

Spring 2013

Reflections

Y A L E D I V I N I T Y S C H O O L

The Future of Race



COVER ART

David C. Driskell

Spirits Watching – front cover

Faces in the Forest – back cover

David C. Driskell is an internationally regarded painter, art historian, collector, and a leading authority on African-American art.

He received an undergraduate art degree at Howard University (1955), a Masters in Fine Arts degree from Catholic University (1962), and joined the Department of Art faculty at the University of Maryland in 1977, serving as its chair from 1978-1983. His works are featured at the National Gallery of Art, the High Museum of Art, Yale Art Gallery, and many other venues. In 2000 he received the National Humanities Medal from President Bill Clinton. In 2007 he was elected as a National Academician by the National Academy.

The David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park, is devoted to honoring his legacy and preserving the heritage of African-American visual art and culture.

INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Terry Boddie took up photography as a teen in order to make sense of a world that had turned strange and disruptive. He had followed his mother to the Bronx, leaving his Caribbean island home, Nevis.

"Growing up, my backyard was a rainforest of greens and blues, and now in New York it was canyons of steel and concrete," he recalls.

The dislocation affected his sense of identity. Nevis is mostly populated by people of African descent. In the U.S., he had to navigate a new race game.

"At first, I lived with labels placed on me by others," he says. "Socially I was seen as an African American, but I spoke different. I was an outsider. Over time I saw myself as a hybrid."

He found creativity in hybridity, and in the two decades since his move here he has used his eye and his camera to explore themes of ethnicity, origins, migration, isolation, and multi-ethnic community. He teaches photography at NYU and Empire State College.

Featured in this *Reflections* is a sample of his photography.

"The images often speak to the position of the individual in society – the solitary figure as an index of the isolated individual in search of something else, whatever that something is. For me, it is self-knowledge, as well as an alignment with community, with values of equality, justice, resolution."

In recent years, his work has taken him beyond straight photography in search of a broader vocabulary of visual experience. He has worked with other media – sculpture, drawing, also making use of archival documents, ID certificates, other modes of critical inquiry – in order to investigate perennial themes of identity in a globalized world. (See terryboddie.com.)

"I like jazz, calypso, blues, reggae, and country music too," he says. "I've come to see the multiplicity of values in other cultures, the value of investigating ideas of history and hybridity and how these might produce new ways of talking about politics and self-knowledge."

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The Future of Race



From the Dean's Desk



Gregory E. Sterling
The Reverend Henry L. Slack Dean of Yale Divinity School
& Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament

Everyday, too many headlines remind us that the brutality of racism is still with us. Too many signs of inequality testify that the dehumanizing history of slavery is still with us. A weary reluctance to face it remains with us too.

And it isn't getting easier, the issue of race. We stand today at a point in the national story where raw tensions between blacks and whites remain unresolved. At the very same moment, the dialogue on race, never simple, is expanding to include other groups in an American ethnic dynamic that continues in great flux.

Demographic shifts – increases in Latino and Asian-American numbers, the coming eclipse of the white majority – make this a complex, challenging, adventurous era whether you are a parish minister, a national political strategist, a social-justice advocate, or a citizen trying to exercise your vote.

With this Spring *Reflections*, we grapple with the multi-front subject of race, inviting some thirty contributors to share their latest thoughts and angles of perception on a long-simmering, sometimes eruptive theme. We were keen about the timing of this issue, which comes 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, fifty years after the March on Washington, and a few months after the reelection of the nation's first African-American president.

This edition also coordinates with an unusual initiative at YDS since Fall 2012 – a focused period of discernment and conversation in various forums by students, faculty, and staff on race. As student Tyrone McGowan writes here, “I believe people of faith must find creative and redemptive ways that allow us to reimagine an alternative calculus of belonging.”

This issue features YDS faculty members but also practitioners beyond Yale who are preoccupied with our theme. The diversity of their arguments

speaks to a turbulent, unfolding scene of national soul-searching and practice.

For example, I think we'd all like to believe that the basic protection of minority voting rights – a battleground for the civil rights heroism of the early 1960s – is accepted by now. Yet as Emilie Townes points out, recent voter ID laws can look like voter suppression of the very groups who, just two generations ago, were fighting for their right – fighting for their lives – to be full citizens.

Is Jim Crow dead? Michelle Alexander reminds us that the cruelty of that era can be reinstated in new forms, manifested today in a federal War on Drugs incarceration policy that disproportionately targets African Americans and other minorities.

National self-congratulations on race relations are premature. It is hard to know where we are in the conversation. The last election season virtually ignored race as an issue. It is naïve to think that our collective silence is proof that we have moved beyond race. We ought to be asking ourselves why it is so difficult to discuss. Perhaps we ought to be probing our own habits of evasion or misapprehension.

Reflections offers the following points of view not as a definitive statement on race relations but as a collection of dispatches from a contentious field of resistance and hope. May it spark conversation and action on a subject that still eats at the American soul. How we talk about it, whether with honesty and creativity or with hostility and distrust, will determine who we become as a people.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gregory E. Sterling".

Gregory E. Sterling
Dean

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In Search of Real Progress

By Dwight Andrews

“In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate.” –Toni Morrison

Like it or not, the matter of race is fundamental to our understanding of who we are as Americans and who we are as people of God. And though we can readily acknowledge the changing demographics of our nation, we in America continue to frame much of our social, political, and even spiritual experience in black and white.

This binary or oppositional way of conceptualizing race has specific characteristics because of America's own peculiar history, its mythic self-portrayals, and inherent contradictions. These matters make the subject of race as treacherous today as it was fifty years ago when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech at the March on Washington.

Ironically, many dismiss the “issue of race” as a thing of the past, a figment of the imagination of those who are still so invested in it that they cannot comprehend the present “post-racial” moment.

Real progress would require oppressor and oppressed alike to let go of identities based on our racial and racist history.

After all, with Oprah Winfrey and her OWN network and President Obama in the White House, isn't this talk of race and racism old hat?

I believe such simplistic claims serve a more insidious purpose: to give permission to turn our attention away from the fundamental aims of the civil and human rights movement that have still not been met. It is as if to say: If we keep claiming that racism is over, that will *make* it so. The new “open mic” world of talk radio has become the latest way to privilege the most divisive, uncivil, and dishonest versions of the American story. The “proofs” for such post-racial assertions are as superficial and deceitful as the rationales used by the pro-slavery advocates of the nineteenth century.

The pattern seems clear. At each point in our history that a modicum of “racial progress” was achieved, a counter-insurgency rose with a vengeance. When free labor of the plantation slave system was abolished, sharecropping kept people indentured to the land with controls just as effective as slavery itself. The Emancipation Proclamation proclaimed that the slaves were free, but from the 1870s to the 1960s, Jim Crow laws mandated *de jure* racial segregation in the South and a *de facto* segregation in the North. The struggle for integration was hard fought, and significant victories were won in the name of its high ideals. But reaction to such racial progress was swift and systematic. In many northern cities, the response to integration was the creation of the post-World War II suburbs.

This new “white flight” dramatized the tenacity of a country still unwilling to live together “one nation under God.” The racial boundaries of neighborhood, schools, and churches would not be legislated out of existence. Even today, the rise of the charter and private school industry has become a new way to keep us separate and unequal. The “school choice” movement in education is all too often code for the same sort of clamor of those from an earlier era who said “not in my school.”

Self-Evident Truths

These truths indeed appear to be self-evident: Many of our core institutions cling as stubbornly to the idea of race as ever. On top of this difficult and still smoldering legacy of black and white, the demographics of America are changing rapidly. External

features and complexions aside, how we are identified and how we identify ourselves is becoming more complicated and nuanced than ever. In spite of these intricacies, we use race in specific ways to wield power and authority, establish self-serving values, define boundaries and division. The idea of race in America continues to be shaped and reshaped by those in power.

And what of the institution of the church? As mainline denominations and congregations grapple with their own future and survival, one might ask if race clarifies or clouds our present and future self-understanding. What would real racial progress in the church look like? Can our churches even imagine it?

Religion and Racial Irrelevance

Churches are inherently dynamic social organisms. They are faith communities framed by many factors, including language, shared histories and geographies, common cultural identities and values, and, yes, even race. But not *only* race. In asking the question of what real racial progress might look like, we might be forced to consider and imagine that true progress, profound progress, would render the idea of race irrelevant.

It is often said that 11 o'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America. Yet in many pulpits in America, black, white, brown and beige, we preach a beloved community that we trivialize by our own institutional inaction and rhetoric. True progress would require the church to confront its reluctance to become what it says it wants to become – one in the body of Christ.

A de-emphasis on race is no easy prospect for any church to face, regardless of its ethnic character. In the case of the black church in America, its very identity is stamped by its moral witness and fight against racial oppression. From its beginnings the black folk church offered a Christian redemptive witness in the midst of slavery. Its prophetic voice was distilled in songs like *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?* The lyrical response was not a rhetorical question but an exhortation: *Then why not every man?* The spiritual *There is a Balm in Gilead* is a defiant affirmation to the scriptural question posed in Jeremiah 8:22, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" These spirituals and sacred songs are theological distillations of a faith community rooted in the soil of slavery, but not defeated by it.

This was the legacy that Dr. King inherited. Yet as his witness evolved, so did his understanding of the "network of mutuality" that he invoked so persuasively. At the time of his death, his vision of

justice was moving beyond race toward justice and mercy for all people.

King's epiphany becomes our question: Can we let race go or is it so internalized in our experience that we cannot imagine a future without it? Perhaps Shakespeare would say "Ay, there's the rub," for many of us, perhaps even most of us, black and white and every other hue, find it difficult to imagine ourselves outside of the racial box we live in.

Cruelty Internalized

Although the modern concept of race is only a few centuries old, cultural and ethnic identities were central factors in the earliest Christian communities. Who could or should be a Christian? Was it a new faith only for Jewish converts – for the circumcised? The modern notion of race represents a more invidious way of thinking about the world, and its cruel inheritance continues, privileging some, devaluing others. It is internalized by the powerless and powerful alike. As we currently conceive it, race is counterproductive to the beloved community.

What would real progress look like? Real progress would require oppressor and oppressed alike to let go of identities based on our racial and racist history.

Real progress would mean that each of us climb out of the racial box the world has prepared for us and see each other as Jesus sees us – children of God.

Writing this essay has brought me to an epiphany of my own. Part of my reticence to let go of race is my need for racial reconciliation based on an acknowledgement by others of the injustice, violence, and brutality that is a central feature of America's story. I don't want to let go of race without an admission of guilt and responsibility by those who continue to benefit from the oppression of my people and all people. I want to forgive my trespassers but I also want them to ask for forgiveness. And therein lies my epiphany. Real progress would require me to forgive without an admission of guilt by anyone. Waiting for the racists of the world to acknowledge their sin of racism makes me a hostage to their transgressions all over again. Forgiveness freely given is its own liberation act. In loving freedom, I can let it go.

A wise Toni Morrison writes: "If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it."

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Welcoming a World of Complexity and Color

By Mary Clark Moschella

What one sees when regarding race is determined largely by where one stands, both culturally and geographically. Historian Tom Tweed describes the interplay between “sight,” “sites,” and “citing” in the work of constructing historical narratives. He points out that the story of U.S. religious history looks different from the perspective of Seminole Indians, African slaves, or Irish maids. The story looks different if it is seen from the Canadian border, the Miami skyline, or the Pacific Rim; different if the tellers are mainline Protestants, Russian Orthodox missionaries in Alaska, or Latino Catholics in the Southwest.¹

The point applies to race as well. There is no grand narrative, but a diversity of situated stories – sightings – that we tell. What anyone sees regarding race is shaped and limited by the place and time and skin – site – in which one lives. We expand our understanding when we cite more stories, and particularly when we include stories from marginalized persons and groups. This is a challenge that continues to confront the nation, its congregations, and theological schools.

Narrow Vistas

At seminaries that work hard to promote racial diversity among students, staff, and faculty, our sightlines are broad and deep, yet also restricted by the geographical sites from which we hail. At many divinity schools and seminaries, it is still rare to find even one faculty member from India, a nation of 1.2 billion people. The problem is not that schools like Yale Divinity School cannot study Dalit theology, or Hindu texts for that matter; we have extraordinary libraries. Yet we do not get to chat, dine, or worship with Indian scholars whose vision of faith has been formed there. Nor do we get regular opportunities to converse with such scholars about the way race functions in India, where the illegal but de facto caste system, with all of its racial inflections, still obtains.

Suffice it to say that a group’s collective vision is impaired to the degree that it becomes accustomed to what one student referred to as a “sea of whiteness,” and then comes to believe that a community so composed is normal, good enough, or even the best in the world.

Prompted by some efforts begun by the 2011-2012 student council, this year three YDS committees came together to begin conversations about race in our school community and racial justice in the U.S. It has been fascinating to listen in and hear the different ways in which race is regarded by the

Regarding race: more scrutiny, not less, is needed. We need to see more complexity, more colors, more imaginative visions for change.

diverse constituents and groups in the community. Race looks different to European scholars than it does to African Americans, different to Latino/a students, to Korean and Korean-American students, and so on. These differences are expressed in worship, in classrooms, and in conversations that have been taking place at many different levels.

Regarding race at the interpersonal level is difficult. Group conversations about this tend to produce at least a little bit of anxiety. Some might wish to skip this step, believing that we are beyond racial bias in our interactions, in our teaching, in our hiring processes. Yet research on the topic of implicit bias suggests that no one is beyond bias, though our biases may be unconscious.² This is because human beings trying to process information quickly often rely on shortcuts in thinking, and these shortcuts often contain social biases.

Embedded Bias

For example, Harvard's "Project Implicit" has found that all of the people who have taken the online Implicit Association Test, when asked to think fast and press a key to make an association, show at least some degree of preference for more socially valued groups. Comparable levels of bias are found in studies of attitudes and stereotypes related to gender and sexuality. Members of stigmatized groups also show preference for the more socially valued groups, though to a lesser degree.³

It appears that we are socially conditioned to think in biased shortcuts. It is not that we cannot think otherwise, but that almost before we think at all, stereotypes can kick in. Seen in this light, it is not surprising that many of us express biases in our interactions sometimes. The point is not to feel shame over this, but to try to find ways to be attentive and thoughtful in our interactions with each other in order to undermine and subvert these biases.

Racial biases are also more or less ingrained in institutions. In understanding how racial dynamics work at the organizational level, the people at the top – those in positions of power – cannot be the sole judges of how things are going. Faculty, for example, simply cannot see what students or staff members, particularly if they are persons of color, can observe from their side of the desk. Of course, students' viewpoints and those of persons in neglected or marginalized groups are also limited and partial. But the experience of living in darker skin and inhabiting a less powerful position in an institutional structure does afford one an important sightline on power dynamics and dominant-culture assumptions.

At YDS, students in particular have been generous in forthrightly naming their various experiences and thoughts about what is it like to be here, as a Latina for example, living and learning in this community. They tell us that when one does not hear one's cultural realities named, or when authors from

one's group are rarely read in class, or when few, if any, persons with institutional power resemble oneself at all, it becomes more difficult to flourish.

In the hallways of so many theological schools one will find rows of pictures of famous white male scholars, all part of an institution's illustrious history. One notices such galleries of representation

At many divinity schools and seminaries, it is still rare to find even one faculty member from India, a nation of 1.2 billion people.

also in congregational settings – pictures of saints, familiar depictions of Christ, the framed portraits of past ministers and heroes of the faith. Whether we pause to examine the portraits, and imagine the lives and minds of their subjects, or simply glance at the pictures without thinking, we are recruited into some level of visual practice, just because we need to get down the hall.⁴ Does this visual practice serve to inculcate certain dispositions in us, what Bourdieu called, "a past which survived in the present and tends to perpetuate itself in the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles ..."?⁵ Intentional reflection is required if we are to discern the ways in which certain practices, patterns, and rules may unwittingly re-enforce racist norms from the past.

Regarding race at the interpersonal level and at the level of organizational practice does not cover the gamut. Currently, numerous academic programs in critical race studies and such related topics as global raciality, postcolonialism, mixed-race studies, race, culture, and gender, race and ethnicity, and intersectionality are burgeoning. These fields of study and the new knowledge they produce have been filtering into theological education at a relatively slow pace.

