

An abstract painting of a mountain range. The sky is a mix of yellow and orange, with a large, textured yellow sun in the upper right. The mountains are rendered in shades of blue, purple, and white, with a river or path winding through the valleys. The foreground is dominated by dark green and black brushstrokes, with a prominent white and blue shape in the lower center.

LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN

RECLAIMING THE STORY OF CIVIL RIGHTS

RECLAIM
SPRING 2021
ISSUE NO. 1

RECLAIM is a magazine that aims to retell stories of our past
in truthful and creative ways to inspire contemplation,
conversation, and Christ-like response in the present.

SUBSCRIBE

www.denverchristian.org

1 issue each year

CONTACT US

Denver Christian School
3898 S. Teller St.
Lakewood, CO 80235
cmclain@denverchristian.org



Content Warning:

The following contains sensitive material. For historical validity and authenticity, no historical document has been altered or edited.

THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

TO W.E.B DUBOIS
LANGSTON HUGHES

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than
the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to
sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its
muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

From I Am the Darker Brother, Simon and Schuster, 1997

C O N T E N T S

05 Editorial

07 Photo Essay

13 Essay

17 About the Cover Image

18 Contributors

THE COMPLEXITIES OF JUSTICE IN A CONTESTED WORLD

BY: COLE MCCLAIN

If anything has marked the past year in the social narrative, questions about racial justice are near the top of the list. Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, George Floyd. These are just a few of the names we learned. Names that soon were associated with a long history of racial injustice in the United States. Names that reminded us that the struggle for civil rights and fair treatment isn't dependent on one march or one act of refusal to give up a seat on a bus. Names that once again stirred the conversation on justice.

But what exactly is justice? Is it attainable in this life? Can it be distributed equally to all? And for those that claim Christ, what role are we to play as justice seekers in the contested space of political punditry and competing stories?

On the Nature of Justice

Justice is like a river whose direct effects in the ecosystem largely go unnoticed in the day-to-day hum of existence. Until a drought. Or a flood. Like a river's current, the felt sense of justice largely passes us by unnamed: the trial that ends with a proper verdict, the foolish action that's met with an appropriate consequence, the weight of God's wrath poured out on the injustice of sin and evil on a Roman cross. Most of us go on living our regular old lives, unaffected. And then the drought hits.

The drought comes methodically or quickly. Most often in the stories of the biblical prophets, it was the former. Mounting injustice followed deliberate and continuous patterns of Israel neglecting Yahweh's commands, scorning the sojourner, the widow, the oppressed, and ultimately forgetting Yahweh. This cycle usually ended in exile, life outside the peaceful presence of God among the strong and violent empires of the world... Egypt. Babylon. Rome.

The context of Amos 5:24 is this kind of drought. King Jeroboam II of Israel followed the age-old patterns, and it wasn't until an unknown farmer-prophet named Amos came along and called the powers to repent that the flood of justice could begin. As Amos sings the funeral song in chapter 5, justice flows only when Israel's feasting turns to mourning, when empty sacrifices cease, when repentance replaces reckless idolatry. Drought always precedes the flood. Death always precedes resurrection.

**But let justice roll
down like waters,
and righteousness
like an ever-flowing
stream.**

Amos 5:24

On American Complexity

In his first inaugural address during the turbulence of 1861, Abraham Lincoln grounded American unity in “the mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

One of our hopes in this issue is to tap into those “mystic chords of memory,” but maybe not the exact ones that Lincoln had in mind in 1861. When considering our collective memories as a nation, how do we reconcile that those mystic chords were actually chains for some Americans? How do we move forward when one American’s Mayflower is another American’s slave ship?

Memory is a tricky thing in that way. It can both unite and bind, which is why the histories that we choose to remember and retell cannot be done trivially or in a manner of blind nostalgia. History changes the way we see the present landscape, not necessarily giving us a clear way forward, but a way to see each other rightly, in all our beauty and brokenness.

