, then you're talking about the basic ideas of critical race theory. And I critique those assumptions, those ideas in my book pretty thoroughly.

Shea Houdmann

So the title of your book is some Fire In The Streets, so why, why that title? And why do you think it's important for us to view what's going on as so vitally important?

Douglas Groothuis

Well, I was reflecting on the literal fire in the streets in the 2020 riots, which were extensive. They went on for about seven months. There were billions of dollars of damage. Many businesses were destroyed. Between 20 and 30 people were killed. Police officers were attacked, wounded, injured, and that unnerved me. In fact, when that was happening, I was living in Willow, AK with my wife for the summer, and we really wondered if we should come back to Denver because we thought Denver would be way more dangerous than rural Alaska. But I talked to friends and I was trying to watch the news and get a sense of what was going on. We decided to come back. But I had never felt that way before in my life. Is it safe to go home? Is it safe to go back to Denver?

Douglas Groothuis

So the riots were extensive. They were very militant. And I wanted to understand what was really behind this. Of course the George Floyd killing sparked it, but that was not the whole story. The whole story involves Marxism, cultural Marxism, what's called critical race theory. It involves certain assumptions about race, and economics, and fairness, and so on.

Douglas Groothuis

So what I wanted to do is explain the fire in the streets on the basis of the fire in the mines of certain philosophers, politicians, activists and so on and try to get to the root of that and then also present a better view. Present a better hope for the United States in our race relations and economic possibilities and so on.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, we talked a lot about what's going on in the United States and obviously that's where we live. I don't think that hopefully it is not an American who didn't see what was going on and were distressed by it, were pained by seeing both the anger at very bad things that have happened, but even then, politically having saying that what we've been taught our whole lives about, the history of America is inaccurate. But I'm also, I know one point in your book that, to me, is particularly interesting is something that we've been presented with at Got Questions or several times is basically the line of argument that Christianity is basically a white man's religion. And how do you respond when someone makes that accusation? And how does that question or that statement play into this whole discussion that we're having?

Douglas Groothuis

Right, I do address that in the book because people will say America has always been racist. America has been controlled by white males, many of them Christians. So if we want to get to the bottom of everything, we have to refute and deny Christianity whiteness and the whole idea of America and basically start over again. So it really took me a whole book to address that. But if you talk about Christianity and being white, the gospel message is for all people, certainly. The biblical categories are

Jew and Gentile, and that covers every human being. The Biblical teaching is that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God. There's no hierarchy of one race over another, and all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So we're all sinners and sin takes different shapes and patterns throughout world history.

Douglas Groothuis

Now in the United States whites were terribly guilty of bringing slaves over and enslaving blacks, particularly in the South, but slavery is not a unique province of white people. Slavery has been going on pretty much ever since the fall, and you even had blacks in the United States before the Civil War who owned slaves and they weren't very many and of course you had many whites owning slaves, and then you had the whole Islamic slave trade that predates the transatlantic slave trade in the United States.

Douglas Groothuis

So all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. All can come to Christ by faith. And we don't want to say that one race is any more sinful than any other race, although as I mentioned some races that sometimes have proclivities to particular sins that conform into systems like slavery, like the more unofficial system of Jim Crow in the South, and so on. So those need to be addressed, but they're not essentially white issues or black issues, or yellow issues, or brown issues or whatever. There are issues of sin and social righteousness, so I have two chapters in the book defending American ideals.

Douglas Groothuis

So I look at the declaration and the Constitution, particularly the 1st amendment in the Bill of Rights. And some people say the Constitution was illegitimate because it was written by white slave owners. And there is this idea that in the Constitution blacks are only worth 3/5 of a person. Now I refute that because the idea was that the South would receive 3/5 representation for, they never use the word slave or black, but essentially the black slaves and that was a compromise between the north and the South because the north wanted to limit the representational power of the South by giving the slaves less than full credit for being citizens or being part of the population of Southern states.

Douglas Groothuis

So this was a way actually of cutting back on the South's political power. It was a compromise. It was not saying that African Americans are worth 3/5 of whites. You hear that all the time. I even hear conservative commentators. Even black commentators say this, conservative black commentators, and I thoroughly refute that in the book. That's simply not true.

Douglas Groothuis

So I think the American experiment is about living up to our founding ideals in the declaration, which says all men are created equal and given by their creator certain unalienable rights, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that civil government should try to secure these rights. Not create them, but secure them because the rights ultimately come from God and are written in our conscience.

Douglas Groothuis

So I am very much concerned about people who would want to blow up the whole idea of America and say that the declaration was a fraud and the Constitution was written by slave owners. No, the

Constitution was a kind of a compromise and into the Constitution as built the idea of amendments. So the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments or the anti slavery amendments and they give they should give or they say they're giving full rights to all Americans, right?

Douglas Groothuis

So when you look at America, you have to look at it over time in accordance with the founding ideals and then try to make for a better America for everybody on the basis of those ideals, not to tear them down. See the Marxist, Neo Marxist view is it's all corrupt. It's all a matter of illegitimate usurpation of power. And the way to change it is not to critique it or to reform it, but to tear it down. And that's what I'm very concerned about.

Shea Houdmann

I've been familiar with the the 3/5 problem as well and I I get how it reads poorly. I guess that's a way to say it, but now I'm very familiar with the fact that that's they were not saying that Africans are only 3/5 of a human being. They're saying look no the South wanted to count all their slaves and determining how much voting power they had in Congress, nor said no, you can't do that.