Value-Free Illusions

In an article on "Diversity Troubles" at Harvard Divinity School, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that structures of domination and privilege may blind scholars at elite schools to the biases in research and pedagogical protocols. In particular, she points to the scientific ethos of value-free scholarship that was adopted in many theological fields of study in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This ethos naively asserted that theological research was or ought to be unbiased, objective, apolitical, universal, and so on. Though the fictive nature of these assumptions has long since been

revealed, Schüssler Fiorenza suggests the professionalization of our academic disciplines that resulted from this ethos:

“(E)ngendered theoretical dichotomies, such as pure or impure, theoretical or applied science. Dualistic opposites – rational and irrational, objective and subjective, hard or soft, male and female ... were given material form, not only in professional disciplines, but also in their discursive practices.”⁶

The legacy of this ethos still affects elite academic cultures, where studies of those who have been excluded from the academy, or from studies of social discrimination and its impact on religious or biblical or theological or pastoral scholarship, are still considered peripheral, not quite at the heart of the discipline. She notes that in academic searches and promotion processes, scholars who focus on

It appears that we are socially conditioned to think in biased shortcuts. Almost before we think at all, stereotypes can kick in.

the experience of one particular neglected or under-represented group, or on postcolonialism itself, are often seen as offering perspectival opinions, intellectually suspect because they depart from established scholarly, quasi-scientific norms.

Interrupting Business As Usual

How can schools promote scholarship that not only increases the diversity of authors and texts we deem worthy of citing, but also broadens the disciplines themselves so that they move beyond such theoretical dichotomies and allow the new scholarship in race studies to infiltrate and expand all of the thinking in the field? What research principles and practices will help us move toward a more truly inclusive scholarly ethos? At YDS, we have already among us many fine scholars who are prodding us along. They expand our sightlines, complicate our viewpoints, challenge our assumptions. As in many schools, pre-tenured faculty members help to lead the way.

The topics we teach and those we choose to research matter. We need to incorporate more viewpoints, more methods, more stories, more historical and contemporary struggles for racial justice. The quest for human self-understanding requires us to probe our assumptions more deeply, and perhaps in some cases to hold more lightly the ideas that have shaped us as scholars. We need to promote and

encourage ever fuller and more nuanced pictures of both Creator and creation.

Of course, the complex dynamics of race also operate at larger political and cultural levels. Last spring, one YDS student asked that the entire school be invited to read Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* and then discuss it together. Two deans had the wisdom to support this idea, not only by funding the purchase of books, but also by bringing the author to campus. This is a fitting interruption of business as usual in a divinity school whose mission statement explicitly includes “the commitment to social justice.”

Alexander demonstrates how since the 1980s’ “war on drugs” began, police officers in the U.S. have been routinely arresting lower-income African Americans and Latinos for non-violent drug offenses, charging them as felons, and incarcerating them at a dramatically increased rate. Simultaneously, the rights of formerly incarcerated persons, particularly those who were convicted or pled to felony offenses, have been severely curtailed, creating a new, racial lower caste of citizens. This systematic discrimination and loss of rights have been taking place in what some have called a post-racial or colorblind age. Alexander challenges the whole notion of a colorblind society as an ideal and argues that what we need instead is a caring society, one that regards people of diverse skin colors and ethnicities as human beings worthy of our care, compassion, and concern.⁷

Blindness of Colorblindness

Following the writing of Martin Luther King Jr., Alexander claims that the *indifference* of the majority of citizens is what supports the current racial caste system, the new Jim Crow. The belief in a colorblind society may in fact encourage the whole society to simply ignore the fate of the numerous lower-class black and brown men and some women who are filling up our prisons and losing their rights.

Care in this situation cannot mean becoming colorblind. Caring involves looking into lives and social systems and discerning what is happening. How can it be that African-American and Latino teenagers in urban areas are being rounded up and charged with felony drug offenses at such an alarming rate, while white teenagers living in the suburbs, whose documented rates of drug use are equal if not greater, are so rarely charged, much less convicted or jailed? Caring involves regarding people, seeing them in all of their complexity and variety, including their skin color, rather than turning away and claiming that race no longer matters.

Caring also involves seeing prisoners as human beings with dignity, human beings like ourselves, who sometimes fall prey to substance use or abuse. When those of us who are wealthier and lighter-skinned find ourselves or our loved ones in such conditions, we tend to want to find high-quality mental health care. Why should poorer and darker-skinned human beings, who are likewise sometimes caught in addictions, be given a cage rather than health care?

More Scrutiny, Not Less

Michelle Alexander makes the point that convicted felons do not make good poster children for racial justice. Not everyone in jail is there for a non-violent offense. Still, however imperfect individuals may be, they deserve legal justice. And when a person leaves prison, he or she needs to be able to make a way in the world. The legal discrimination against formerly incarcerated persons in employment, housing, and food stamps effectively prevents those who are released from prison from getting on with their lives. Better to regard this situation critically, and use our energy and intelligence to work for justice, than to avert our gaze and pretend that we live in a post-racial society.

Regarding race: more scrutiny, not less, is needed. We need to continue deconstructing white privilege, interrupting social discrimination, and coming to terms with each other in the midst of our similarities and our differences. We need to see more complexity, more colors and more creeds, more imaginative visions for change.

At the end of his award-winning book on Christian theology and the origins of race, Willie James Jennings writes: "I yearn for a vision of Christian intellectual identity that is compelling and attractive, embodying not simply the cunning of reason but the power of love that gestures toward joining, toward the desire to hear, to know, and to embrace."⁸ Many at YDS and other schools and congregations also yearn for such a vision of religious identity, one that is broadly inclusive and vigorously engaged in the work of racial justice.

Certainly all of this year's gestures toward joining, knowing, and loving have been tentative and partial. Yet gesture we must, however haltingly, toward a fuller vision, a more complicated conversation, and a richer understanding of the compelling power of love.

Mary Clark Moschella is the Roger J. Squire Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at YDS. Her books include *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Pilgrim Press, 2008) and *Living Devotions: Reflections on Immigration, Identity, and Religious Imagination*. (Pickwick, 2008).

Notes

- 1 Thomas A. Tweed, "Narrating U.S. Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, Thomas A. Tweed, ed., (California, 1997), pp. 1–26.
- 2 See <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html> to take the Implicit Bias Test.
- 3 See <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/faqs.html>.
- 4 This, of course, would not be true of those who are severely visually impaired or non-sighted.
- 5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 82.
- 6 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Diversity Troubles," *Harvard Divinity Review*, Summer/Autumn 2012 (Vol. 40, Nos. 3 & 4),
- 7 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, (New Press, 2010), p. 229.
- 8 Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Yale University Press, 2010), p. 291.

MARKED By Carmen Tafolla

Never write with pencil,
m'ija.
It is for those
who would
erase.
Make your mark proud
and open,
Brave,
beauty folded into
its imperfection,
Like a piece of turquoise
marked.

Never write
with pencil,
m'ija.
Write with ink
or mud,
or berries grown in
gardens never owned,
or, sometimes,
if necessary,
blood.

A New Day for Multiracial Congregations

By Michael O. Emerson

A decade ago my colleagues and I made a bold proclamation: The twenty-first century must be the century of the multiracial congregation.¹ Based on many years of study, several hundred thousand dollars of investment, careful analysis of data and trends, and biblical application to the modern day, it remains our claim that the costs of segregated congregations are too high, and the imperative and promise of multiracial congregations are immense. Anything less than a religious movement for multiracial congregations will lead to the decline of the U.S. church as we know it.²

Congregations have long been hyper-segregated. As of 2007 (our most recent data with such detail), 85 percent of congregations in the United States were comprised of at least 90 percent of one group. As of 2010, just 4 percent of all congregations claimed to have no racial majority.³

This racial segregation in congregations in our modern, diverse nation has many costs. When congregations are racially segregated, there is less opportunity for intergroup mobility (such as through intermarriage) and more importance is placed on racial boundaries, separate racial identities, and other differences between groups. Though many in the religious community call and work for an end to racial division and inequality, the very organization of religion into segregated congregations often undercuts their efforts.⁴

Misreading Out-Groups

Racial segregation of religious groups affects how we see ourselves as well as others. The separate groups that are reified through religious division result in categorization. Research links this process of categorization to several biases in our thinking, including:

1. Identifying out-group members by their differences from the in-group, overly homogenizing the out-group.

2. Favoring our in-group.

3. Perceiving negative behavior of an out-group member as a characteristic of the entire out-group. (We leap from “Gerry of Group X shoplifted” to “Group X shoplifts.”) We don’t do this with our in-group.

4. Recalling only information that confirms our stereotypes of out-groups, dismissing contradictory evidence as an exception.

Religion in the U.S. contributes to racial division and inequality, and, as I show below, to cultural and political conflict, because it creates the very condition – racial segregation in an important social setting – that feeds the practices of racial categorization and the errors in perception that follow from it.

Racial segregation of religious groups also affects how we interact – and with whom – by creating the ethical paradox of group loyalty. The paradox is that even if comprised of loving, unselfish individuals, the group transmutes individual unselfishness into group selfishness.

So in the more than 300,000 congregations in the U.S., members are busy creating group identity and forming moral persons. Those moral persons, acting morally, are aware of and help their families and the members of their own congregations first, making sure those needs are met before looking else-

where to help. But racial segregation in congregations means we largely help people of our own race.

Ethical Ironies

The problem with this pattern is it maintains the inequality between groups. Members of groups with the most to share (white Americans currently have about *twenty times* the wealth of black and Hispanic Americans⁵) do so with others of their group. Members of groups with the least are busy trying to meet the needs of others in their group, which, because the group has less, are typically bigger needs, trying to be met with less. It is a nasty cycle, even though the people involved are themselves attempting to act morally.

We also have another problem. Because group members cannot understand and feel the needs of another group as completely and deeply as those of their own group, reliance on love, compassion, and persuasion to overcome group divisions and inequalities is practically impossible. For this reason, then, relations between groups are always mainly political rather than ethical or moral (reflect on the implications of this sentence!).

Involvement in multiracial congregations, over time, leads to fundamental differences. Friendships patterns change. Through national surveys we find that people in multiracial congregations have significantly more friendships across race than do other Americans. For example, for those attending racially homogenous congregations, 83 percent said most or all of their friends were the same race as them. For those *not* attending any congregation, 70 percent said most or all of their friends were the same race as them.

But for those attending multiracial congregations, there is a dramatic difference. Only 36 percent of people attending racially mixed congregation said most or all of their friends were the same race as them. And we found that those 36 percent were relatively recent arrivals to their racially mixed congregations.

We found this same pattern for every question we asked about relationships with other people. People *not* attending congregations are more likely to be interracially married, have best friends who are of a different race, and have more diverse social networks (acquaintances beyond one's circle of friends) than are other Americans.⁶

Interestingly, over 80 percent of the people in racially mixed congregations said that most of the racial diversity in their friendships came *because* of their involvement in their racially mixed congregation.⁷ Indeed, when we did a statistical analysis

called logistic regression, we found that by far the most important factor in people having racially diverse relationships is whether they attend a racially mixed congregation. Representative of this finding, a Salvadorian immigrant living in Los Angeles and attending a racially mixed congregation said that perhaps 10 percent of the people she knew before

It takes 20 percent or more of another group to have their voices heard in an organization. Short of that percentage, people are largely tokens.

she started attending her church were of different races, but now, “since I have been at this church the majority of my friends are of different races.”

Partly due to the greater relationships across race, involvement in multiracial congregations leads to attitudinal change – change toward closing the racial gap in racial attitudes.

Our research has identified several other benefits from involvement in multiracial congregations – from the creation of a new group identity that crosses racial boundaries, to the reduction of socioeconomic inequality, to an expressed deeper sense of who God is. The implication for a racially divided but changing nation is clear. In contemporary times, multiracial congregations offer a promising path forward.

The 20 Percent Rule

Research on a variety of organizations has shown that it takes 20 percent or more of another group to have their voices heard and effect cultural change on an organization. Short of that percentage, people are largely tokens. Part of this 20 percent or more rule is mathematics. At 20 percent of another group, the probability of contact across the groups is 99 percent.⁸

For these reasons, I define a multiracial congregation as one having *less than 80 percent of any single racial group*. Since the Civil War, multiracial congregations in the U.S. have been rare. But it was not until 1998 that we had our first scientifically systematic survey of U.S. congregations. At that time, just 7.4 percent of all congregations were multiracial.

These types of congregations were rarer among Christian congregations than, for example, Muslim congregations. Within Christianity, multiracial congregations were rarer among Protestants than Catholic congregations. The key factor to understanding the level of racial segregation across religious traditions, I have found, is quite simple. The more choices people have – for instance, a larger

number of congregations within a religious tradition to consider – the more people choose to worship with people who are racially like themselves.

But I suggest we are witnessing a religious movement toward multiracial congregations. Fifteen years ago, the resources for multiracial congregations were few, networks almost unheard of, and institutional support essentially non-existent. It was very much a case of isolated, unconnected lone rangers – usually the head clergy – attempting to manage the few multiracial congregations.

A Dramatic Shift

This has changed, dramatically so. Since 1998, an explosion of materials, networks, and organizations has appeared claiming the need for, rightness of, and necessity of multiracial, multi-ethnic, multicultural churches. As best I can tell, in 1998 there were perhaps ten books on the topic (scattered across fifty years and multiple religious traditions) and a couple of denominational offices that tangentially had some materials on becoming more inclusive congregations. Today there are literally thousands of materials on the topic, including books, articles, blogs, workbooks, denominational offices, conferences, undergraduate and seminary courses, workshops, websites, podcasts, Facebook pages, networks, and formal organizations.

Take for example the Mosaix Global Network, founded in 2004. Its vision is clear: to see 20 percent of all local churches achieve a minimum of 20

Since 1998, an explosion of materials and organizations has appeared claiming the need for multi-ethnic churches.

percent diversity by the year 2020. It does so, as it says, by “Casting Vision, Connecting, Conferencing, and Coaching.” It is a relational network meant to bring people together, grow the movement, and equip local congregations. They produce books, videos, sermons, teaching guides and workbooks, host conferences, conduct two-day visits to existing multiracial congregations, do surveys, create plans to help local congregations incorporate and manage diversity, and they serve as a node in helping people in this movement connect with each other. Most of the resources are available at the Mosaix website.⁹

Our latest data suggests the overall movement is having an impact. The 2010 Faith Communities Today Survey, which randomly sampled over 11,000 U.S. congregations across all faith traditions, found significant growth in multiracial congregations since our first nationally representative survey in 1998.

for Cecil

We prepare
the meal together.
I complain,
hurt, reduced to fury
again by their
subtle insults,
insinuations
because I am married to you,
impossible autonomy, no mind
of my own.

You like your fish
crisp, coated with cornmeal,
fried deep,
sliced mangos to sweeten
the tang of lemons.
My fish is raw,
on shredded lettuce,
lemon slices thin as skin,
wasabe burning like green fire.
You bake the cornbread flat
and dip it in
the thick soup
I've brewed from
turkey carcass, rice gruel,
sesame oil and chervil.
We laugh over watermelon
and bubbling cobbler.

You say
There are few men
who can stand
to have a woman equal,
upright.

This meal,
unsurpassed.

Whereas 7.4 percent of U.S. congregations were multiracial in 1998, in 2010 that figure had grown to 13.7 percent.¹⁰ Admittedly, this recent figure is still a tiny fraction of all congregations, but at the same time, it represents significant change in but a little over a decade.

Lessons So Far

What have we learned about successful multiracial congregations? Though I cannot offer the final word here, based on a variety of sources we do have an emerging agreement on the core ingredients of successful multiracial congregations:¹¹

- Intentionality. Although congregations do become multiracial without intentionality, they don't stay diverse without focused intentionality. For congregations to remain diverse, they must desire to do so.
- Diversity as a necessary means to a larger goal. Diversity cannot be an end in itself – this is not sufficient motivation to sustain the difficulties of

Though many in the religious community work for an end to racial division, the very organization of religion into segregated congregations often undercuts their efforts.

being diverse. Instead, diversity must be a path to a larger goal. This is often communicated in vision and mission statements. For example, the vision of River City Community Church in Chicago reads, “We are on a quest to become a multi-ethnic community of Jesus followers that transform the city of Chicago through worship, reconciliation, and neighborhood development.”¹² The mission of Riverside Church in New York is “to serve God through word and witness; to treat all human beings as sisters and brothers; and to foster responsible stewardship of God’s creation.”¹³ In both cases, diverse congregations view their diversity as a means to a larger goal.