As Americans and as Christians, we would do well to reconsider the types of histories we’ve known all our lives. Are they truthful? Do they uncover unjust patterns? How might we approach the complexities therein?

Telling the Story of Justice Seeking

Justice lives squarely in the tension of the already commenced but not yet fully realized Kingdom of God. Even though God’s final justice is not “already” that doesn’t mean we don’t have a role to play in the “not yet.” In that tension, we felt called to embrace the role of the storyteller.

Throughout the process of creating this issue, we knew we couldn’t fix any of these problems as a class of seven, but we figured that one step in the right direction just might be to tell compelling stories centered around justice seeking in America’s past and present. We don’t pretend to be experts. We simply come as a group of storytellers whose aim isn’t to have all the right answers but to provide a space to reflect on the right questions.

In this issue, you will find compelling stories about the struggle for civil rights in America specifically and the struggle for justice generally. Stories both old and new, familiar and foreign. Our deep hope is that you will read with a sense of contemplation leading to conversation and Christ-like response in the world today.

**Even though God's
final justice is not
"already," that doesn't
mean we don't have a
role to play in the "not
yet."**



TENSIONS WITH DEEPER SIGNIFICANCE

BY: TAYLOR MCNALLY, BILL TRAN, GRACELYN ADAIR

Not many issues in the past decade have grown to be as large and complex as the subject of racial injustice. Racial injustice has been brought up with considerably more attention in the present day because of the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and many more that have triggered a chain reaction around the country and even the globe.

The images selected for this magazine are powerful visuals of both historical and present day issues occurring within this theme. As stories of racial injustice aren't necessarily products of the past, the tensions that come along with them and movements in the present day against police brutality have brought an upsurge of questions about justice.

The tensions that lie behind the factors of racial injustice predominantly have a deeper significance beyond the popular headlines and political opinionating. Ironically, those who create divisions also tend to be those who are disappointed with the outcomes. With the following images chosen, may the audience choose to reflect on the photos deeply with added perspectives.

While the causes of racial tensions are multifaceted and complex, too often the role of problem fixer becomes division creator. In these types of scenarios it is difficult and altogether necessary for people to be justice seekers who desire to bring wholeness where there is brokenness.

Taylor McNally

Painting from *Untitled (Abstract)*
by Hale Woodruff, 1960.

BREONNA TAYLOR

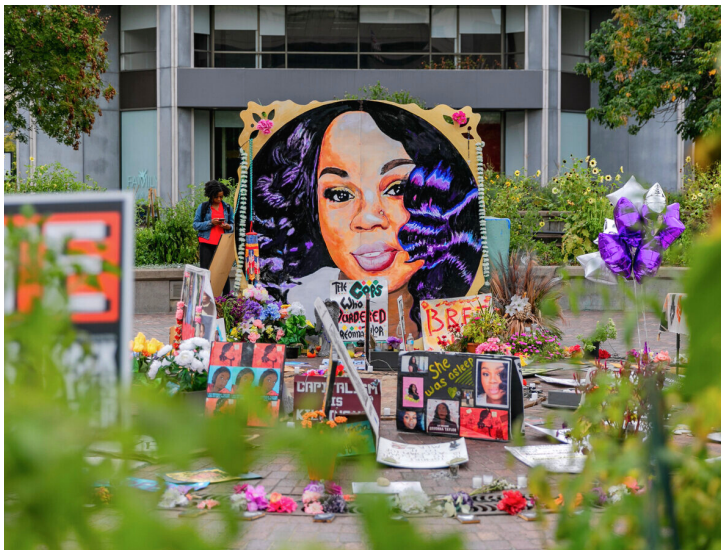


MARCH 13, 2020

On March 13, 2020, a no-knock raid was organized by police officers in Louisville in the home of Breonna Taylor and her boyfriend Kenneth Walker. Walker who is a legal gun owner, fired his gun at what he said was someone he thought was an intruder entering his house. When officers fired back, Breonna was shot six times and killed. Her death sparked an outcry across the nation, and she became a symbol of the many victims of police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), according to This is York Magazine. On Sept. 25, 2020, the officers that were present for Breonnas' death, Jonathan Mattingly, Myles Cosgrove, and Brett Hankison, were either removed from their duties or charged with minor charges.



