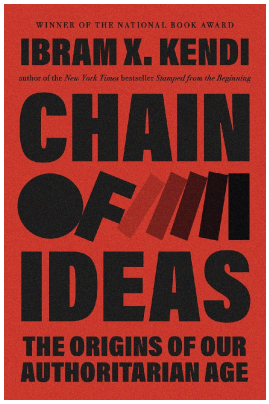
Excerpt Page for Good Friday (from Ibram X. Kendi) — April 3, 2026

Theme for Good Friday: God's Authority (in an Age of Authoritarianism): "From Above" or Alongside?
Or: The Great Replacement Theory vs. the Great Reconciliation Event

In John's Passion Reading, Jesus and Pilate have an interesting conversation about power and authority. (The Greek word used in John 19, exousia*, can be translated as either "power" or "authority.") Pilate thinks he has power and authority over Jesus. Jesus says that Pilate has less power than he thinks; any authority he has is "from above." Does Jesus mean God? In tonight's sermon I argue that Jesus is* not *referring to God. And that a main theme of John's Gospel is that God's power and authority in Jesus has come* alongside *us in love. Jesus is simply trying to help Pilate see the truth of his situation: as a person in authority in the* human *world, there is always an authority that comes "from above," because that is the nature of human authoritarian reigns.*

God's reign is different. God, in Jesus, comes with the power of love alongside us, so that we might learn the way of mutual service. (Like Jesus washing his disciples' feet at the Last Supper and then making a big deal of calling them "friends.") This became more clear to me as I began to read Ibram X Kendi's new book on authoritarianism — on how human reigns work top-down. In Jesus, we see that God's reign works alongside. What follows are some basics on Kendi's analysis of human reigns — how people like Pilate are tricked into thinking they have more power than they do.

Excerpts from Ibram X. Kendi's brand new book: *Chain of Ideas: The Origins of Our Authoritarian Age* (One World, 2026).



Kendi's book basically analyzes the recent history of human authoritarian regimes in terms of what today is called "The Great Replacement Theory" — which is but the most recent name for how rulers keep power by 'dividing and conquering' those whom they rule over. On page xxvii (in the Prologue), Kendi gives a definition:

This book primarily chronicles the spread of great replacement theory as a racist idea. But it also shows, at times, these mutations to the theory. In a more expansive sense, great replacement theory can be defined as *a political theory that powerful elites* [most often believed to be Jewish, the anti-Semitic base for the theory] *are enabling disadvantaged groups to steal the lives, livelihoods, cultures, electoral power, and freedoms of privileged groups, who now need authoritarian protection.*

In today's reading from John, Pilate thinks he is "privileged" over the lowly "disadvantaged" group of Judeans — thus, over Jesus. Jesus corrects him. Following is Kendi's brilliant analysis of how authoritarian rule actually tricks people like Pilate to thinking they have power, when their power comes "from above" — ultimately, from the top-down authoritarian system itself. Kendi also ends with a hint of what it would actually mean to have a different kind of power structure that is based on true equality — on human beings truly working together side-by-side.

[The Great Replacement Theory] is not one idea, but a series of interlocking ideas — or *links* — that form the *chain of ideas*. The links are what give great replacement theory its reach and strength; alone, the individual ideas are outliers that could never have managed to encircle the globe.

There are ten links in the chain of ideas. Each of the ten sections in *Chain of Ideas* tells the story of a single idea, set in a different nation, featuring a different great replacement politician as its main character, while chronologically narrating periods of electoral growth for great replacement parties. . . .