- Spirit of inclusion. This can be done in many ways, including through worship, small groups, diversity in who is seen “up front,” structures that encourage cross-racial relationships, and mission statements.
- Empowered leadership. Leaders of multiracial congregations need to be diverse, be truly empowered (not “token” leaders), and be experienced in managing diversity.
- Adaptability. Leaders and parishioners must develop skills of adapting to change, to each other’s racial and ethnic cultures, and to each other’s religious traditions and histories. Grace is essential.

Undergirding these steps of course are much faith and prayer. Nearly all leaders of such congregations say the challenges and opportunities are too big to rely merely on themselves and their own understandings.

The U.S. is racially and ethnically diversifying at a rapid rate, yet it remains dramatically unequal on so many fronts – economic outcomes, incarceration rates, home ownership rates, mortgage rates, educational levels, health, and life expectancy, to name a few. For too long congregations have contributed to these inequalities through their racial segregation. Multiracial congregations offer a new way forward for a new time in America. This century must be the century of the multiracial congregation.

Michael O. Emerson is professor of sociology at Rice University, where he is also co-director of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research. He is the author of People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States (Princeton, 2006) and co-author of Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America (Oxford, 2001) and United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race (Oxford, 2004), among other books.

Notes

- 1 Curtis Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 2 I use the term “multiracial” because of the absolute meaning race has had in the United States (and most other places): It means ranking, hierarchy, and inequality. Other commonly-used terms – multi-ethnic, multicultural – do not have such meaning. So while it is indeed an achievement to have a Mexican-Guatemalan congregation, a Chinese-Korean-Filipino congregation, or an American black-Nigerian-Kenyan congregation, these congregations are filled with people who, over time, via the power of the U.S. assimilation approach, will meld into a racial group. I could say much more about why I use multiracial (and why I want to focus on addressing inequality and the ranking of people groups rather than simply the differences between people’s cultures) but space is limited. I ask that the reader who prefers other terms either to allow me grace, or substitute one’s preferred term.
- 3 2010 National Survey of Congregations, a project of Faith Communities Today. Summary data taken from <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faithcommunitiestoday.org/files/2010FrequenciesV1.pdf>, accessed Feb. 25, 2013.
- 4 See Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

- 5 Rakesh Kochhar, Richard Fry, and Paul Taylor, "Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs Between Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics." Accessed Feb. 25, 2013 at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26/wealth-gaps-rise-to-record-highs-between-whites-blacks-hispanics/>.
- 6 All of these data are from the 2000 Lilly Survey of Attitudes and Social Networks (LSASN), a survey my colleagues and I conducted. It is a nationally random sample telephone survey of 2,546 Americans eighteen and over, and includes both churchgoers and non-churchgoers.
- 7 This finding comes from our approximately 200 in-person interviews with participants of multiracial congregations around the nation.
- 8 See *People of the Dream* (Princeton, 2006), Chapter Two for a more complete explanation and list of sources.
- 9 Visit <http://mosaix.info/> for more details.
- 10 My special thanks to Scott Thumma and David Roozen for their tailored analysis of the 2010 Faith Communities Today data. The data can be found at <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/fact-2010>.
- 11 See for example George Yancey's *One Body, One Spirit* (IVP Books, 2003), Emerson's *People of the Dream*, Chapter 7 (Princeton, 2006), David Anderson's *Gracism* (IVP Books, 2007), Mark DeyMaz and Harry Li's *Ethnic Blends* (Zondervan, 2010), Soong-Chan Rah's *Many Colors* (2010, Moody Publishers), and Derek Chin's *1+1=1* (Pickwick Publications, 2012).
- 12 Taken from <http://www.rivercitychicago.com/about-us/the-essence-of-river-city/>, accessed March 5, 2013.
- 13 Taken from <http://theriversidechurchny.org/about/>, accessed March 5, 2013.

Asian Americans are adding to the growth of non-Abrahamic faiths, notably Buddhism and Hinduism, a Pew Research Poll says.

Overall, Asian Americans have increased to 5.8 percent (18.2 million people) of the American population according to the U.S. Census. It was less than 1 percent in 1965.

Each of the six major Asian-American subgroups displays a different religious composition, the survey reported last year.

- About half of Chinese Americans (the largest Asian-American subgroup) are unaffiliated.
- Most Filipinos (the second largest subgroup) in the U.S. are Catholic.
- About half of Indian Americans (the third largest subgroup) are Hindu.
- Most Korean Americans are Protestant.
- Forty-three percent of Vietnamese Americans are Buddhist.
- Japanese Americans (the smallest of the subgroups) are a mix of Christians, Buddhists, and unaffiliated.

Other findings of the survey:

- Most Asian Americans affiliate with the nation's two largest religious identities – Christian (42 percent) and the religiously unaffiliated (26 percent), the survey said. Buddhists are third (14 percent), followed by Hindus (10 percent), Muslims (4 percent) and Sikhs (1 percent).
- Buddhists and Hindus together now account for about 2 percent of the U.S. population, about the same share as Jews.
- Regarding yoga, which has a long tradition in Hinduism, nearly three-quarters of U.S. Asian Hindus see it not just as exercise but as a spiritual practice.
- More than half of Asian-American Hindus say they believe in reincarnation and moksha, defined in the survey as "the ultimate state transcending pain and desire in which individual consciousness ends." About half believe in astrology, defined as the belief "that the position of the stars and planets can affect people's lives."
- Hindus rank at the top of the socioeconomic ladder – not only among Asian-American religious groups but also among all U.S. religious groups. Some 85 percent of Asian-American Hindu adults are college graduates; 57 percent have some post-graduate education. That is nearly five times the percentage of adults in the general public who have done post-graduate study (12 percent).

"The high socioeconomic status of Asian Americans in general, and of Hindus in particular, is due at least in part to selective immigration," the Pew survey explained. "Many Asian immigrants come to the U.S. through the H-1B visa program, which is designed to encourage immigration of engineers, scientists and other highly skilled 'guest workers' from abroad. In 2011, for example, India accounted for more than half of all the H-1B visas granted."

Source: Pew Research Center



To Make the Invisible Visible: Interrogating Race and Racism

By Keun-Joo Christine Pae

Race matters in every part of human society – our church, theological education, economic systems, and everyday relations with others. Those who strive to practice God’s love and justice on earth must join the difficult and complex dialogue of race. As an Asian woman, I rarely feel comfortable sharing my personal experience of overt or covert racial discrimination that has occurred in the church and in American higher education.

On the one hand, this discomfort partially results from the fact that U.S. interracial dialogue is dominated by the black-white dichotomy. Asian Americans often fall into the awkward position – they are neither black nor white, neither victims nor perpetrators. On the other hand, I often need God-

The American public celebrates the growing Asian presence by honoring diversity in culture, food, and religion. But Asian Americans have never been freed from the racism interwoven with America’s military operations in Korea and Vietnam.

given courage to challenge – to interrogate – race domestically and internationally because this task reveals my own vulnerabilities in our globalized world. Nonetheless, I have to interrogate race as a social system, engage in interracial dialogue, and contemplate just racial relations because God wants all humans to live fully and abundantly in God’s image. Here I want to share reflections on Asian Americans as a racial and political category. What can the church do better to advance racial relations?

Asian Americans are diverse people representing complex and intricate relationships with their mother continent Asia, which is comprised of three billion people, seven different language zones, di-

verse religions, and various political and cultural systems. Asian Americans should not be viewed as one racial group. Many Asian Americans still hold strong ethnic and national identities as Korean Americans, Chinese Americans, Vietnamese Americans and so on. Considering this diversity among Asian Americans, Chandra Mohanty argues that “Asian American” is a political category reconstructed by Asian descendants who share similar political goals such as equal opportunity and just racial relations.¹

Wars and Words

Although the construction of Asian Americans as a racial and political category has a strong tie with the civil rights movement, the American public’s perception of Asians reflects America’s involvement in wars in Asia. Chang-Rae Lee’s novel *Native Speaker* offers an insightful theory of etymology of the prejudicial word “gook,” which most Americans first heard during the Vietnam War. The narrator of the novel, Henry Park, theorizes that when American soldiers entered a Korean village during the Korean War (1950-53), the villagers shouted “Mee-Gook! Mee-Gook!” While Mee-Gook means America or American in Korean, American soldiers interpreted it as “I am a Gook.”²

Ethnic studies scholar Jodi Kim interprets Lee’s story as an important resource for understanding the racialization of Asian Americans. Kim argues that Americans publicly racialized Asian/Asian

Americans prior to their migration into the U.S., and Americans continue to racialize Asian Americans in the post-Cold War era. The history of “gook” exemplifies the racial categorization of Asian Americans that reflects America’s interpretation of U.S.-Asian relations without considering how Asians identify themselves.

The New Immigration Act of 1965 dramatically increased the influx of Asians into the U.S. The American public celebrates the growing Asian presence by honoring diversity in culture, food, and religion. However, Asian Americans have never been freed from the racism that was interwoven with America’s military operations in Korea and Vietnam. The 1965 Immigration Act embodied America’s reaction to international criticisms of the Jim Crow law and racial segregation, while also attempting to spread free market democracy in Asia. America’s

According to the complacent stereotype, Asians’ economically privileged status proves that America is the country of equal opportunity: Whoever works hard can be successful.

hidden desire in Asia in the early Cold War period is theologically articulated in Reinhold Niebuhr’s *The Irony of American History*: Asians must be saved from communists, and this is America’s global responsibility.⁴ Americans’ turbulent feelings about the Korean War (the so-called forgotten war) and the Vietnam War (the lost war) have stirred ambivalence and racial tension around the post-1965 Asian immigration ever since.

A Model Minority?

One of the greatest myths about Asian Americans is their “model minority” reputation. The “model minority” stereotype depicts Asian Americans as a hardworking, financially stable, and well-educated minority who has achieved the American dream. The flip side of this stereotype dismisses racial inequality as a structural issue. According to this complacent argument, Asians’ economically privileged status proves that America is the country of equal opportunity: Whoever works hard can be successful. However, most Asian Americans do not identify themselves as a model minority. Just as “gook” is given to Asians (specifically Southeast Asians) to reflect a derogatory ideology, the model minority stereotype is a socially constructed perspective that serves an ideology – the endeavor to maintain order,

reinforce white supremacy, and discipline non-Asian people of color.

But a model minority myth is more dangerous than “gooks.” First, this stereotype does not accurately portray the realities of Asian Americans. According to Robert Teranish’s empirical study, it prevents Asian Americans from equally accessing higher education compared to other racial minorities and whites. The high school dropout rate among Hmong, Cambodians, Vietnamese, and Pacific islanders is as high as those of blacks and Latinos, but the model minority myth blinds educational policy makers to these real-life statistics and conditions. Furthermore, Chinese, Korean, Indian, and Japanese Americans – core members of the model minority stereotype – experience inequality in their attempt to access educational resources if they live in inner urban areas of large cities such as New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The Asian American population is highly concentrated in these areas.

“Perpetual Foreigner”

The American public often misinterprets the visibility of Asian students in higher education – many of them are international students from Asia who do not share the experiences of racism or racial consciousness with many Asian Americans. Considering these international students only, many Americans fail to recognize the everyday racial injustice that Asian American students may encounter on campus. Americans’ lack of distinction between Asians and Asian Americans stems first from the relatively short history of Asian immigration, and second from the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype: No matter how long Asian Americans have lived in the United States, they cannot assimilate because of their race and unique cultures and thus are forever considered foreigners. Ironically, the perpetual foreigner stereotype contradicts the model minority stereotype.

What can our churches do better in the name of just racial relations? Here I would like to share one anecdote.

Throughout my M.Div. years at YDS, interning with a Korean-American church, I prepared for ordination in one particular Protestant denomination. Toward the end of my senior year, I was excited about the invitation to interview for candidacy. A few days before the interview, a person in the ordination committee told me that the church would not guarantee a job for me because Korean-American churches would not respect female leadership and general American churches would not welcome

immigrants like myself whose cultural background was so different from their congregations'. Although I did understand this individual's concern about the "right match" between a church and a minister, I took his comments as a sign of the church's unexamined sexism and racism. How could he be so definitive about Korean-American churches and American churches generally, while many female pastors ministered Korean-American congregations and non-Korean congregations across the United States? Even if his observation was true, shouldn't it be the church's responsibility to challenge the congregations to work with the leaders whose gender, sexual, racial, and cultural identities were different from the majority? After this experience, my love for God and passion for God's people remained the same, but I no longer wanted to stay in that denomination.

Understanding Power

This experience eventually challenged me to analyze racial relations in various Christian communities across the globe. Every major U.S. denomination provides racial justice training for church leaders and ministries of cultural and racial diversity. However, many congregations still have a long way to go

Without facing racial issues, Asian-American churches may repeat the same mistakes that many white churches do.

to establish just racial relations inside and outside of the church. Most Christian churches are still racially segregated. On a surface level, some evangelical megachurches seem racially integrated, but they may avoid interracial dialogue or analyzing power differentials inside the church. Without struggling to understand how power and privilege relate to race, the church fails to preach about and live God's love and justice.

I do not want to blindly support racial integration in the church, either. Asian-American churches sometimes need safe spaces where they could share cultural heritages, Asianized Christianity, and criticize white supremacy without fear. Unfortunately, many Asian-American Christians do not utilize their ethnic gatherings in order to analyze racism or to preach about racial relations. Without facing racial issues, Asian-American churches may repeat the same mistakes that many white churches do.

Immediately after the Los Angeles riot of 1992, Korean-American churches met in dialogue with black churches. In this way they could address racial

conflict among people of color all the while naming white supremacy as the major source of this conflict. Twenty-plus years later, where is interracial dialogue happening in our churches? A racially integrated congregation may be ideal, if power differentials are analyzed, but in the meantime we at least ought to be attempting dialogue between members of racially different congregations. By cross-racially appointing ministers and seminary interns, churches can nurture interracial ministry and dialogue on a leadership level.

Finally, our churches and theological schools should consider the American church's global connection to believers around the world. Keeping the origins of "gooks" and "perpetual foreigners" in mind, what roles do American churches play in instigating racism in Asia? Are American missionaries acting like saviors in Asia? Are American seminaries educating Asian international students to ignore analyses of racism so that they will consciously or unconsciously hold racist views when they go back to their respective countries? If the church takes its responsibility seriously to create just and peaceful human relations before God, it is not too late to repent of past racial injustices and examine its present faith in God whose will is to dismantle white supremacy.

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Notes

- 1 Mohanty develops Asian Americans as a political category from a transnational and third-world feminist perspective. Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory Practicing Solidarity* (Duke, 2003), pp. 68-69.
- 2 Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 1-2.
- 3 Kim, pp. 3-5.
- 4 Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (1952; reprinted, Chicago, 2008), p. 57, 112.
- 5 Robert Teranishi, *Asians in the Ivory Tower: Dilemmas of Racial Inequality in American Higher Education* (Teachers College Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 63-68.

As a former Yale student, I recall completing the required annual “student information” on the Yale Student Information System (SIS) webpage. Besides confirming my home address, telephone number, and emergency contacts, I was also expected to update my racial identity. This was always appalling to me, because I am a Puerto Rican woman. “Puerto Rican” is not a race, but an ethnic group.

The SIS process required that I select one racial category. This was a problem for me, because Puerto Ricans consist of three racial groups: African, Taino (Island Natives), and Spaniard. Filling out the SIS during my three years at Yale, I took turns selecting one of the three racial groups. This annual chore served to remind me how I must constantly define what it means to be a Latina in the United States of America, inside and outside the academy.

As a pastor serving in a Latino Spanish-speaking congregation, I find that it can be complicated defining our cultural, racial, and ethnic identities. This is also true with definitions of “Hispanic” or “Latino.” (Latin@ designates both Latinos and Latinas.) Though my church takes pride in being multicultural and multi-ethnic, its focus has been on its Latin American and Caribbean presence. This representation may accurately reflect the adult U.S. Latino population, the majority of whom were born in Latin America or the Caribbean, but the demographics are changing. Today, studies show that 60 percent of all American Latinos were born in the U.S. and are now English-language dominant.