Gracelyn Adair



The New York Times

**"OFFICERS WHO
KILLED BREONNA
TAYLOR 'SHOULDN'T
HAVE FIRED A
SINGLE SHOT,' LMPD
INVESTIGATOR
SAYS"**

-WDRB.COM



BLOODY SUNDAY

MARCH 7, 1965



"Two Minute Warning" -- March 7, 1965. Spider Martin

On Sunday morning, March 7, 1965, about 600 people met after church in Selma, Alabama, to begin a 54-mile march to Montgomery. They were protesting continued violence and civil rights discrimination — and to bring attention to the need for federal voting rights legislation that would ensure African Americans couldn't be denied the right to vote in any state. News and images of the violent response from Alabama State Troopers spread in newspapers, magazines, and television. The day came to be known as "Bloody Sunday."

The Civil Rights Movement began in order to bring equal rights and equal voting rights to African American citizens in the US. This was accomplished through persistent demonstrations, one of these being the Selma-Montgomery March. This march, led by Martin Luther King Jr., targeted the disenfranchisement of African Americans in Alabama due to literacy tests. Tension from the governor and state troopers of Alabama led the state, and the whole nation, to be caught in the chaos of the demonstrations. However, this did not prevent the march from Selma to Montgomery to accomplish its goals in abolishing the literacy tests and allowing black citizens the right to vote.

Bloody Sunday was important to the civil rights movement because the events helped lead to the passage of the Voting Rights Act (1965), which struck down many of the laws that local officials had used to prevent African Americans from voting. But those who were at Bloody Sunday could never have known the effect their actions would have including prominent figure John Lewis who was 25 at the time. The first march took place on March 7, 1965, organized locally by Bevel, Amelia Boynton, and others. State troopers and county clansmen attacked the unarmed marchers with billy clubs and tear gas after they passed over the county line, thus earning the "bloody" title. Bloody Sunday was a ruthless and gruesome attack on African American protesters in Dallas County which captured public imagination through its images being spread far and wide by news crews and photographs. It was similar to a war zone, with fighting happening between unarmed African American protesters and mostly white cops and civilians.



Police officers force injured civil rights marchers to leave the area after their march was crushed by law enforcement personnel in Selma. Bettmann / Bettmann Archive

There were a lot of unfortunate events or parts of that story and that's why it made it through the history books. It had a big impact on the Black community and has resounding impact in the present day.



Marchers reach a police roadblock in Selma. Frank Dandridge



In light of who we are as Americans and in recent conversations around racial justice, we would do well in considering these historical tragedies involving African American oppression. While it may be easy for some of us to easily forget these events and move on, some people still deal with the effects. The fact that the African American community experienced these tragedies before may be a reason and that they still keep protesting and fighting for their rights as human beings who are trying to survive in this generation. They desire to be heard and given their rights to live peacefully. Some just want freedom and justice. We might do well to listen intently.

State troopers watch as marchers cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge over the Alabama River in Selma, March 9.

Bettmann / Bettmann Archive - Above

A woman burns a Confederate flag to a crowd's cheers during a protest outside the Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma, March 10, 1965.

Bettmann / Bettmann Archive - Below



GEORGE FLOYD

MAY 25, 2020



On May 25, 2020, Minneapolis police officers arrested George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man after an employee at a convenience store called 911 and told police that Floyd had just bought cigarettes with a counterfeit 20 dollar bill. Only seventeen minutes after the first squad car arrived at the scene, Floyd fell unconscious and was beneath three police officers, with no signs of life. By combining videos from bystanders and security cameras, reviewing documents, and consulting experts, The New York Times analyzed the detail in the minutes leading up to Floyd's death.