Douglas Groothuis

Right?

Shea Houdmann

So this request was a compromise. I don't think I've never read any person actually saying in that time that they only viewed them as 3/5 of a human being, so it's like again it reads poorly the statement itself, but that was never really the point. But and seeing the tear it all down and burn all American history to the ground and start over, it's like were we perfect or not we. I mean where the founding fathers perfect? Of course, they're not. No one is or ever has been other than Jesus Christ.

Douglas Groothuis

Right, right?

Shea Houdmann

Have we failed to live up to our ideals? Of course we have, but at the same time, the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, lays the foundation for still, in my opinion, the greatest nation that's ever exists on Earth in terms of providing freedom, liberty, the ability to pursue happiness, economic opportunity, and so forth and it's distressing to see and hear from people who think, who hate the country, or want to tear everything down. It's like you're not going to find a better solution anywhere else and.

Douglas Groothuis

Well, years ago there was a black conservative radio host here in Denver. I think he's retired and retired now and he wrote a book called Find a Better Country which I thought was very clever is yes, we have lots of problems. We have a flawed past. But find a better country. Find a country that reforms itself the way the United States has reformed itself. Find a country that allows for more principled participation of

the citizens. We have a Republic. We have a Republic with a structure of representation and it's really ingenious.

Douglas Groothuis

The founding fathers were brilliant men who studied the history of civil government, Greek and Roman government. They knew their Bibles and they were very intentional about the kind of Republic they wanted to form, and there's that famous story about Ben Franklin coming out of the Constitutional Convention and a woman of some standing and influence at the time, said Mr Franklin, what have you given us? And he said a Republic. If you can keep it.

Douglas Groothuis

So we can't just assume that the American Republican form of civil government is permanent. It's not. It could go down, so let me read this thing I have in my book from a Black Lives Matter leader named Hawk Newsome. He says if this country doesn't give us what we want then we will burn down this system and replace it all right? And I could be speaking figuratively. I could be speaking literally, it's a matter of interpretation.

Douglas Groothuis

Well, we know given summer of 2020 that fiery summer we know what was meant. It was burned down Police station, police stations, destroyed businesses, intimidate police officers. It was really horrible and ugly. And I hope to God we never see anything like that again.

Shea Houdmann

You've done a great job at explaining Marxism its connection to critical race theory. And hopefully our listeners will be able to better detect what's going on in our culture and to recognize its roots, but let's let me close the interview with the question of how should we use Christians respond when we see what's going on? How can we point people towards Jesus Christ as the ultimate solution for sin, including the sin of racism and prejudice, but then also for I don't know if there's even a good way to say this. Something we do a whole lot of episode on it, but why should we, based on the Bible, view the United States government, its institutions, as something that we should trust and defend rather than something we want to tear down.

Douglas Groothuis

Yeah, that's a big question, isn't it? But I do have a final chapter on what we can do constructively. And I have quite a bit to say there, but several things I say are we need fire in our bones for the gospel and to preserve or to use biblical language, strengthen the things that remain that are good in the United States. Jeremiah brings a message from God to the Exiles in Jeremiah 29 in verse 7. And the Lord says, seek the welfare of the cities to which you were exiled, because when it prospers, you prosper. So we should want to prosper. We should want our nation to prosper and Jesus said to be salt and light wherever we are. So I think we need fire in our bones and we need love in our heart. We don't want to use propaganda or manipulation or violence of any kind. We should use persuasion and prayer and suffering for the right, 'cause as needed.

Douglas Groothuis



And I do think we need to understand the roots of the problem. And that's the main reason why I wrote my book. It doesn't pop into existence out of nowhere. There's a long history of revolutionary philosophies even going back before Marx. But Marx is a pretty good place to start, and I try to explain how that plays out and why people say the sort of things that they say. What's behind this whole idea of white privilege and group think in terms of if you're part of this racial ethnic group this is the way you are and this is what you do. And this is how you have to somehow atone for your sins culturally and so on.

Douglas Groothuis

So I think as Christians we want to see individuals changed, born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, given what he's done through his atoning work. And we also want to see righteousness to some extent in our society as a whole, that is, we should seek the welfare of the city to where God has put us. And Paul says in Acts 17 that God has placed you wherever you are and you should be a light for Christ wherever you are and speak against injustice. Work for what is good. But don't just jump on a political bandwagon because it looks exciting, or it seems to be the trend. We really need to think biblically about all this and think logically and not be manipulated by slogans or images and not be intimidated either.

Shea Houdmann

Alright, so Doug thank you for your time today. I appreciate your explanation. You helped me to even understand the connections better and hope our listeners gain some insight into what's going on and what are the roots of it. But from our conversation today, you want to learn more about Doug Groothuis, in his book *Fire In The Streets*. There which is an excellent book and very sound biblically, theologically, philosophically, but also historically gives you a really good picture of what's going on, and we'll include links in the show notes at our podcast. [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org) and also on the description field on YouTube where you can learn more about Doctor Groothuis and his work and other books he's written as well. So again, Doug, thank you for joining me on the podcast today.

Douglas Groothuis

You are welcome. Thanks for having me.

Shea Houdmann

This has been the Got Questions podcast. Got Questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.