This is the population who, to outsiders, may be considered “not American” and, to insiders, “too American.” This is the generation I identify with – a generation that has been forced to choose by American mainline society, home, and the church. I’ve always stood at a crossroad, trying to survive in two worlds.

For many second- and third-generation Latin@s, the subject of race, ethnicity, and culture was not considered a relevant or urgent issue until their parents’ generation moved to the United States. These notions were introduced to the second and third generations while being educated in U.S. schools. This is the generation that is taught to identify as a “Latin@” or “Hispanic” but speaks English while still communicating with their parents and *abuelos* in Spanish. Navigating both these worlds, one encounters rejection, a lack of belonging.

I was born and raised in New England and was given an ethnic name. Growing up, I attended public schools, where, just because of my name, many of my teachers would assume I did not speak English. When I would visit my family in the island,

they would comment that I was “too American.” At church, I was very active and had a leadership role but felt limited because I spoke English.

Nevertheless, living on the margins of two worlds I take strength from the example of the many characters in the Bible who had no choice but survive in two worlds – Moses, Joseph, Ruth, Esther, Jesus, and others. As a minister and educator, my hope for Latin@ in the U.S. is that they not merely survive but live fully in both worlds, embracing one’s bicultural and bilingual identities.

Can the Latino church help these new generations flourish? In a time when Latin@s are the largest growing population in the country, the Latino church has become the center of hope and new beginnings for many families. The church is where families are served while journeying through the immigration bureaucracy. The church is where first- and second-generation children and teens are reminded of their spiritual purpose and empowered in their educational endeavors. The church is where parents hear that they too have a voice in advocating for their children, and where a prophetic message of social justice is preached. These community roles have ignited the Latino church, but the church can become stagnant if it gets comfortable and resists advancing. By advancement, I mean embracing the demographic shift that is defining these second and third generations still present: The Latino church must see that it is more than an immigrant church or a church that only speaks Spanish. The new generations are seeking a place that can be a bridge connector between the two worlds in which they live.

The Latino church must be ready to serve a multicultural, multiracial, multi-ethnic, and multilingual community: Offer a space for individuals to explore their faith in both Spanish and English, celebrate a rich history and culture, serve as a link to those who are living in two linguistic, cultural worlds.

Living in two worlds has brought meaning and purpose to my life. I have learned to embrace these two worlds as gifts that have shaped me for service. Now, as a minister called to the Latino church, my desire is to continue to celebrate the strengths and potential of a multigenerational congregation in its twenty-first century witness.

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“Laughing at What I Love”: Notes on White Working-Class America

By Tex Sample

Let me say at the outset that the main reason why it is difficult for the white working class to talk about race is that significant numbers of them are prejudiced and bigoted, probably at about the same proportion as upper-middle and upper-class whites.

At the same time, if racism is understood as a systemic, structural reality, as prejudice plus power, a good question can be raised as to whether white working-class people are nearly as racist as powerful elites who shape the policies and procedures of this country to a far greater degree. In addition, there is a long history in the United States of blunting class resistance and rebellion by turning lower-class whites and people of color against each other.

These are important considerations, but in this brief space I want to address other issues less often raised about why working-class whites don't talk about race. I direct my comments at those most likely to read this journal, that is, Anglo and Euro-

pean whites who are more likely to be liberal in their political and economic views. I begin this discussion with certain practices of class.¹

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pean whites who are more likely to be liberal in their political and economic views. I begin this discussion with certain practices of class.¹

So far as I know there is really only one racial slur that you can use in politically correct circles and get away with it. That slur is “redneck” and one hears it frequently used by people on the left. If one used virtually any other racial slur among such political company, one would be either frozen out of the room or driven from it, and I certainly support active opposition to racial slurs. Yet one frequently hears attributions like “redneck politics,” “redneck mindsets,” or simply the characterization of someone or some group as “redneck.” In a paper

on Elvis Presley, Will Campbell takes on this racial slur directly:

“it is an ugly word, an invective used to defame a proud and tragic people – the poor, white, rural, working class of the South. ... Now, if I had said the word we must consider is nigger, chink, jap, dago, spick, chick, or broad, all of you would have been morally outraged at just hearing these despicable epithets said aloud. At least I hope you would've been. You should have been. But hearing the equally offensive insult, redneck, draws not a flinch in most circles. Only a chuckle.”²

Could it be that a disparaging characterization of white working-class people is a reason for their not talking about race, feeling somehow not just left out of conversations about racism but seen as its primary progenitors?

The Genuflections of Class

But it is not only the racial slur. To live in the white working-class world – indeed, to live in the bottom third of the American class structure whatever your race – is to be immersed in the rituals and liturgies of inequality. It is to live in a world where you basically take orders but do not give them, and where you must shut your mouth and offer unreciprocated respect. The granular rites of being defined by class, of being told what to do, of being named as less, and of dealing every day with gestures, glances, and verbal sleights: these constitute the genuflections of stratified domination.

Further, to be working class in a world that worships being “Number One” is to rehearse failure in everyday life. Yet more, in many jobs it is to risk life and limb. And where work is not physically

dangerous one must endure ice-pick assaults on one's dignity. And when white liberals talk about the integration of neighborhoods and schools, they mean that lower-class people of color and whites will engage that venture while the children of the affluent – successful Anglos, African Americans, and Latinos – go to private schools or those well segregated by costly houses and condominiums.

In these “worlds of pain” of the white working class, as Lillian Rubin once described them, it is difficult to talk about race unless the legitimate concerns of these white working people are intrinsic to the conversation.³

A Forgotten History

In discussions of racism, white working-class people often hear talk of white privilege. They hear of the necessity for reparations and the need to make up for the advantages they have had in comparison to people of color. There is no question that in American history it has been better politically and economically to be working-class white than black, brown, gold or red. Still, most white working-class Americans probably do not know their own history because it is not taught in most of our schools. They did not own slaves. More than half of the American colonists – “a large underclass of miserably poor whites” – came to these shores as indentured servants. In England, the growth of commerce, the emergence of capitalism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the land enclosures that were established in order to produce wool loaded up the cities with poor people without work. These poverty-stricken masses subsequently suffered legal punishment, incarceration in workhouses, and/or exile to America.⁴

Other whites came to the colonies as convict labor, migrating to this country to serve out their terms as servants to their “temporary” masters. Many of these died before their terms could be completed.

Most working-class whites may not know that indentured servants on plantations were often treated worse than slaves, mainly because they would serve their master only for the time of indenture whereas the master's slaves were a lifelong investment. As Eugene Genovese explains, wealthy Europeans learned long ago to regard “the lives of the lower class [as] cheap.”⁵ In other words, these aristocrats did not require African slaves to teach them brutality.

Further, working-class whites may not know that poor whites who worked on slave ships died at a significantly higher rate than did the enslaved Africans on board, although, I hasten to say, the great preponderance of slaves on these ships meant that thousands of more slaves died than their keepers.⁶

At the same time, ships filled with white indentured servants had high death rates. A sea trip to America took eight to ten weeks. Bad weather during the voyage meant a longer trip and the risk of running out of food. One sloop, the *Sea Flower*, left Ireland in 1741 on a voyage that took sixteen weeks. With 106 passengers on board, forty-six died of starvation, and six of those were eaten by the survivors.⁷

What working class whites *do* know is that they have to work harder and longer now than they used to and that it takes two paychecks to make it, provided there are two earners in a family unit. They must know now, as everyone must, about the increasing disparities of wealth and income that occurred over the last forty years. It is obscene that since the mid-1970s productivity increased 80.4 percent in the U.S. while wages for working Americans increased just 10.7 percent, with most of this growth occurring during the mid-to-late 1990s.⁸ In fact, the seeming gains on white working men by working people of color and by working white women are more a function of the dismal wage situation of these white men than substantive gains by these others. As one white working man said to me: “I may not be real smart, but I do know the difference between a rainstorm and somebody pissing on my boots.”

I do not have the space here to say more about the long history of white laboring people in the American colonies and the U.S. It is a wicked history of struggle, oppression, exploitation, and violence.

A good question can be raised as to whether white working-class people are nearly as racist as powerful elites who shape the policies and procedures of this country to a far greater degree.

To speak of the privilege of the white working class in this land is to obscure this history. To discuss race and gender apart from this history is to engage in a profound falsification. But let me be very clear. I have no interest in minimizing the wickedness of American slavery and its Jim Crow consequences, or of the violations and exploitation of the brown peoples of this land, or the twisted bigotry, exploitation and incarceration of Asians, and certainly not the stealing of the continent from and the genocide of Native Americans.

At the same time, the exploitation, domination, and class warfare committed against white working people must also be part of this story. If more attention were given to this story of race and class, white working-class people would be more likely to enter

talk about race and perhaps enter into alliances with people of color so necessary to reform the violations of race, class, and gender in this society.

Still, it is not only because of the bigotry against, and the struggles of, white working-class people that make it difficult to talk about class. It also has to do with a difference of culture. The group I want to speak of is a very large segment of white working people often labeled as “social conservatives.” I contend that this label and the identification of this label with certain positions on social issues obscure a great deal of what goes on with people often misidentified by this term. I describe this large group of working-class Americans as people of a traditional oral culture. To be sure, not all working-class people participate in this culture, but most do. And not all of those formed in this culture are working-class people. Further, this large cultural group has certain resonances with racial and ethnic minorities even with all of their differences. But my focus here is on this large white working-class traditional oral group.⁹

Family vs. Market Freedom

Let me contrast this tradition with the laissez-faire economic position in order to sharpen the differences between that conservative mindset and the traditional oral culture I have in mind. Among laissez-faire conservatives the focus is on the free individual, who is “prior” to society and the state. This individual pursues self-interest in a competitive free market. The conviction is that individualistic pursuit of self-interest in a free market results in the greatest good of the greatest number. Defenders of this position support high military spending in a minimalist state, and their greatest fear is the loss of market freedom.

In contrast, traditional working-class people place primary emphasis on the family, not the free individual. The family is the core institution. They seek cooperation among key groups like the family, the school, the church, and other traditional institutions. They do not stress self-interest, especially of an individualistic kind, because it is corrosive of family relationships. This is especially so in the case of the man, provided there is one, as the primary breadwinner. If he pursues his individual self-interest, he may walk out the door, leaving poor families devastated and near-poor families poverty-stricken.

Further, the greatest fear of these traditional oral people is moral corruption, and this for a basic reason.¹⁰ Anthropologist James Ault Jr. makes the case that morality in this culture serves to support the structure of family relationships in order to cope and survive. He finds that this kind of traditional culture basically operates to control male sociality

and to minimize the potentially disruptive behavior of men in these settings.¹¹

It is important here to understand that political and economic positions on social issues are not at the base of the lives and practices of these traditional families. What is more foundational are the relationships, convictions, commitments, and practices that enable these families to deal with a world that does not come out right. This means that their political attitudes can vary significantly depending on how a given question relates to their lives. The great majority of these families do not listen to the National Organization of Women or to Focus on the Family. They do not turn to the NAACP or to the Ku Klux Klan, though, of course, these influence some. They are far more likely to address problems by thinking about them in terms of how they affect their families, the cooperative institutions upon which they depend, and the morality that sustains the structure of these relationships and enables them to manage and to make it through the night.

The point is that the practices of this traditional oral culture do not generate a commitment to an explicit list of positions on social issues. In fact, it is a good question whether thinking in terms of social issues is the way to approach the people of this culture in any case. So talking about race as an issue may be the least effective way to approach the relationship between the white working class and people of color. It is far better to deal with the relationships of the family, institutions, and the contexts of the people they know. I suspect this would also work well with many working-class people of color.

Healthy Suspicions

The people of this tradition are also oral. I do not mean orality as found in a primal culture, one where there is not a written language or print. Most of the people of a traditional oral culture can read and write, although many cannot. By the use of the term oral I am referring to a way of using language. The people of this oral tradition do not process language the way that college graduates do. Proverbs, adages, and sayings populate their talk. They reject the formalities and niceties of more “sophisticated” words and discourse. They are suspicious of fine print, big words, and fancy language, having been hustled by people using language this way many times, not to mention the ways in which they have been put down by those who use words and talk this way. These traditional oral people engage the world with story, and stories are the embodiment of their wisdom, great sources of their humor, and rich ways of understanding the world and dealing with its mystery. Further, much of their use of language is of

a more tacit kind, suggesting a contrast with more representative language. That is, their tacit language like their tacit knowing does not attempt to state in the descriptive and conceptual terms of a high literacy a given topic or question, but rather uses the ostensible situation to convey what they mean. Most of the skills and jobs of the working-class world are not learned through manuals and literate discourse, but through apprenticeship training and through being shown: "Do it like this."

It should come as no surprise, then, that this traditional oral culture affects the way one comes at any question and certainly the way one approaches "social issues." In fact, one can say that these traditional oral people are not interested in social issues, at least not in the way the college-educated are. This does not mean, for example, that they are unaffected by or unaware of the impact of black or brown people on their lives. They have *varying* opinions about affirmative action or immigration, especially as these impact job opportunities in their communities for themselves or members of their families. But talk about such things is difficult when in the presence of *others*, especially the college-trained.

One person in my extended family speaks with great frustration and irritation about two friends who went away to college and who now have "opinions about everything" and "an answer to every question." It is quite clear from our conversations that her two college friends, however, have little or no interest in the circumstances my family member faces and the difficulties of her life. Her friends talk of African Americans, Latinos, homosexuals, and the glass ceiling of corporate America. They never mention white working-class people as a "social issue." They hardly know any such folk, except my relative, and regard working people in general as rednecks. Some of their "best friends," however, "are African American."

So stack these things up: calling people by a racist slur, telling them how privileged they are, failing even to notice the realities of class in the white working-class world and its long history of oppression and exploitation, speaking out of a cultural setting they do not share and being ignorant of the traditional oral culture white working people not only embody but value, and then expecting them to talk about the "social issue" of race. Why would not these things alone make it difficult?

Pastor Lourey Savick tells the story of being in an audience where a white Ph.D. candidate made a presentation on the liberal and the "social conservative" mindset. Before a largely white liberal

audience the presentation opened with a couple of cartoons on creationism, which provoked considerable laughter from the group. The presentation then moved on to a larger range of questions and issues but nevertheless with each issue covered in a similar way of demeaning the so-called "social conservative position." After the presentation the audience was invited to respond with questions and comments. One of the persons present said: "You liberals need to understand that when you laugh, you laugh at things I love, things that are very dear to me, really, at me."¹²

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Notes

- 1 I want to express my appreciation to the Rev. Sam Mann for his careful reading and comments on this article.
- 2 "Elvis Presley as Redneck," Elvis Presley Symposium, University of Mississippi, Aug. 7, 1995, p. 1.
- 3 Lillian B. Rubin, *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working-Class Family* (Basic Books, 1976).
- 4 Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (Harper Colophon Books, 1980), p. 42.
- 5 Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (Vintage Books, 1974). p. 57.
- 6 Genovese.
- 7 Zinn, *A People's History*, p. 49.
- 8 Lawrence Mishel, "The Wedges between Productivity and Median Compensation Growth," Economic Policy Institute Issue Brief #330, April 26, 2012, www.epi.org.
- 9 I have addressed this large cultural group in a number of my books. See *Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, and Minnie Pearl: Doing Ministry in an Oral Culture* (Westminster John Knox, 1994), *White Soul: Country Music, the Church, and Working Americans* (Abingdon, 1996), and *Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus*, (Abingdon, 2006).
- 10 It was Rebecca Klatch who first alerted me to this traditional group in contrast to the laissez-faire conservative. See her *Women of the New Right: Women in the Political Economy* (Temple, 1987).
- 11 *Spirit and Flesh: Life in a Fundamental Baptist Church* (Knopf, 2004), pp. 189-200.
- 12 I thank Pastor Savick for permission to use this story.

The Jazz of Worship and Creole Faith

By Otis Moss III

As a relatively new pastor of a thriving megachurch, I am witnessing a growing gap between multiple generations of worshippers, highlighted by the worship habits of older adults (who have an orientation towards spirituals, blues, gospel, and soul music that arose out of complex, conflicted black experience) and the postmodern, urban cultural creation known as Hip-Hop.