The day after Mr. Floyd's death, the Police Department fired all four of the officers involved in the episode. On May 29, the Hennepin County Attorney, Mike Freeman, announced third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter charges against Derek Chauvin.



Gracelyn Adair



Gracelyn Adair

" 8 MINUTES, 46 SECONDS BECAME A SYMBOL IN GEORGE FLOYD'S DEATH."
- THE NEW YORK TIMES

A SINGLE STORY AMONGST THE MANY

BY: ABIGAIL GEIGER



Despite being rejected from the University of Mississippi on the basis of race, forced to be an advisor to an openly segregationist Senator, and shot by a sniper during his March Against Fear, James Meredith refused to stop advocating for equal rights for African Americans in America.

Bursting a Bubble

James Howard Meredith was raised on a farm with nine brothers and sisters, in the largely segregated area of Kosciusko, Mississippi. The area was quiet, white people sticking with whites and black people with blacks; Mississippi didn't allow for much overlap. His first real encounter with racism occurred while he was riding a train from Chicago with his brother. The train arrived in Memphis, Tennessee, and Meredith was ordered to give up his seat and move to the crowded Black section of the train. Having to stand for the rest of his trip home, a little boy decided on a big dream: dedicating his life to ensuring equal treatment for African Americans.

After high school was when this young boy made good on his promise. Directly after high school, he served in the United States Air Force from 1951 to 1960.

Institutionalized Discrimination

In 1961, he applied to the all-white University of Mississippi. He had accomplished what no other African American had before: James Meredith was accepted into an all-white university. In the midst of the admittance celebration, he received news that his admission for University of Mississippi was rescinded. After submitting countless inquiries to the admissions counselors and directors, he was told that the decision had been withdrawn when the registrar discovered his race. He had reached yet another boundary that African Americans were prohibited from crossing.

James Meredith realized that his opportunities were not limited because of his location or because of his money. He simply did not have access to the same opportunities as white people; his life was predetermined by the color of his skin.

But Meredith did not submit to his designated destiny as a black person. Since all public educational institutions had been ordered to desegregate by this time, following 1954's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, Meredith filed a suit alleging discrimination. He had hit another boundary, this time in the justice system itself. It was on record that the registrar rejected him because he was black, and yet all of the state courts he appealed to ruled against him. Despite the earlier Supreme Court decision, the Mississippi courts still aligned with Jim Crow laws, the practice of segregating black people in the US. This corruption in the lower courts highlights the constant belittlement black people face in a system that is supposed to work for the people. Many African Americans with similar stories of injustice gave up their case when it lost in the lower courts because of a lack of faith in the government.

James Meredith, however, decided to push his way into unknown territory: taking his case to the Supreme Court. This Court turned the tides of Meredith's case: a ruling in his favor. This caused the breakthrough Meredith needed to continue his stand for civil rights.

Corruption of Politics

This was nowhere near the end of his troubles. The Democratic Governor of Mississippi, Ross Barnett, declared "no school will be integrated in Mississippi while I am your governor". The state legislature quickly created a plan. They passed a law that denied admission to any person "who has a crime of moral turpitude against him" or who had been convicted of any felony offense or not pardoned. The same day it became law, Meredith was accused and convicted of "false voter registration," in Jackson County. If justice is similar to a river, the river for James Meredith had run dry. For a long time, the Promised Land of racial equality under the US government was out of sight.

The conviction against Meredith was trumped up: Meredith both owned land in northern Mississippi and was registered to vote in Jackson, where he lived.

On September 20, the federal government obtained an injunction against enforcement of this Act and of the two state court decrees that had barred Meredith's registration. That day Meredith was rebuffed again by Governor Barnett in his efforts to gain admission, though university officials were prepared to admit him. On September 28, the Court of Appeals found the Governor in civil contempt and ordered that he be arrested and pay a fine of \$10,000 for each day that he kept up the refusal, unless he complied by October 2. On September 29, Lieutenant Governor Johnson was found in contempt by a panel of the court, and a similar order was entered against him, with a fine of \$5,000 a day. Slight retributions had finally been made under the law.

