

The Peoples' Bible seeks to reach a mass audience of people who have often felt left out and voiceless in their encounter with other study Bibles. These include people at the grassroots as well as people in the academy. In order to give voice to those who have been silenced by dominant narratives in Western culture, *The Peoples' Bible* offers some of the best insights of scholars from a wide array of different cultures and ethnicities, writing in accessible language. The editorial team and writers are comprised of scholars from communities traditionally underrepresented in mainstream biblical scholarship in the United States, whose perspectives have consequently been underrepresented in study Bibles as well: African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas/os, and Native Americans. Some white interpreters who have a track record offering perspectives rarely heard have also contributed to this study Bible, and the editors have sought a balance of men and women writers as well.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible has been selected by the editors and the publisher as the translation for *The Peoples' Bible*. This choice was made because of the NRSV's wide acceptance for accuracy in translation from the original languages of the Bible and for its effort to use gender-inclusive language in order to communicate in a modern idiom.

The Perspective of *The Peoples' Bible*

The Peoples' Bible envisions the Bible as a crossroads: both a place of collision and of convergence. On the journey of biblical interpretation, there are collisions between one or another culture and Scripture, between cultures themselves, between dominant and marginal perspectives, and across imbalances of power in society. These realities are reflected here as scholars often present multiple perspectives on a biblical text. Yet the Bible is also a place of convergence, where people meet at the crossroads, finding points of common ground and shared interest.

The Peoples' Bible gives the Bible back to the reader and invites a peoples' interpretation of Scripture through each reader's own unique social lens. Readers will resonate with voices speaking from life settings similar to their own. Biblical narratives will engage readers in ways that prompt reflection on their own life journeys. How we read the Bible, like our understanding of life itself, is affected by many dimensions, including our age, gender, race, culture, socioeconomic class, religion, ability, sexual orientation, and nation of origin. *The Peoples' Bible* taps into this reservoir of feeling and insight to inform the reader's understanding of these ancient texts. Studying the Bible with only one's own set of lived experiences or educational viewpoints limits the possibilities for gaining meaning from biblical texts. This study Bible brings together the interpretive lenses of scholars from many peoples, whose many perspectives produce a mosaic of wisdom and affirmation. The reader's own view is enriched by the vast cultural diversity of scholarly knowledge offered in *The Peoples' Bible*.

Not only does *The Peoples' Bible* offer the reader the space to explore Scripture from multiple social locations, it also invites a fresh discussion of the critical issues facing citizens of the twenty-first century. Many people have rejected biblical faith, believing that it has no power to address contemporary racism and injustice. The writers in this study Bible engage with passion the Bible's potential for social justice and liberation, originally meant for times long ago yet still proclaiming a timely word today. They also describe how the biblical authors struggled with the limitations of their own settings as they tried to interpret God's will and work. The essays and introductions in *The Peoples' Bible* speak with a refreshing candor about how, throughout history, the Bible has been manipulated and misused to support colonization, slavery, genocide, ethnic cleansing, sexism, and a host of other forms of oppression. The residue of oppression still marks much current biblical interpretation and theological musing. The publication of *The Peoples' Bible* marks a new era of inclusion and freedom in which all peoples and all voices are welcome to the table of biblical interpretation—a process that we hope will serve as a catalyst for a more just society and a reconciled human family.

How *The Peoples' Bible* is different

In order to appreciate the wealth of meaning in Scripture, it is often necessary to recognize and set aside, at least momentarily, our own culture-bound assumptions so that we can understand the perspectives of other people. This study Bible embraces multiple cultural approaches that reflect the current cultural mosaic in the United States. It relies on established historical-critical, literary-critical, and social-scientific methods, but also on the perspectives of postcolonial, feminist, and Afrocentric criticism, to name a few. *The Peoples' Bible* highlights interpretations that emerge from diverse and particular contexts.