Hip-Hop is a poster child for this clash of cultures. It represents an urbanized value system detached from the southern, Africanized ethos that shaped the black church, an ethos suspicious of profane rhetoric.¹ Hip-Hop is not the problem per se, but it points to larger cultural implications that have high stakes for the future of congregational life: How do we create worship space for both the Be-Bop and Hip-Hop generations? I don't mean gimmicks or new songs, but a value system that embraces African culture, prophetic witness, and the love ethic of Christ?

Merging Democracy and the Blues

I think the answer is found in a "creole faith." It draws inspiration from a jazz vision of improvisation and democracy, a legacy of Africans in America. Creole faith merges a blues and spiritual aesthetic with democratic new-world ideals, ideals that enliven what we call jazz. Creole faith is an expression of Christianity based on the unique theological vocabulary that Africans brought to America. A jazz-creole approach challenges American-Anglo and African-American churches to try fresh strategies for worship and theology. I consider it one of the most vibrant wings of American Christianity today.

"I take that emptiness and try to fill it up."² The blues aesthetic uttered by August Wilson's character, Ma Rainey, describes the spiritual impulse vibrating through my life. The sounds of John Coltrane's saxophone, James Baldwin's prose, Zora Neale Hurston's "folk-ways," Fannie Lou Hamer's grassroots political rhetoric, Martin Luther King

Jr.'s democratic Christian witness, Howard Thurman's southern-inspired spiritual mysticism, the urban-blues-centered postmodern beats of J Dilla and Madlib, the poetic, honey-dipped voice of Jill Scott – these compose the song of my spiritual journey. Through them the Western division of the sacred and the secular dissolves before the blues-and-gospel motif of black church experience, with eternal virtues rooted in Christ.

My parents are children of the South and products of the heritage of the black church. Dr. Otis Moss Jr., my father, mentor, and pastor, is now pastor emeritus of the Olivet Institutional Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio, where he served for thirty-three years before retirement in 2008. Growing up in Olivet, I witnessed southern patterns of rhythmic speech and prophetic Christian witness drawn from the Old Testament prophets. Having two parents as veterans of the civil rights movement created a theological synergy where themes of love and liberation danced around the dinner table and found voice in casual conversation.

An Extra Ingredient: Love

A community historically forced to play chords of blues and gospel views Christ as a Savior and Liberator rooted in love and committed to healing. This idea, developed further by King, advanced a democratic vision grounded in Christian ethics and Africanized theological notions of blues, gospel, and jazz – a creole faith. And it added an ingredient: love. Talk of liberation, revolution, or justice is empty rhetoric if the tough question of love is

not part of the equation. My theology is founded on this elusive endeavor of spreading a life of love within communities scarred by the cruel nihilism of modern, now postmodern, culture.

The nation's progressive wing shudders at the notion of engaging any concept that cannot be empirically defined. The conservative community abandons the challenge of love when love stirs people to question doctrine and realign political alliances. In our culture, love gets jettisoned from prophetic doctrine in favor of edicts: Instead of creating a loving dialogue around poverty, abortion, and race, we take positions. But the black church has held on to a vision of love with special poignancy. Its unique history required it to see America from the underside and adopt the love ethic of Christ as a community bruised and scorned by a society claiming democratic ideals.

A vision of democracy infuses that love, and jazz is its deliverer. More than music, jazz is a cultural and theological idea. A jazz aesthetic combines the Africanized faith of my ancestors with democratic optimism. Jazz is the one true American art form, born in the crucible of southern pain and frontier optimism. The womb of slavery and the impulse of new-world exploration created conditions that impregnated a French colony (New Orleans) with Africanized democratic ideals hidden in complex musical notation.³ Jazz sprung from this creole culture.⁴

Everyone's Right to Solo

Improvisation and African polyrhythmic composition, layered with European scales, created this new sound in the emerging South. European instruments such as piano and bass were married to drum and saxophone. Jazz composition had a strict thematic structure, but every instrument had the right to solo. This was unheard of within the confines of, for instance, French chamber music, but now it promoted the democratic idea that each instrument was welcome to share in the composition and allowed to speak musically from the player's own cultural context. Never during performance would the piano oppress the drum, or the saxophone tell the bass player that he or she was "three-fifths" of an instrument. They flourished together. European chamber music maintained a strict class hierarchy where only certain instruments were considered worthy of playing before aristocratic audiences. Jazz stated radically: *All are welcome and every instrument has a gift to be played before the people.*

The jazz ideal was further leavened by the call and response of black preaching tradition. By now

this theological spirit can be found not only in black churches, but Anglo, Korean and Latino faith communities. No church can claim "cultural purity." We all merge, borrow, create a theological gumbo.

Coming to Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, I found a congregation committed to black cultural heritage, social activism, and a ministry to the Hip-Hop generation still struggling with its faith journey. To honor this mission, we adopted a "Creole Style Worship Experience" with a multigenerational and multisensory liturgy that embodies a very African and yet deeply American jazz aesthetic.

In *The Gospel Reloaded*, Chris Seay explores the nexus between art and worship.⁵ His methodology reinforced my sense of the power of a jazz-creole spirit. At Trinity we created a holistic worship team that deploys visual art, drama, dance, music, homiletics and technology. I use the term "360°" (borrowed from graphic design) to explain our worship goals. The church has adopted the phrase "Jazz Narrative of Worship," which speaks to both disciplined preparation and our conviction that the Spirit creates room for improvisation. This theological idea is the basis for leadership development, conflict resolution, and social-justice organizing.

Any good jazz band lets everyone solo. Any church serious about Christ must allow each person the opportunity to express his or her gifts. Nothing is more beautiful than when individuals find their groove and create a new chord in the church-wide composition I call A Love Supreme. In the twenty-first century church, everyone has a part in the band, and all have worth in God's eyes.

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Notes

- 1 Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, (Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 2 August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Theatre Communications Group, 2008).
- 3 Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt*, (Harper, 2011).
- 4 Freddi Williams Evans, *Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans* (University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2011).
- 5 Chris Seay and Greg Garrett, *The Gospel Reloaded: Exploring Spirituality and Faith in The Matrix* (Pinon Press, 2003).

What's Missing in the Dialogue about Race in America?

By Ronald David

I can imagine two levels of response to the question at hand. I might respond, say, as a public health administrator. This I will call the macro level of civic (and, I hope, civil) discourse. Here my intention would be to influence public policy for the good of the social order. On another level, as a priest and chaplain, I might reflect on the micro level of interpersonal dialogue. Here my hope would be to grow in the knowledge and love of my dialogical partner, to co-create new meaning of our shared experience of race.

For me, the micro level of engagement has been the most difficult ... and the most fruitful. My difficulty is that I must strive to acknowledge my own thoughts and feelings. Unlike the macro level of discourse, I cannot deploy an imaginary shield of anonymity or detached objectivity. I feel more vulnerable in intimate dialogue. Yet it is at this level of relationship that I have witnessed the fruit of my interlocutor's liberation and tasted my own.

So, with this prologue I return to the question: What is missing in the dialogue about race in America? I reply: What is missing are participants who are compassionate, candid, courageous, and consciously relational – factors that would enrich both levels of engagement.

Sub-Atomic Communion

I am a relational being through and through. I live and move and have my being in relationship, through relationship, and for the very sake of relationship. I believe this to be true of all human beings. Indeed, from the perspective of quantum mechanics, relationality is eerily evident throughout the fabric of the universe and manifest as “entanglement.” All things created in the primordial Big Bang remain entangled; space-time is a construct that gives the illusion of separateness. As one preeminent theologian, John D. Zizioulas, states the case, “There is no true being without communion. Noth-

ing exists as an ‘individual,’ conceivable in itself. Communion is an ontological category.”¹

The reality of this communion notwithstanding, I have difficulty loving my neighbor as myself. The challenge is not in loving my neighbor *in the same way* that I love my illusory self. After all, even the love of that illusory self waxes and wanes. Rather, the difficulty is in experiencing and acknowledging myself as an ensemble of relationships. I imagine this is true for others who have been, as I have,

Dialogue about race in America is replete with unacknowledged fear. What is missing is courage to name our fear.

enculturated to believe and behave as though we were born utterly dependent and that our developmental trajectory is toward independence and rugged individualism.

Acknowledging this elemental communion between us all – becoming conscious of our relational selves – is the first ingredient missing from dialogue about race in America.

Missing alongside the consciously relational self is the courageously emotional self. Curiously, even as emotions give rise to² and constitute the sense of self³ we are hardly aware of our emotions in dialogue – and are loathe to share them. When we

do become conscious of an emergent emotion we will likely attempt to suppress or disguise it. This is especially true of fear, and dialogue about race in America is replete with unacknowledged fear.

To be sure, emotions are expressed in dialogue and irrepressibly so. In the domain of civic discourse I can hear James Baldwin's outrage at white men for denying their guilt.⁴ I can feel Shelby Steele's sadness or shame for the black man's proclivity to claim innocence and thereby assume the role of victim.⁵ I can hear Lani Guinier's lament, in the prologue to her otherwise hope-filled book, *The Miner's Canary*, as she recounts her worries about her son growing up as a black man in America.⁶ And I can certainly hear the undertones of Michelle Alexander's righteous outrage in her masterful book *The New Jim Crow*.⁷

True enough, Shelby Steele names a fear: "What black and white Americans fear are the sacrifices and risks that true racial harmony demands. This fear is the measure of our racial chasm."

But these pointed insights and arguments from civil discourse are not easily transferrable to intimate, interpersonal dialogue when one has to name one's own fear and propose the self-sacrifices to be made and personal risks to be taken. What is miss-

I am forever endeavoring to avoid the stigma and the stereotype of the "angry black man."

ing, then, is courage to name our fear. At least that is true for me as an African American for whom fear triggers and masquerades as anger. I am forever endeavoring to avoid the stigma and the stereotype of the "angry black man" ... and even that level of candor requires that I imagine you, the reader, as a trusted friend.

Candor Deficit

In dialogue about race I am more inclined to be guarded rather than candid. There is this notable exception: In retrospect I am aware of ways I have employed candor as a rhetorical device designed to intentionally provoke ire! Such a strategy has the effect of safely projecting my own anger. Should you respond to the provocation by taking in and acting out the emotion, I can claim innocence. So candor in the service of truth is largely missing from dialogue about race relations in America. So, too, is compassion.

Whether or not we are conscious of the experience, human beings do "suffer with" those we wit-

ness in pain.⁸ It is a curious fact that the very same area of the brain in which blood flow and oxygen consumption increases with physical pain is also active with the social pain of estrangement, isolation, and alienation.⁹

While compassion is our biological nature, active empathy is an experience that requires the cerebral cortex, a structure that evolved after the formation of the limbic brain. Empathy requires data gathering and perspective taking. We learn empathy, just as we learn apathy and antipathy. It seems to me that conflict-filled race relations of late are more likely to excite the latter.

Compassionate, candid, courageous, consciously relational beings – if we could recover these "ingredients" for the contemporary dialogue about race, how might interpersonal dialogue feel and sound? Here, just as I have attempted to engage you, the reader, as an imaginary interlocutor, I would like to engage Rep. John Boehner in conversation about an incident that may or may not have been racially "tainted." In this conversation I am mindful of purposely dancing on the borderline of civic discourse and interpersonal dialogue.

Rumors of Annihilation

The incident in question is Mr. Boehner's remarks to the politically moderate Ripon Society on Jan. 23, 2013, in Washington, D.C.¹⁰ In that speech Mr. Boehner's face is bereft of affect even as he declares that President Obama's administration will "attempt to annihilate the Republican Party." He anticipates working in an "environment that is far hostile [sic] than anything we've seen in a long, long time." He poses a number of questions including, "Where's the ground we fight on?"

Here the reader might well exclaim and ask, "Wait a moment! What does Mr. Boehner's speech have to do with the dialogue on race in America?" Mr. Boehner, too, would be understandably troubled if I were to imply that his comments were racially tinged, let alone wholly tainted.

Still, I wish to enter this dialogue with the hope of exploring and clarifying our thoughts and feelings. For myself, I want to be able to speak aloud about why race comes up for me at all. This is a difficult challenge as I endeavor to avoid the very trap James Baldwin warns of – i.e., "... the black man can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession which fatally contains an accusation."¹¹

On the other hand, if I have compassion for Mr. Boehner, I should try to understand why he harbors a fear that the Republican Party of which he is a

member and which he represents truly believes that it is someone's goal "to just shove us in the dustbin of history." The absence of emotional expression on his face notwithstanding, I give credence to his fear. It is a fear that seems punctuated if not affirmed by the skyrocketing sales of guns and ammunition long before the president's reelection and long before Sandy Hook.

Faces of Fear

Perhaps I understand his fear because his emotionless face is a perfect projection screen for my own desire to at least figuratively annihilate a political party that seems ready to do the same to the president with whom I identify racially if not always politically. Perhaps he is unconsciously trying to present himself as innocent of any intention to "annihilate" this president or his administration. Or perhaps Mr. Boehner is projecting onto the Democratic Party and the president the self-destructive behavior the Republican Party seems to have inflicted on itself. And yes, there are moments, many moments, when I pray that some members and tenets of republicanism (read individualism) would self-destruct.

Whatever the case, it is primarily out of compassion and concern for Mr. Boehner that I wish to explore the trigger for his fear, even as I attempt to explore the basis of my own. If Mr. Boehner and I are not one literally (and I believe that we are), at the very least we are inextricably bound in a "single gar-

For the sake of healing and wholeness we owe it to ourselves to excavate rather than bury the reality of race and race conflict in America.

ment of destiny." We share a history of race in this country that resists colorblindness and the facile erasure of race. Race-less conflict may be possible, but at this moment in history it is a "diagnosis of exclusion." For the sake of healing and wholeness we owe it to ourselves to excavate rather than bury the reality of race and race conflict in America.

If we can recover the necessary ingredients – find a way to be consciously relational beings of compassion, candor, and courage – we just might be able to co-author new meanings of race in America. You and I just might be able to co-create a new world.

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Notes

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- 2 A.N. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994).
- 3 K.J. Gergen, *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction* (Harvard, 1997).
- 4 James Baldwin, "White Man's Guilt" in *The Price of the Ticket* (St. Martin's/Marek, 1985).
- 5 Shelby Steele, "I'm Black, You're White, Who's Innocent?" in *Harper's Magazine*, June 1988.
- 6 Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* (Harvard, 2003).
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- 8 M.V. Saarela, et al., "The Compassionate Brain: Humans Detect Intensity of Pain from Another's Face," *Cerebral Cortex* 17, 2007: pp., 230-237.
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- 10 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2013/01/23/boehner-obama-wants-to-annihilate-the-gop/>
- 11 Baldwin, p. 412.
- 12 Guinier and Torres.

The Future of Civil Rights

Is it time to move on to a "post civil rights era"?

A Public Religion Research Institute poll asked Americans to respond to this statement: "Over the past couple of decades, the government has paid too much attention to the problems of blacks and other minorities."

- 43 percent of whites said yes, 53 percent said no. The regional breakdown of whites saying yes was: South (51 percent), Northeast (37 percent), Midwest (43 percent), West (37 percent).

- 20 percent of blacks said yes, 79 percent said no.

- 43 percent of Hispanics said yes, 55 percent said no.

The survey asked about another statement: "Today discrimination against whites has become as big a problem as discrimination against blacks and other minorities."

- 53 percent of whites said yes, 45 percent said no. The regional breakdown of whites saying yes was: South (60 percent), Northeast (45 percent), Midwest (50 percent), West (51 percent).

- 27 percent of blacks said yes, 72 percent said no.

- 35 percent of Hispanics said yes, 62 percent said no.



Our Second Declaration of Independence

By Harry S. Stout

In contrast to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural, his Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, freeing all slaves resident in the Confederacy, is not celebrated as a particularly personal or inspirational event.¹ Few Americans have even read it. The language is dry and technical, the eloquence suppressed in a tightly argued legal brief. But when completed the document was revolutionary, indeed nothing short of a second Declaration of Independence.

Although lacking the soaring sermoniac rhetoric of the Second Inaugural, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation is arguably of far greater historical significance. Indeed, without the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln's Second Inaugural would not enjoy the significance it holds.