Ole Miss Riot of 1962

On the evening of September 29, after State Senator George Yarbrough withdrew the State Highway Police, a riot broke out the following day. White people opposing integration had been gathering at the campus and began fighting with the federal agents. The Kennedy administration reluctantly ordered the nationalized Mississippi National Guard and federal troops to the campus. In the violent clashes which followed, two civilians were killed by gunshot wounds, and white rioters burned cars, pelted federal agents and soldiers with rocks, bricks and small arms fire, and damaged university property.

The next day on October 1, 1962, after federal and state forces took control, Meredith became the first African-American student to enroll at the University of Mississippi. Meredith's admission is regarded as a pivotal moment in the history of civil rights in the United States. He persisted through harassment and extreme isolation to graduate on August 18, 1963, with a degree in political science.

Life at University of Mississippi was anything but easy. Although he had won the battle of admission, the war for total equality was still waging. Many students harassed Meredith during his two semesters on campus, but others accepted him.

According to first-person accounts, students living in Meredith's dorm bounced basketballs on the floor just above his room through all hours of the night. Other students ostracized him: when Meredith walked into the cafeteria for meals, the students eating would turn their backs. If Meredith sat at a table with other students, all of whom were white, the students would immediately get up and go to another table.

March Against Fear

In 1966, Meredith organized and led his March Against Fear for 220 miles from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, beginning on June 6, 1966. Inviting only black men to join him, he wanted to highlight continuing racial oppression in the Mississippi Delta, as well as to encourage black people to register and vote following passage of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, which authorized federal oversight and enforcement of rights. Governor Paul Johnson promised to allow the march and provide State Highway Police protection.

Meredith's mission was to help black people in Mississippi to overcome the fear of violence by taking a stand together in the March Against Fear

Despite the police presence, on the second day, Meredith was shot and wounded by Aubrey James Norvell, a white man whose motives were never determined, and who pleaded guilty at trial. Meredith was quickly taken to a hospital. Leaders of major organizations rallied at the news and vowed to complete the march in Meredith's name. They struggled to reconcile differing goals, but succeeded in attracting more than 10,000 marchers from local towns and across the country by the end. Meredith recovered from his wounds and rejoined the march before it reached Jackson on June 26, when 15,000 marchers entered the city in what had become the largest civil rights march in state history.

During the march, more than 4,000 black Mississippians registered to vote.

Continued community organizing was catalyzed by these events, and African Americans began to enter the political system again. Black voters in Mississippi have established a high rate of voter registration and voting participation.

A Shot in Politics

In 1967, while living and studying in New York, Meredith decided to run as a Republican for the Congressional seat in Harlem. Although he eventually withdrew from the race, he finally stuck his foot in the door of politics.

After returning to Mississippi, in 1972 Meredith ran for the US Senate. Following provisions of a new state constitution in 1890 that made voter registration extremely difficult, African Americans had been effectively disenfranchised and the Republican Party had been crippled. An active Republican, Meredith served from 1989 to 1991 as a domestic adviser on the staff of United States Senator Jesse Helms. Faced with criticism from the civil rights community for working for the former avowed segregationist, Meredith said that he had applied to every member of the Senate and House offering his services, and only Helms' office responded.

A highly independent man, Meredith has identified as an individual American citizen who demanded and received the constitutional rights held by any American, not as a participant in the Civil Rights Movement. There have been tensions between him and leaders of major organizations of the movement.

Legacy: Justice Seeker

When interviewed in 2002, the 40th anniversary of his enrollment at University of Mississippi, Meredith said, "Nothing could be more insulting to me than the concept of civil rights. It means perpetual second-class citizenship for me and my kind."