All the links in the chain of ideas connect to the final and decisive tenth link: fighting for privileges provided by dictators rather than power provided by democracy. Let me explain what this means. Great replacement politicians teach privileged groups to covet policies and practices that provide them with a generally better

quality of life *over* disadvantaged groups, rather than coveting the shared power of antiracist democracy to provide themselves with the best quality of life together in solidarity with previously disadvantaged groups. For instance, lower- and middle-income White Americans are taught to covet the privilege of struggling less than their peers of color, rather than harnessing democratic power to eliminate financial struggle for all Americans. To defend their privilege of struggling less than peoples of color do, White Americans must defend racism. To defend racism is to defend racist power. To defend racist power is to increasingly defend dictatorial power. To defend dictatorial power is to defend their own domination.

This resembles the political dynamics back in 1860, when White American enslavers and their financiers on Wall Street reigned as one of the richest and most powerful oligarchies in the world. Everyday White Southerners had the privilege of not being enslaved. Many worked as overseers in one way or another, lording over enslaved Black people. But a White overseer's authority was conditional. The condition: submitting to the White master who lorded over him (and the enslaved). The White master dominated the government, the economy, the cultural infrastructure. Which is to say, the White master dominated the White overseer. To chain another, the White overseer had to accept his own chains, then and now. He spent his lifetime policing the law and order of a racial hierarchy that subordinated him: White elites over everyday White people over Black people. The White overseer, who rarely became a super-wealthy enslaver, spent his lifetime preserving his privilege *and* his subordination.

Great replacement theory manipulates White people, men, middle-income people, Christians, ethnic majorities, and heterosexuals into believing that their *domination* is fleeting at the hands of democracy, antiracism, feminism, queer activism, anti-capitalism, and multiculturalism. But, in fact, these movements remove their *privileges* and their *subordination*. Everyday White people, men, Christians, middle-income people, ethnic majorities, and heterosexuals are members of privileged groups, not dominant groups. Yes, members of *privileged* groups are empowered to oppress, to exploit, to kill, to *dominate* — as their, disadvantaged victims know all too well. But to identify these privileged people as members of dominant groups is to conceal who empowers them: the truly dominant group of oligarchs. To identify privileged people as dominant is to conceal that most of us gain privileges in exchange for submitting to our own domination. When we believe we are dominant as opposed to privileged, we defend our privileges as if we are defending our domination over others. But, in actuality, we are defending the domination of others over us.

Chain of Ideas is a history of dominant power chaining privileged people by their own ideas. People like me. While my life can be a struggle, I have the privilege of not having to struggle against sexism as a man, or homophobia as a heterosexual, or poverty as a college professor, or Islamophobia as a son of Christian ministers, or xenophobia as a U.S. citizen. It can be hard to feel my privilege amid all my struggles, amid all my hard work to get by. It feels easier to erase my privilege, erase these facts of my life, and write over them that women, queer people, impoverished people, Muslims, and immigrants are receiving preferential treatment, are coming for me, are stealing from me, are replacing me. At times, I have felt the tug of this great replacement theory, giving me the ability to empathize with people who have been led to see me, a Black man, as their replacer. I can see their humanity, because I can recall the times when I felt my livelihood was being threatened by demographic change. I felt myself getting angry at times, my unchecked bigotry feeding my anger. But then I saw politicians manufacturing and manipulating my anger. I did not want my privilege to be my prison. I wanted to imprison my privilege to free my power.

The ultimate purpose of great replacement theory is to conceal what members of privileged groups *gain* from antiracist democracy: power over *themselves*. A society where neither everyday White people nor peoples of color, neither men nor women, neither Christians nor Muslims, neither heterosexuals nor homosexuals, neither low-income people nor middle-income people, neither citizens nor immigrants, neither the ethnic majority nor the ethnic minority are disempowered, lorded over, and ordered around by oligarchs. A question defining political activity in the twenty-first century: Will members of privileged groups spend the century chained by their own ideas, defending their privileges by empowering those who dominate them? Or will they spend the century breaking their chain of ideas and joining with members of disadvantaged groups in the grand power struggle for antiracist democracy?

St. Paul writes in Galatians 3:27-28: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Isn't this about no longer claiming any privilege or domination and living together as one family in God's 'alongside' power of love?