Despite the Emancipation's legal language, we must look to a profound spiritual odyssey on Lincoln's part – unique in his life – rather than law in order to understand the document's evolution and significance. In the months leading up to its creation, Lincoln wrestled with a personal God and would not act until he was satisfied that emancipation was God's personal mandate. At no other time in his life did Lincoln engage so profoundly with a sense of both God and his own destiny.

Providential Politics

By 1862 Lincoln's religious moorings were moving in ever more individual and providentialist directions. While the term "providence" enjoyed wide currency in nineteenth-century American discourse, it was a capacious term holding multiple meanings. For many liberal Protestants and free thinkers, providence assumed an impersonal meaning more closely identified with fatalism than personal divine direction. Such a "Unitarian" perspective fit an earlier Lincoln who repudiated the Calvinism of his youth in favor of a more impersonal fatalism. Historian Richard Carwardine has explored Lincoln's religion in depth and concludes "the weight of evi-

dence points ... to a Lincoln as more in sympathy with Unitarian, not Trinitarian doctrines."²

But two years of unprecedented war and an increasing preoccupation with the moral issue of slavery moved Lincoln toward a more orthodox conception of providence featuring a God who was immediately involved with His creation and predisposed to intervene directly in human affairs to effect His purposes. Lincoln would never move in

The Emancipation Proclamation was a revolutionary declaration in an ongoing revolution in which we continue to participate.

a Christocentric evangelical direction, but he did increasingly sense a personal God at work in the war and a God whose engagement was intimately tied up with the moral issue of slavery and emancipation.

With civil war rising to unimaginable levels of devastation, Lincoln was ready to bring the personal, moral, and political together in his Emancipation Proclamation. How did he get to that point? From a moral perspective, Lincoln was always anti-slavery. In a letter to Kentucky editor Albert G. Hodges, he wrote: "I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel." But, he continued, "I have never understood that the Presidency con-

ferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling. It was in the oath I took that I would to the best of my ability preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.”³

That Constitution explicitly upheld the institution of slavery, at least in the original thirteen states. In time of peace, Lincoln believed that he could not act to emancipate slaves based on his moral principles because loyalty to the Constitution required him to protect the “peculiar institution.”

Military Necessity

But by 1862, Lincoln saw a way out that would both pursue emancipation for slaves in the Confederacy and uphold the Constitution he had pledged to defend. Picking up a point originally made by John Quincy Adams, Lincoln realized that in time of war and grave endangerment, “military necessity” could trump constitutional liberties. Acting in his capacity as commander-in-chief Lincoln could free slaves whose labor was undergirding the Confederate rebellion as a “war measure” to put down the rebellion by taking away their chief asset – the unfree labor of four million slaves.

“Military necessity,” of course, is a relative term, which explains the technical language in the Emancipation Proclamation. Unlike presidential orations, the Emancipation Proclamation would be subject to judicial review so that every term had to be nailed down and properly hitched to its proper post. That post could not be Lincoln’s personal disapproval of slavery, but rather the “military necessity” of taking away Confederate manpower.

Lincoln knew such a course of action would define his presidency – and the war. So for the first time he began to search for the will of God in pursuing his nearly unthinkable course of action.

Divine Necessity

In June 1862, Lincoln met with a delegation of Pennsylvania Quakers headed by Thomas Garrett, organizer of the Underground Railroad, who pressed him to emancipate the slaves. Though by no means the first time clergy importuned Lincoln, it was the first time Lincoln offered a religious sentiment, revealing how his course was changing in ever more religious directions. According to Garrett, Lincoln responded that “he was deeply sensible of his need of Divine assistance.” He went on to say that “some-time [he had] thought that perhaps he might be an instrument in God’s hands of accomplishing a great work.” But what that great work might involve was not certain. Lincoln confessed, “God’s

way of accomplishing the end ... may be different from theirs.”

Three months later, on Sept. 13, Lincoln met with two more ministers from Chicago, William Patton and John Demster, who brought with them a petition, signed by area clergy, urging emancipation on the president. By then Lincoln had come to the same conclusion as his petitioners and drafted a preliminary proclamation, but in their company he played coy, asking questions that would imply he wouldn’t move forward. What would the country do with the freedmen? How could it be enforced as long as Confederates controlled their states? Who would feed the freedmen and protect them?

However, in one significant aside Lincoln also showed his hand. First he reiterated the pledge he made to the Quaker delegation: “It is my earnest desire to know the will of Providence in this matter. And if I can learn what it is I will do it!” Later, as the conversation moved forward, he conceded that in fact he had been contemplating just the course of action his visitors enjoined:

Understand, I raise no objections against it on legal or constitutional grounds; for, as commander-in-chief of the army and navy, in time of war, I suppose I have a right to take any measure which may best subdue the enemy. Nor do I urge objections of a moral nature, in view of possible consequences of insurrection and massacre at the South. I view the matter as a practical war measure, to be decided upon according to the advantages or disadvantages it may offer to the suppression of the rebellion ... Whatever shall appear to be God’s will I will do.⁴

Although Lincoln had already decided to issue the proclamation, he needed a sign from God. After Lincoln shared his intention to draft the proclamation with his cabinet, Secretary of State William Seward urged him to issue the proclamation only after a victory, else the opposition would label it a desperation measure put forward by a failing president. Lincoln agreed. Later he told Salmon Chase “that if General Lee was driven back [at Antietam] ... I would crown the result by the declaration of freedom to the slaves.” The reasons eventually became clear. He told his cabinet that he had said nothing about this determination to anyone in his circle; it was a promise he made only to “myself and” – here, Chase noted in his diary that Lincoln hesitated – “to my Maker.”

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles also described this unprecedented moment in his diary

when Lincoln described “a vow, a covenant, that if God gave us the victory in the approaching battle he would consider it an indication of the divine will and that it was his duty to move forward in the cause of emancipation.” Allen Guelzo has noted that this was only the second instance in all of Lincoln’s writings when he went on record as preceding the word God with the possessive “my.” As Lincoln explained to his cabinet: “God had decided this question in favor of the slaves.”⁵

An Exalted Status

While the Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural remain engrained in American memory, they did not occupy such exalted states in Lincoln’s mind.

Without the Proclamation, there would be no Lincoln Memorial bearing the Gettysburg Address and no Second Inaugural because there would be no Union.

Only his Emancipation Proclamation was accorded that special status, the most solemn and spiritual political decision of Lincoln’s life. Lincoln – and his Confederate adversaries – recognized that beyond its legal rhetoric, the proclamation actually affected lives directly – four million of them.

Of hundreds of presidential proclamations, including President Washington’s famous proclamation of American neutrality, none exerted a greater impact, and Lincoln knew it. At last the pieces were aligned for him to follow his personal instincts in an entirely fitting and legitimately constitutional manner. It was with this realization that Lincoln concluded his December 1862 Annual Message to Congress with the stirring peroration:

Fellow-citizens, we can not escape history. We of this Congress and this Administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor to the latest generation ... We, even we here, hold the power and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free – honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just – a way which if followed the world will forever applaud and God must forever bless.⁶

Without the Emancipation Proclamation there would be no Lincoln Memorial bearing the Gettysburg Address and no Second Inaugural because there would be no Union. As John Burt aptly summarizes: “Emancipation and Union were not contradictory goals. They were not separate goals. They were the same thing.”⁷ Although hardly single-handedly responsible for emancipation and the end of slavery, Lincoln was indispensable – and he knew it. He had the catch in his throat while describing his covenant with God to his cabinet because he realized the enormity of what he was doing. He caught the thunderbolt. This was the single most momentous outcome that he – and he alone – could ever accomplish in his lifetime. The shock was existentially electric and he felt it.

We in the twenty-first century feel it too. Viewed contextually, the Emancipation Proclamation was a revolutionary declaration in an ongoing revolution in which we continue to participate. Considered as an idea rather than an event, the Revolution is as alive today as it was in 1776 or 1863. We continue to face the contradictions between the revolutionary rhetoric of equality contained in the Declaration of Independence and the reality of ongoing prejudice, self-interest, and discrimination. Like Lincoln, we confront the question of our destiny and the intentions of providence. And like Lincoln, we cannot escape history and the judgments it bears.

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Notes

- 1 The Emancipation Proclamation applied only to slaves dwelling in Confederate states under Confederate administration. It did not apply to slaves in the border states. Slavery was prohibited universally with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1864.
- 2 Richard Carwardine, “Lincoln’s Religion,” in Eric Foner, ed., *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World* (Norton, 2008), p. 230.
- 3 Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Lincoln Speeches and Writings 1859-1865* (Library of America, 1989), pp. 585-86.
- 4 Fehrenbacher, ed., *Lincoln Speeches and Writings*, p. 367.
- 5 Quoted in Allen C. Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln Redeemer President* (Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 341-42.
- 6 Fehrenbacher, ed., *Lincoln Speeches and Writings*, p. 415.
- 7 John Burt, *Lincoln’s Tragic Pragmatism: Lincoln, Douglas, and Moral Conflict* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 365.

The Multicultural Future: An Interview with Khyati Joshi



Khyati Y. Joshi, a scholar and commentator on far-ranging issues of religion, diversity, and social justice, came to the U.S. from India with her parents when she was two. They settled in Atlanta, and so began her adventure in ethnic identity in a nation where she was neither black nor white. Today she teaches in the School of Education at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, NJ, and consults nationwide on questions of diversity and religion with school districts and teachers.

*Her 2006 book, *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground: Religion, Race, and Ethnicity in Indian America* (Rutgers, 2006), based on forty interviews, explores how second-generation Indian Americans make sense of race, religion, and ethnicity as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or Christians.*

In the book she writes, "The Irish and the Jews, to name two major constituents of the last great wave of immigration, were thought of as racially different, until this view was finally overwhelmed by the force of white skin and social mobility. Nearly half a century after the Civil Rights Act was passed, more than half a century after Brown v. Board of Education, old-fashioned racism is finally beginning to become socially unacceptable. ... Yet despite the decline of Jim Crow racism, America still needs its 'others,' and despite the flourishing of non-Christian religions, we prefer our differences to be visible. So we racialize religion ... Unlike the Irish and Jews of a century ago, however, Indian American Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs will not melt into whiteness after a generation." Khyati Joshi spoke to Reflections in March 2013.

REFLECTIONS: In *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground*, you say, "America is changing how it categorizes people." The nation's demographics are shifting. Are definitions of race changing too?

JOSHI: We need a deeper awareness that certain groups have had advantages and others have not, and this system of advantages and disadvantages is still embedded in our laws. It's a matter that whites have an advantage, white privilege, and Christians have an advantage, Christian privilege. The nation has looked different ever since the Immigration Act of 1965. You have many people coming here from very different places and raising families and sending their kids into the school system.

That's where things are finally starting to change on the ground. Racial, ethnic, and religious diversity is exploding. However, the presence of diversity doesn't mean that laws and traditions about faith in the public square are keeping up. The question is, are we going to continue to have rules in place as if it's still fifty years ago, or are we going to create

policies that better reflect how we're living in our own time?

REFLECTIONS: As we become more multiracial, will racial prejudice likely diminish, or intensify?

JOSHI: I see progress happening as two steps forward, one step back. I've seen marked improvements in the last ten years. Looking at public schools, a decade ago there was little more than lip service given to multiculturalism. Today there's still too much lip service, but more and more teachers and administrators are taking it seriously. Multiculturalism is about more than race; it includes sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic class, and religion, among other identities.

As a reaction to all this diversity, we are seeing a surge of nativism. Scholars point out that race is not a biological phenomenon, but a human-made idea. It's not "real." we give it meaning through laws and social values. There will always be efforts to define people and divide people. Historically, that's often been based on lightness and darkness of skin, but ideas of "race" and inborn difference have also been applied to religion.

REFLECTIONS: When whites lose majority status, will the preoccupation with race end?

JOSHI: Well, let's do the math. The white majority might become a minority by 2050, but add 275 years of laws and institutional structures benefiting just one people, and that's still a lot to overcome.

Meanwhile, many people still think of "racism" in terms of the historic African-American experience. So immigrants who face bias either don't recognize it, or they deny it's happening to them, or they say, "Well, I'm new here, and I don't want to rock the boat." But they still feel excluded, targeted, isolated – and so do their kids.

REFLECTIONS: You were born in India, raised in Atlanta. In your book you call yourself a proud southerner. What does that mean to you?

JOSHI: I have an appreciation for what the South has gone through, and where Atlanta is headed. I'm not saying it's a bed of roses. But I appreciate southern culture – the combination of genteelness and matter-of-factness. In the South, I know where I belong – and where I don't belong. There are places fifty miles outside of Atlanta that I wouldn't want to stop for gas. I've encountered racism in Massachusetts and New Jersey too. There you find what one columnist has called "Have a Nice Day" racism – a covert racism that speaks behind your back. The South, and the U.S. as a whole, still have a long way to go, but I intend to keep us moving in the right direction.

And Still We Struggle to Be Counted

By Emilie M. Townes

On the morning of Nov. 5, 2008, we gathered for our daily worship in Yale Divinity School's Marquand Chapel. There was much joy and celebration in the air as almost all of those gathered felt a new day had dawned across America. I was doubtful. Perhaps it was the cranky ethicist in me peeking around the corner of ecstasy. Maybe it was the pragmatic womanist in me, looking back at history and forward at the future and being grounded in the present. But whatever or whoever was my touchstone that morning as the chapel erupted with joy sans my circumspection, I was absolutely sure that though some things had changed, most had not and it was going to be a rough four years.

And I am bitterly disappointed that I was right. Although President Obama's list of accomplishments is long, a syndrome that W.E.B Du Bois noted in 1935 is more powerful than ever. Du Bois says in his essay, "The Propaganda of History":

"One is astonished in the study of history at the recurrence of the idea that evil must be forgotten, distorted, skimmed over. We must not remember that Daniel Webster got drunk and only remember that he was a splendid constitutional lawyer. We must forget that George Washington was a slave owner, or that Thomas Jefferson had mulatto children, or that Alexander Hamilton had Negro blood, and simply remember the things we regard as creditable and inspiring. The difficulty, of course, with this philosophy is that history loses its value as an incentive and example; it paints perfect men and noble nations, but it does not tell the truth."¹

Bad Politics, Bad History

I have felt the impact of his words time and again as our studied, selective amnesia or willful oblivion has painted a perfect, simplistic picture of a complex and fascinating nation. Truth-telling is often tossed

to the wind when it comes to electoral politics and public-policy formation. Gone are statesmen and stateswomen and in their place have arisen politicians *running* for office but rarely *governing* with thoughtfulness and an eye to the common good. This is bad history and macabre political process because it does not tell the truth of the living and breathing that goes on in our lives and in the lives of countless others as we struggle to be counted.

We are learning to be circumspect about what we read, what we hear, and what is presented to us as "fact" when it comes to politics. Having a his-

I have become one of those black folks annoyed at both parties for caricaturing my community and reducing me and others to social projects or pathological problems.

tory that paints perfect men and women and noble nations through selective interpretation means we use misshapened and false models to craft our democracy and set our global aims. And our religious bodies are of little help if they are like an inept Greek

chorus that intones lies and deceptions in collective voice – off-key, cracking jokes, and failing to give healthy guidance.

Getting buried or “renamed” is the long and troubling history of race and politics. We do not hear very often, and certainly not in the national campaigns of either party, the word “race” or “racism.” In one party, they know little of what it means to have genuine diversity, and in the other, they have weighed the cost of naming the obvious and decided to let image speak rather than call forth the dangers and violence as well as the joys and triumphs we find in the history of darker skinned peoples in this country.

Four Little Girls

I became aware of the dangers and violence of this history when I was eight years old in 1963. It was found in the slain faces of four little girls who were older than me but as southern and black as me. Four little girls – Carol Robertson, Carole Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley. Four young black girls who arrived at Sunday School for Youth Day

The gospel demands that we be pro-humanity, pro-mercy, pro-justice.

at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. on Sept. 15, 1963. One was eleven years old, the other three were fourteen. Four little girls living in the midst of the racial turmoil that marked Birmingham and so much of the United States as black folks and their allies sought the right to vote. Killed when a bomb planted by a Ku Klux Klansman who opposed integration ripped through the basement of their church, killing them when they were buried beneath the rubble in a blast that blew out the face of Jesus in the stained-glass window and stopped the church clock.