This quote emphasizes the true value all people have under God's love. Equality under legal terms will always need to be fought for, bargained, sought after. However, God's love does not know any discrimination, any injustice. That kind of love does not need to be fought for, bargained, or sought after.

James Meredith is one of the stories amongst the many that reveals the immense suffering and discrimination and hate that African Americans experience in the US. That is how it has been for people of color: an uphill battle with no end in sight. No matter where he turned, James Meredith faced walls and blockades that white people would have never faced. He sought justice in all aspects of his life.

Justice in this case is keeping our mouths closed and our ears open. James Meredith's story is one of the thousands hardly told. When one thinks of civil rights, people like MLK and Rosa Parks easily come to mind. But who else? The unsung stories of the civil rights movement need to be told. However, this justice is two-fold: these stories also need to be listened to. If no one is actively listening, how will we be able to hear God? God's divinity can be seen in any person at any given moment. Are we watching for it though? Are we looking for those who represent God in their actions? Perhaps the better question is: are we reflectors of God's image ourselves?

James Meredith was a Christian. And that can be seen in his methods of activism. He refused to resort to violence even after people had been physically violent to him. James Meredith decided to resolve hate with love. He marched for the fear and terror that black people had felt and still feel to this day.

Together we are called to be Justice Seekers. And in that task, we can become Image Reflectors. God's love extends past the borders of brokenness and evil to overcome all sins.

We are the guilty standing on trial. We have let the river of justice run dry. We have let the river of God's love shown through man run dry. The ground in the depths of the riverbed is cracked with the drought of justice and love. I believe, with the help of God, it is time for a flood.



William H. Johnson, *Midnight Sun, Lofoten*, 1937, oil on burlap, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Harmon Foundation, 1967.59.907

Midnight Sun, Lofoten by William H. Johnson (1901-1970) was the perfect choice for our cover image not only for its beauty, nuance, and primitiveness; but also because its creator was a man of complex intrigue. William H. Johnson was best known for his contributions in the latter years of the Harlem Renaissance, however, his story and art was not confined to the United States. In his 20s, Johnson traveled to France where he studied post-impressionist art, married a Danish artist, and spent much of the 1930s traveling throughout Scandinavia and producing beautiful art pieces like the one above. This particular piece was inspired by the mountainous landscapes of the Lofoten Islands in Norway, a scene as majestic as the idea of justice itself.



From Right to Left:

Taylor McNally is a Junior at Denver Christian High School. He learned that justice seeking is not only applying what is right, but also recognizing the wrong in yourself and others around you.

Abigail Geiger is a Senior at Denver Christian High School. She learned that justice seeking can simply mean to close mouths and open ears to hear stories of injustice and to reflect on them.

Gracelyn Adair is a Senior at Denver Christian High School and has been at the school since 2017. She learned that justice seeking is looking for truth underneath opinion and bringing people to an understanding of equality.