We are committed to the possibility that all may learn to read the Bible as though we have never read it before, from social locations where we have never stood before. For example, men may learn to read Scripture through the eyes of women; those accustomed to reading the Bible from the perspective of the dominant culture may read through the eyes of those at the margins; and so on. Precisely because biblical interpretation differs from one cultural perspective to the next, and from one social location to the next, any of us who wish to gain a deeper understanding of the Bible must involve ourselves in what may well feel like a risky endeavor: to listen to the Bible by listening to one another. It is toward that end that we are pleased to offer *The Peoples' Bible*.

The Editors

George “Tink” Tinker — I am an enrolled member of the Osage (*Wazhazhe*) Nation and Professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology. I have taught here for

nearly twenty years, bringing an Indian perspective to a predominantly Euro-American school. As an American Indian academic originally trained in biblical studies (Ph.D., Graduate Theological Union), I am committed to a scholarly endeavor that takes seriously both the liberation of Indian peoples from their historic oppression as colonized communities and the liberation of white Americans, the historic colonizers and oppressors of Indian peoples.

Wilda C. Gafney — I teach the “scriptures of Israel”—by which I mean a wealth of literature including the Hebrew Bible (the scriptures of contemporary Judaism); the ancient Jewish writings treasured by many Christians as the Apocrypha or Deutero-canonical biblical writings; the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Jewish scriptures made in North Africa; the Samaritan Pentateuch; and the writings represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a black feminist with post-colonial commitments to and beyond the African Diaspora, my interest in these overlapping bodies of literature and their languages leads me to explore how translations, theories, and practices either open up or cover up biblical texts. I am an Episcopal priest who is a member of two congregations, the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas and the Dorshei Derekh Reconstructionist (Jewish) Minyan, both in Philadelphia.

Frank M. Yamada — I am Sansei, third-generation Japanese American, who grew up on the West Coast of California, which locates me one generation after the internment of over 200,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II. I grew up in a nominally Buddhist home, before converting to Christianity when I was in college. I received my training as a scholar at a Protestant seminary, where historical criticism was the dominant form of investigation. Ironically, this is also where I began to develop interest in the destabilizing practice of postmodern biblical interpretation. All of these forces of cultural conflict and fusion are reflected in my identity—a hybrid construction that seeks to refuse oversimplified characterizations of Asia or America in my Asian American body. Because of my identity, I am often drawn to conflicts and contradictions in the biblical text, seeing them not as a problem to be fixed, but as difficult and sometimes painful openings into another people’s understanding of the world and God.

Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz — Just as the Bible has shaped the way I read and understand my life, my life has shaped the way I read and understand the Bible. Through my experiences as a Latina woman of Mexican heritage, born and bred in the bicultural borderlands between Mexico and the United States, I have come to appreciate and read the Bible as a hybrid text where many borders, voices, and meanings converge. So, as a reader, believer, and lecturer of the Christian Scripture, I find myself constantly negotiating and contesting the meanings and stories of the Bible as I seek to responsibly interpret and appropriate its message in a culture and time that is thousands of years and miles away from its original context. Ultimately, my goal as an informed reader of the Bible is to empower minority readers as agents

of historical change in the ongoing process of decolonization and liberation, to dismantle oppressive interpretations and to offer inclusive and transformative readings that can bring about justice and liberation for all of God’s creation.

Curtiss Paul DeYoung — I am a white male of Dutch and English ancestry who is a citizen of the United States, ordained in the Church of God (Anderson, Ind.), and Professor of Reconciliation Studies at Bethel University. My biblical interpretation has been transformed from a de facto Eurocentric bias to a more multicultural perspective through theological training at Howard University School of Divinity and years of reading biblical scholars and theologians from Native American, Asian, Latin American, African, Arab, and African American perspectives. My racial self-understanding was interrupted at age fifty with the genealogical discovery of a black ancestor—one drop of African blood. My cultural self-understanding has been affected by socialization in African American communities and by the consciousness raised by multiple visits to South Africa and Palestine/Israel. As a person with race, class, and male privileges in the United States, I have committed my life to social justice and reconciliation. This collision of birthright privilege and experiential transformation informs my interpretation of the Bible.