It is rare for me, during any federal election, not to think of those four little girls. Along with James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. Yet their martyrdom should not be sad historical notes to the ways in which our lust for supremacy and control beget such vicious and evil children as hatred, bigotry, racism, sexism, classism. You see, growing up in the liberal segregated South of Durham, NC, in the late 1950s and 1960s, one of the things drummed into little black kids’ heads was the power and right of voting. From civics classes to conversations in our homes to messages from stormy pulpits, we learned the story of the hard-won victories of black folk who fought to be able to go to the polls without physical threat (or in spite

of it) and pull the lever. This is democracy. This is what citizens do.

One of the most exciting things I did as a youth was to vote in my first election. We learned the value of studying the issues. Our teachers recited as mantra the importance of being informed, not letting others tell you what to do with your vote, studying the candidates, listening as others discuss the issues, putting your opinions into the mix. And though there was little hint of spin in the air then, we did learn the power of what has come to be known as dirty tricks: Intimidation at polling places and broken machines were stock-in-trade in black and poor white precincts even then. My education included the stories of black folk going to town hall to register to vote and being turned away by the local police.

In spite of, or perhaps because of these realities, we were told, and I deeply believe, that a strong democracy rests on an informed and voting electorate. So, when I entered the voting booth on Nov. 6, 1973, for the first time, I was proud to be one of the 1,687 registered voters in my precinct and one of the 767 votes cast from our precinct in our municipal election. And I was not the odd kid among my peers. We were all proud to be voting and some of us even dressed up to do so – like folks used to do to travel by plane or go to church.

I still study the candidates and their positions. But what has given me pause is the way in which we now substitute innuendo and worse for facts in much of the political debate of the day. I have become one of those black folks annoyed at both parties for caricaturing my community and reducing me and others to social projects or pathological problems.

A National Enigma

It is remarkable that in a country so full of the presence of darker-skinned peoples of varying hues, race remains a national enigma. As race becomes more complex and the nation more diverse, this, friends, means all of us commit these acts of ignorance. Neither party names racism or race directly, but it is there in the coding of words that are symbols of centuries-long hatreds and discriminations. They are more powerful as symbols because they tap into our imaginations, what I call the fantastic hegemonic imagination. This imagination traffics in gross caricatures so that we can control the world in our own image. This imagination conjures oppressive social structures based on foundations of evil and then proclaims this as normal or acceptable or natural.

I don’t think there is anything normal or natural about the way we continue to countenance evil

as acceptable. Although the evil of racism may be harder to detect by some these days, for others it continues to stand front and center. We now see it in voter suppression, or as the subtext in discussions of immigration reform, and in reference to “the poor” and the “47 percent.”

ID Laws and Ideology

Out of the thirty states that have enacted Voter ID laws, twenty-three of these are where Republicans dominate. Whether it be voter ID laws or shortened early voting hours in urban districts, this suppresses the rights of the poor, former prison inmates, the elderly, Latino/as, as well as blacks, to vote in local, state, and presidential elections. These efforts are making it more difficult for college students,

Obama has become mute on advocacy for truly disadvantaged blacks and rarely speaks out forthrightly on racial issues for fear of alienating more conservative white voters.

the disabled, and immigrants to vote. Pennsylvania enacted a strict voter photo ID law even though the state did not offer any evidence of voter fraud to justify this law. Last fall, a state judge ruled that voters could cast their votes in the November election without these IDs but failed to toss out the law completely. Hmmmmm ... To confuse matters more, the judge refused to stop election officials from asking for IDs at the polls although they were not required for the November election. As the old black women who raised me used to say: ummmmmph ... ummmph ... ummmph.

I could understand enacting these laws if we had rampant voter fraud in the U.S., but we do not. In the ten states that recently passed photo ID laws, there were fewer than seventy voter-fraud convictions in the past decade among the forty million registered voters in these states, according to a CBS Evening News report last August. These laws prevent something that very rarely happens; their mercurial application does not justify such vast potential disenfranchisement. I am left wondering why the focus of these efforts so often seems to be the swing states where folks who are more likely to vote Democratic and so many darker-skinned people and poor people are still struggling to be counted. Why do some folk rush to “fix” a problem we do not have and ignore the fact that they create a real problem – denying legitimate voters the opportunity to vote in a participatory democracy?

In the long run, what I hear and see both parties courting are middle-class white folks. The black class structure earns far less than the white class structure. In 2009, the black middle class, which was 38 percent of black households, ranged from \$35,000 to \$100,000. The upper-middle class, or 8 percent of black households, made \$100,000 to \$200,000. Obama has become mute on advocacy for truly disadvantaged blacks and rarely speaks out forthrightly on racial issues for fear of alienating more conservative white voters who may quickly turn in a Republican direction if he does.

So I have heard little beyond a white middle-class mantra from both parties – little mention of the waitress with two kids, not much for the warehouse worker who is trying to survive on wages that have stagnated for a decade, barely a whisper for the factory worker whose skills are now obsolete. Many of us who are black can appreciate the president's dilemma and support him regardless of his silence. It's a deeply racist society that creates this kind of conundrum with a fantastic hegemonic imagination as its drum major.

A Pro-Human Gospel

It remains for those of us who seek to live our religious convictions rather than simply rehearse them in a funhouse mirror of self-loathing to find our cues in sacred texts. For those of us who hold that our religious beliefs must be present in the public debates of our day – and not be buried in political and religious cat fights and mud-wrestling contests – we'd do well to heed Du Bois' warning to us that we must tell the truth. It is my hope that those four little girls – Carole Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carol Robertson – are not mere historical artifacts of the horror of what can go wrong when we blend religion and politics and then stir in a dose of hatred and fear, with ignorance and elitism as the maid and butler.

Instead, we must live into and build a vibrant democracy. We cannot lean on the *memory* of the ways that black religion has called for and fought for a robust sense of the common good for all: The gospel demands that we be pro-humanity, pro-mercy, pro-justice.

So we must say it clearly: Racism, like sexism, classism, militarism, ageism, heterosexism, and the rest of this wearying laundry list of isms, remains alive and thriving in this country. If the political parties want to ignore these issues, we cannot and must not.

I close with a petition I have issued before and will continue to: There are no days off!

Now I believe that most of us are hankering for a faith that comes from seeking to live in righteousness – to move beyond a ritualized, sterilized, codified, cul-de-sac faith to one that comes from the heart and soul, a faith so strong, so tough that we can craft a community of witnesses from it. A faith made up with peoples of all racial ethnic groups, both genders and intersex, varied lifestyles and abilities, different political and theological agendas, from

No matter how many times politicians and other alleged Christians pick up the Bible to abuse it and then use it to ratify wickedness, there are no days off.

all levels of the class structure, documented and undocumented, all ages, and on and on into the richness of our living. A community of righteousness striving to reach out to the least of these. Witnessing through our spirituality and our sense of justice. Demanding the best of who we can be as a church. Refusing to accept maudlin loathing as divine commandments. Refusing to turn King's legacy into a one-day-a-year feel-good time-paid holiday celebration of inept kumbayas and sashaying allelulias.

There are no days off.

We must step into the great challenges we have before us and choose wisely those leaders we elect.

There are no days off.

We must refuse to accept a trail of false promises as signs of salvation.

There are no days off.

No matter what they say about whether you are married, divorced, single, straight, gay, lesbian, or who knows what, there are no days off.

No matter where your people come from, there are no days off.

No matter how many times you are called too tender-hearted or too concerned about "those people," there are no days off.

No matter how many times politicians, public figures, and other alleged Christians pick up the Bible to abuse it and then use it to ratify their personal wickedness, there are no days off.

No matter what the world hands us, we give back love. We stand for goodness. We live our faith. We live with integrity. We live God's grace large. We build bridges of salvation that can carry the depth and breadth of humanity over them.

To the memory of those four little girls and the countless other martyrs of the faith, and with thanks to W.E.B. Du Bois for believing in black folk even

when he didn't always understand them, and with the hope I learned in Sunday school and sitting on the children's pew in the back of Asbury Temple United Methodist Church, that little church by the side of the road where everybody is somebody and Christ is the Lord, there will be no days off ... until justice comes.

Emilie M. Townes, the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology, joined the YDS faculty in 2005. She also served as YDS associate dean of academic affairs from 2008-2012. Her books include Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Care and A Womanist Ethic of Care (Continuum, 1998). This essay is adapted from a lecture she gave last fall at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. In July she leaves Yale to become dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School.

Notes

- 1 W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Propaganda of History" in *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward the History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America*. (Russell & Russell, 1966), p. 722.

BLACK POET, WHITE CRITIC

By Dudley Randall

A critic advises
not to write on controversial subjects
like freedom or murder,
but to treat universal themes
and timeless symbols
like the white unicorn.

A white unicorn?

The Unfinished Business of Race

An open discussion about racial prejudice unmask a spectrum of emotions, as students, staff, and faculty at Yale Divinity School discovered this year.

Committing themselves since Fall 2012 to a series of workshops, assigned readings, and dialogue, they faced the ironies of racism today – how stubborn it is, and how hidden it can be. They pondered the tenacity of prejudice lodged in our assumptions about others even 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation. They encountered their own discomfort in talking about racial bias. They learned the importance of listening. They were stirred to seek better definitions of twenty-first century social justice and faith-driven activism.

*Their discernment period culminated in February when Michelle Alexander, a law professor at Ohio State, came to YDS to speak about her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New Press, 2010). Reflections invited a group of students to summarize their thoughts after a memorable season of soul-searching and awakening. Here's a sampling.*

The Pain of Dismissal

By Mercy L. Herrera



Racial prejudice persists into the twenty-first century. However, just as the earth's geography continually shifts, so too does the racial landscape, giving rise to changing demographics that will redefine us. With such shifting comes opportunities for transformation. But how do we avoid repeating the errors of the past? How do we embrace a truly multiracial community?

Evaluate your assumptions. Be open to learning. Racism is gigantic, but gigantic objects can be broken down into a multitude of tiny pieces. Each piece is a person. Each person has power. Daily, in small and large ways, from public policy decisions to coffee shop interactions, people use their power destructively and constructively. One negative use of power is through careless dismissal. Dismissing on the basis of race people's voices, experiences, cultures, or ideas perpetuates racism.

As a woman of color, I often experience the pain of dismissal. In fact, it happened again yesterday. A white cashier had been chirpy and endlessly smiled at the white woman in front of me. When it was my turn, her demeanor visibly changed. I cannot fault anything but racism, however latent. That is not the last time I will be dismissed, I am sure. But my reaction was (and is) not hate. I understood that this cashier had been born into the same culture as I, one marked by a history of segregation that relied on an "us vs. them" mentality. That mentality is rooted in ignorance, a lack and distortion of knowledge on which the monster of racism feeds.

But every monster has its kryptonite – racism's is critical awareness. Through diligence and humility we can embrace our diverse histories, rich traditions, and varied experiences, potentially creating genuine community along the way. We seek not the "melting pot," a thing of the past. Rather, we engage a landscape that is far more colorful, where difference and commonality exist in dynamic tension, not competition, both valued, neither suppressed. Herein lies the key for hope and positive change. A quote from Arundhati Roy comes to mind, "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."

An anti-audism and anti-ableism educator, Mercy L. Herrera will receive her M.A.R. this spring, after which she will continue working with faith communities seeking to become more accessible to people with a range of disabilities.

The Yes and the No

By Jamall Andrew Calloway



During the fall semester of my second year, professor Andre C. Willis asserted that "race is the worst invention of modernity." And during the spring semester, professor Emilie M. Townes stated, "It seems like it is much easier for students to discuss class and gender than it is to talk about race. Tension rises when race is brought up." Both statements touch the edges of my recent experience with the concept of race. Dr. Willis' statement takes seriously the intellectual history of race as an invention intended to classify by

denigration. Dr. Townes' statement speaks to the lived experience of people dealing with their inherited classifications and feelings of unwarranted denigration.

W.E.B. Du Bois was correct. The burden of the twentieth century was all the socio-political and theological baggage that comes with the problem of the color line. Will that ever disappear? Will America's original sin ever be forgiven and forgotten? Some will say, "No – racism is much too ingrained in the American mind. There will be racism as long as there is evil." I understand that response. It sadly makes sense. But I believe that those who proclaim it bear a responsibility to do what's necessary to prove themselves wrong. No one should sit comfortably with evil.

Others will say, "Yes – we have made progress ... a biracial president, a Hispanic pope and look, more black and brown students." They'll argue that racism will fade as long as evidence of progress continues. I understand that response. It ironically makes sense. But I'd ask them to look again at the statistics. The vast and growing prison-industrial system alone proves that Jim Crow never died, he just found a more lucrative business.

As students of religion, we should be careful of the myths we choose to believe: No one should sit comfortably with harmful illusions. Will racism ever disappear? I'm unsure. But what I do believe is that we will make real progress when both sides – the no and the yes – become honest with themselves. Racism is alive and we can't succumb to nihilism or get distracted by naïve illusions of progress.

"Will racism ever end?" The only response I have right now is, "I don't know, you tell me ..."

Jamall Calloway '13 M.Div. will study French while pursuing his Master of Sacred Theology degree at Union Theological Seminary in New York this fall.

This Hyphenated Life

By Stephanie Wong



"What are you?" I get asked the question pretty often, by people who aren't sure what to make of my multi-ethnic appearance. As a teen, I often felt jealous of those who could claim simple cultural identities, like my cousins who were either wholly Dutch or wholly Chinese. It seemed that most people – whether "Latina," "black," "white" or "Asian," etc – at least possessed something pure and recognizable, whereas I could only explain myself as an ethnic derivative drawn from other categories ... not really white, not really Asian either.

But I've come to appreciate not only that "hybridity" can be positive; it also offers a more accurate picture of just about everybody in society. At Yale, I've met friends who are English-Singaporean, Korean-Australian, Kenyan-Haitian-American, and much more. When I first started dating my "white" American fiancé, I quickly realized that his Scots-Irish southern background was not at all of the same "whiteness" as my mom's Californian Dutch family. The linguistic shorthand of color labels too often short-circuits any full appreciation of another person.

In the church, we do have a model for meditating upon hybridity as a good thing. Theology looks to Christ and praises the fact that he is both human and divine. But does the church really appreciate the implications for society? Unfortunately, the Christian community resorts to exclusive categories as quickly as the rest of American society. People throw around terms – black versus white, conservative versus liberal, first-world versus third-world – as if these are clear packages of meaning that never overlap. After all, Christ did not cling to the purity of "divinity" but willingly took on the messiness of being a god-human, preaching healing in this world and salvation for the next.

My hope is that we overcome the tendency to abbreviate people into essentialized race categories. This will take patience, and a willingness to share and hear all the hyphens in our lives. I'm now more willing to give a real answer when people ask me what I am: I'm Chinese and Catholic, Dutch-American and evangelical, confident in some situations and shy in others. I appreciate it when people hear the hyphens. I know that every other person's life is equally complex and rich, so I am grateful when others take the time to share the hyphenations in their backgrounds too. By embracing the hybridity in each other, we claim the "both-and" of the Gospel.

M.Div. candidate Stephanie Wong graduates this spring and plans to pursue Ph.D. work in theology at Georgetown University.

Dreams Unfolding

By Marilyn Kendrix



It's spring break, one year since I read Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* for the first time. One year ago, I awoke to the plight of so many of my fellow Americans, trapped in a system that relegates them to second-class citizenship, unable to escape from the permanent punitive policies of our thirty-year War on Drugs. One year ago, I dreamed of a time when every member of the YDS community would also read this book and engage in a school-wide discussion about mass incarceration and the intractable poverty that it has created for our poorest, darkest citizens.

This year's YDS All-School Conference was the culmination of that dream. In her lecture, attended by more than 600 people at various locations and via live streaming, professor Alexander recounted how well-meaning counselors advised her to give up on the book and not jeopardize her future in a fight that seems impossible to win. Yet she understood that if people of faith, if people of conscience, knew the devastating consequences of the nation's policies of mass incarceration, they would be moved, as I was, as she was, to do something about it.

Later in the week, we participated in lunch discussions where students, faculty, and staff shared their reactions to the book, ranging from shocked amazement to righteous indignation. We watched a documentary film, *Broken On All Sides* by filmmaker Matthew Pillischer, which showed an unjust criminal justice system from the vantage point of the incarcerated and their families.