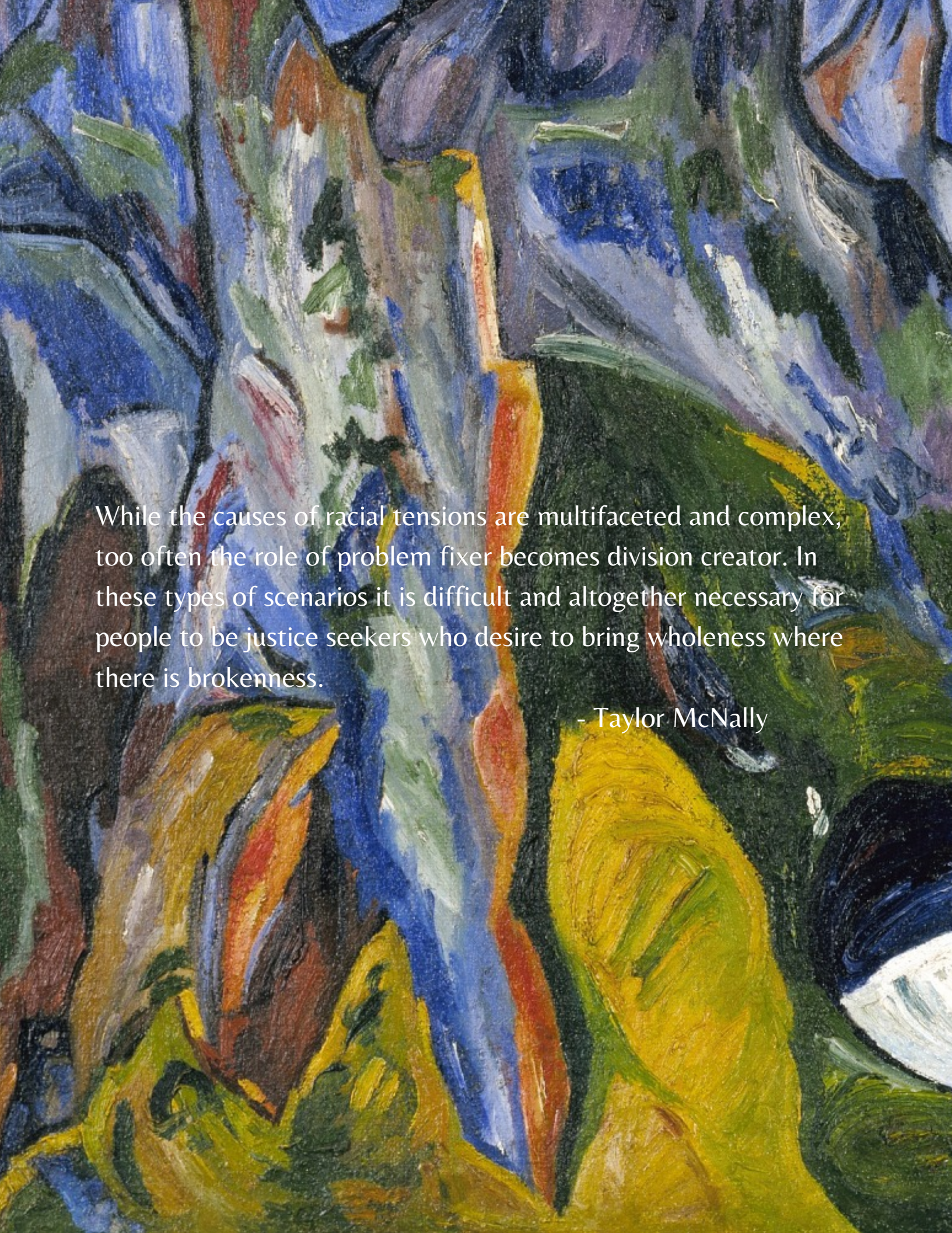
Bill Tran is a Senior at Denver Christian High School. He learned that justice seeking is an action taken in response to a wrong that has been committed. A common interpretation of justice is giving people what's right and fair for them.

James Xu is a Junior at Denver Christian High School. He learned that justice seeking is ensuring people are able to live fulfilling lives and that we should seek justice for others so that they can live a life as God intended.

Sam Lamsma is a Junior at Denver Christian High School. He learned that justice seeking is applying moral and ethical reasons to our lives and seeing how we can change them and live united as God intended.

Cole McClain is a history teacher at Denver Christian High School. He learned that justice seeking is a direct application of the biblical command to love one's neighbor.

Signing Page

An abstract painting featuring a dense composition of thick, expressive brushstrokes. The color palette is rich and varied, including deep blues, vibrant yellows, earthy reds, and dark greens. The strokes are layered and textured, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and emotional intensity.

While the causes of racial tensions are multifaceted and complex, too often the role of problem fixer becomes division creator. In these types of scenarios it is difficult and altogether necessary for people to be justice seekers who desire to bring wholeness where there is brokenness.

- Taylor McNally