As much preacher as law professor, Alexander spoke directly to our Christian call to justice, imploring us all to be "stone catchers." She cited the text in the Gospel of John where Jesus is brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and is reminded of the Law that would have the woman stoned for her sins. Jesus challenged those who would judge her, saying, "Let anyone among you who is without sin cast the first stone." As people of conscience, Alexander said, we must go further than just drop our stones; we must be willing to become stone catchers, advocating an end to the inhumane system that the War on Drugs has created. This call to action, sending us forth to do justice in the world, makes me hopeful for our future as a society in the twenty-first century.

Third-year M.Div. candidate Marilyn Kendrix is serving as Minister of Faith Formation at Church of the Redeemer in New Haven, CT.

Keeping Pessimism at Bay

By Brooke Girley



Thinking about the future of race in this country, I often find myself challenged not to slip into pessimism and cynicism. This challenge becomes infinitely greater when I read a work like Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*.

Her argument is not wholly novel to me. Indeed, I have known this intuitively, especially when I practiced criminal law. Yet I still found her work jarring because it compiles disparate data and coherently articulates America's current expression of systemic injustice, the use of the prison system to lock up disproportionately huge numbers of African Americans and other minorities. What unfolds before the reader is a reinscribing of oppression along racial and class lines that dates back to this nation's founding. Therein lies my proclivity toward pessimism: How can a nation eradicate such an egregious flaw so deeply embedded in the fabric of who it is?

As a child I thought I knew the answer to this conundrum. Inspired by the work of civil rights legal pioneers like Thurgood Marshall and Medgar Evers, I set about to become a civil rights lawyer and fight injustice through the legal system. However, as a civil rights lawyer I quickly realized that the practice of law is not the answer I sought. To be sure, much work is needed on the legal front. Yet I learned that systemic injustice does not just permeate our legal system but also reaches into our intellectual and spiritual being. Laws codified on paper today but not codified in hearts and minds are woefully inadequate to bring permanent change.

Laws cannot change one's internal condition. That is the role of faith and religion. One of the reasons I transitioned from law to divinity school is that I realized that the more sustaining work of combatting racial injustice will not be done in the courthouse but must be done in the church.



In her book, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, Michelle Alexander argues that a spurious War on Drugs targets black men, profits a prison-industrial complex, and underwrites a new national form of racial control. .

She writes: "Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. Once you've labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination – employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service – are suddenly legal. ... We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it."

Alexander, a law professor at Ohio State, lectured at YDS in February. Before her talk, she held a question-answer session attended by hundreds of students. Here are excerpts from her remarks:

A Trickle-down Theory:

I think there has been a tendency to sit back and wait for racial justice to trickle down once Barack Obama was elected. Ironically, black communities in particular have been demobilized in the era of Obama and are less likely to make demands on a range of issues from jobs to criminal justice reform. I think Obama's heart is in the right place. But whether he has the courage of his convictions in a political environment in which it does not pay to be candid about issues of racial justice is another matter.

It's foolish for us to imagine that Barack Obama just because he's black is going to respond dramatically differently to these political realities than the presidents who came before him. It's going to be hard for him to be a bold truth-teller on these issues, but it's difficult to point to a single president we've ever had who was bold and courageous on racial justice without being made to be.

I'm hopeful that in his second term he'll be the president that I'd guess he probably wants to be – but it's our job to make the pathway for that to happen.

Signs of Hope:

I see hope particularly in the emerging grassroots movement of formerly incarcerated people, who are finding their voice for the basic restoration of their civil and human rights. One of the most damaging dimensions of mass incarceration is what it does to the psyche of those trapped in it. There's so much shame heaped upon people who've been labeled criminals and felons, and it's so destructive for families. Many people who've been branded as criminals and felons haven't, until now, even felt enough sense of self-worth to say, "I deserve to be treated better, I deserve the right to be able to work, support my family, educate myself, and be able to vote. I am someone who matters. I am a human being."

I'm encouraged by growing numbers of young people who are starting to protest against mass incarceration – who are beginning to connect the dots between the defunding of education and the rise of the prison-industrial complex, also a growing awareness of the relationship of the immigrant rights movement and the movement against mass incarceration.

A Human Right:

I view mass incarceration as a profound human rights crisis that won't be solved simply by appeals to the same kinds of civil rights ideals that animated that movement. Unless and until we as a society begin to believe that every human being matters – no matter who you are or what you've done, you are truly worthy of the right to work, quality education, shelter – then I don't see how we will ever undo the traps of these caste-like systems that repeatedly emerge or dismantle the caste system that surrounds mass incarceration today. People who've been branded criminals can be denied the right to work, turned away from housing, denied even access to food.

Because the Constitution doesn't include "human rights" in it, and because the U.S. isn't particularly warm and friendly towards the U.N. declaration of human rights, I think it's more worthwhile to shift the way people think about economic justice, racial justice, social justice – shift into a human rights framework. That represents the same set of values that Dr. King and other racial justice advocates viewed as absolutely essential to the liberation of the African-American community at the peak of the civil rights movement. But we've largely abandoned those values, pursuing a much narrower path of litigating civil rights in courtrooms and trying to do battle for those narrower rights in a political arena where poor people inevitably have no voice.

A Faith Perspective:

From a personal faith perspective, what I'm most hopeful about is that faith communities are waking up. There's the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, a large network of progressive black churches that has made mass incarceration one of its major issues. There's the United Methodist Church, which is divesting from private prisons.

I think faith communities are beginning to ask themselves out loud the question, "How could we people of faith and conscience possibly have been silent for so long as millions of people are rounded up, locked in cages and denied the very forms of compassion, forgiveness, and redemption we say we're all about?"

I am a big believer that there is no political solution to these problems – that all these issues require a moral transformation, a spiritual transformation, a turning of our hearts and souls.

Racial healing will only come when Christians truly began to live out the Gospel. Reconciliation involves, among other things, confession of past and present sins, the presence of justice and forgiveness. These the Gospel obligates us to do and shows us how to accomplish. The church, not just black churches but all churches, must lead the movement of racial reconciliation within America. If we continue to shirk this duty, then I am afraid my occasional pessimism and cynicism might be here to stay.

Brooke Girley is an M.A.R. candidate with a concentration in Black Religion in the African Diaspora. She plans to graduate next year.

The Reality Down the Street

By Nicholas Alton Lewis



“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” These words were often quoted by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. at a time in U.S. history when racial disparities were part of the fabric of our collective existence. Signs such as “whites only” or “for colored” were not only visual articulations of segregated public services; they were salient signifiers of the entire Jim Crow system. After numerous acts of civil disobedience against this system were met by violent, brutal resistance, the truth of racial inequality became starkly apparent, ultimately prompting the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

In our so-called post-racial age, the signs and signifiers of racial inequity are not nearly as visible as they once were. In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander makes a compelling case for the existence of a new-millennium manifestation of a racial caste system in which black and brown people have been corralled disproportionately into a prison-industrial complex under the auspices of the War on Drugs. It has been perpetuated on our watch, yet it remains “out of sight” from our self-congratulatory post-racial culture and “out of mind” of our collective sense of social conscience. As students within the walls of a divinity school, the temptation is to remain insulated from the sight of such injustice. YDS stands only a few blocks from Newhallville, a community where the adverse effects of racial inequity are not hidden from view. What is our responsibility to see? In an 1853 sermon that clearly influenced MLK, Unitarian minister Theodore Parker wrote, “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.”

As people of faith, we must trust that that arc of the moral universe bends according to God's will. As people of conscience, we must strive to see the societal circumstances of suffering so that we may know the places and spaces where we must continue to do the work of social justice – even (and especially) when they reside only a few blocks away.

Nicholas Alton Lewis, president of the Student Council of Yale Divinity School, is an M.Div. candidate who graduates this spring.

The Sacred Space Inside

By Carmelo Sorita



Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2:19) declares: *As a consequence, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of God's household.*

I have gathered some questions designed to challenge us, including myself, to build inclusive communities not only of tolerance but also of deep compassion and genuine respect.

These questions are jolting and painful, and I find myself getting defensive or offended. But letting them sink in, I find them humbling and liberating, creating space for my old, ignorantly bigoted self to transition into a more mature and loving Christian. They are like the spit of Jesus mixed with earth that opened the eyes of the blind beggar and enabled him to see Jesus' vision of the glory of God's reign.

Here then are a few of these questions:

How do we feel about the foreigner, the alien, the refugee, and the immigrant in our midst, occupying our familiar space?

If we meet any of these differently looking folks and find out that the person speaks good English and is from Chicago or California, do we restrain ourselves from asking, "But where are you really from originally?"

African-American, Latin-American, Middle Eastern-American, Asian-American, Caucasian-American: Why can't we just get rid of the hyphen and simply call all of them "American"?

Why must we call someone white or black?

What about those who don't fall into this binary?

In our spiritual life, can we feel at ease if we imagine Jesus Christ not as Caucasian but rather Oriental, Middle Eastern, African, or Asian?

What if this same Jesus with spit and dirt on his hand were to try literally to touch our eyes and our tongue and ears in order to share with us his vision of God's kingdom?

Wait, what? Spit with dirt heals? Obviously, Jesus belongs to a culture different from us.

Inclusivity demands that we be open and even take the initiative. Like smiling and greeting the shy elderly Chinese couple we come across on Prospect Street.

We need to put ourselves in someone else's shoes for two miles.

Building bridges and inclusive communities starts first with building these sacred spaces for inclusivity within our hearts.

Sisters and brothers, in the name of all that is holy and by the faith of the Risen Lord, let us welcome one another as fellow citizens in the household of God.

M.Div. candidate Carmelo Sorita graduates this spring and plans to serve as a chaplain/clinical pastoral care resident at a hospital in Florida.

First Anger, Then Action

By Jewelle Bickel



During this time of conversation about race and ethnicity, I found myself challenged. I already had some knowledge of the problem of racism in this country, and I was not ignorant of the many socio-economic policies affecting race. Yet my perceptions changed as I learned of the full extent of the suffering of many in this country. When I read Michelle Alexander's book, I felt both anger and guilt: anger at the facts and figures that showed a deep trend of prison injustice of which I was once only vaguely aware and with which I was now being confronted head on; and guilty because I hadn't been fully aware of the realities faced by so many and also hadn't been an active advocate for change.

For me, the knowledge of these injustices was the push I needed to act. I can imagine some might feel, as I did before, that these problems are so removed from their lives that there is no reason to respond. But the church is in the business of helping the neglected. Wherever injustice reigns, there we as the church must respond. Confronting these issues this year as a school has not only educated me but has prepared me to commit to the conversation concerning them. This time of inquiry allowed me to converse with students from so many different backgrounds, and many of my friends spoke honestly with me about how issues of race had impacted their own lives. I am resolved to continue the dialogue I have already begun with my classmates.

Jewelle Bickel is an M.A.R. candidate concentrating in philosophy of religion. She graduates in May.

The Calculus of Belonging

By Tyrone E. McGowan Jr.



Our social world is constructed on a logic or ethic of separation. The very core of this racial separation is one of violence that seeks to destroy the fabric of our common humanity. This logic is intent on managing who belongs to whom and dictating how social belonging should function.

It radically distorts our God-given identity. But in many ways, our religious institutions are guilty of replicating, reproducing, and reinscribing many of the same social structures that help maintain and police this rigid methodology of separation and belonging. As an emerging church leader, I believe people of faith must find creative and redemptive ways that allow us to reimagine an alternative calculus of belonging.

Some contend there is no need for any such new calculus because we now live in a post-racial society. This idea could not be further from the truth. The post-racial is an intense yearning, not a reality – a yearning to get beyond race without first going through painful issues of race. But we have to deal with the questions that the race issue places upon us and not simply sweep them under the rug. Although a person of color occupies the highest office in the land – making an African-American male the leader of the free world – we nevertheless continue to see people of color in the weakest position globally.

No, we are not post-racial. We have more work to do. We must combine issues of race and class, issues of poverty and culture, and begin to examine seriously the economic effects upon communities of color and people who have traditionally been marginalized. Only then can we start to envision what Maya Angelou calls, “These yet to be United States.”

Tyrone E. McGowan Jr. is a third-year M.Div. candidate from Chicago, IL.

Racialized Bodies

By Justin Crisp



This semester’s close study of contemporary issues of race has given me not only a kind of shock at the sheer magnitude of the suffering leveled at racialized bodies in the U.S. but also a real fatigue in the face of the immense systemic obstacles to remedying such pain.

I think this reaction often happens when we do the all-too-necessary work of plumbing the depths of systemic oppressions. Seeing just how complicated the issues are, realizing the true extent of their institutional fortification, recognizing the frightening level to which the animating prejudices and ideologies have polluted not only our common sense but our imaginations – all of this can put one at a loss for even knowing where to start. What’s necessary, then, is not only a more honest public conversation about our nation’s racial past and present but also some way of empowering us for the tough work of social change.

This is the function of real hope, a hope that does not whitewash our past and present in the name of “progress” but can make evident all our present failings while sustaining efforts to remedy them, with God’s help. It is essential that we ground our efforts for social change in something larger than ourselves. It is critical that Christians mobilize a robust public theology that is attentive to racial and ethnic oppression – a theology capable of furnishing a vision of a future worth striving toward, with a conception of human dignity strong enough to animate our participation in God’s work of transformation and reconciliation.

Justin E. Crisp is an M.Div. candidate (class of '14) at YDS and the Institute of Sacred Music and a Diploma in Anglican Studies candidate at Berkeley Divinity School.

Divine Challenge to Social Darwinism

By Samuel L. Caraballo



“What then must we do?” This is the inevitable question faith communities across the nation face when dealing with racial and ethnic divides within their congregations and in society at large.

If it is true scientifically that there is no such thing as racial superiority, then we should ask ourselves, how is it being sustained? If we fail to challenge the staying power of racial privilege in our own settings we might lead people to believe that such privilege in fact indicates inherent biological or social advantages, eventually leading us back to social Darwinism. Instead of racial reconciliation we might end up promoting racial remediation, which leads to paternalism and condescension toward those deemed “unprivileged.”

The uncontested acceptance of “whiteness” as either a social or biological advantage can only be maintained by systemic racial “usurpations.” Any ideological assertion of racial superiority depends on the systematic denigration of those who do not abide by such racial categories.

The goal of reconciliation should not be to help the “unprivileged” obtain what the “privileged” already enjoys, but rather to dismantle the assumptions that led us to the attribution of biological or sociological “advantages” to a given group in the first place.

From this standpoint there is no racial reconciliation without racial restitution.

By restitution I mean several things. First, restitution entails a change of focus that gives priority to the neglected voices at the opposite end of the racial spectrum. No one can better inform our reconciliation agenda than those directly affected by the lack of it.

Second, restitution implies a lifelong process of meaningful exchanges that disrupt the conventional ways in which we treat each other. In other words, our relationships need to strive to understand the “other” and constantly deconstruct our own inherent racial bias.

Finally, my rendition doesn’t see racial restitution as merely a human initiative but a Spirit-led enterprise where the supernatural presence of God in the midst of our communion enables us to transform our individual and societal brokenness for the sake of honoring the divine image that permeates us all. May the Lord give us the strength to do that which we must do.

Samuel L. Caraballo is a third-year M.Div. candidate who is originally from Puerto Rico and is currently seeking ordination in the American Baptist Churches.

REHABILITATION & TREATMENT IN THE PRISONS OF AMERICA

By Etheridge Knight

The Convict strolled into the prison administration building to get assistance and counseling for his personal problems. Inside the main door were several other doors proclaiming: Doctor, Lawyer, Teacher, Counselor, Therapist, etc. He chose the proper door, and was confronted by two more doors: Custody and Treatment. He chose Treatment, went in, and was confronted with two more doors: First Offender and Previous Offender. Again he chose the proper door and was confronted with two more doors: Adult and Juvenile. He was an adult, so he walked through that door and ran smack into two more doors: Democrat and Republican. He was democrat, so he rushed through that door and ran smack into two more doors: Black and White. He was Black, so he rushed – *ran* – through that door – and fell nine stories to the street.



Evangelizing the Evangelizers: Juan Diego's America

By Roberto S. Goizueta

In his 1999 Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in America," Pope John Paul II asked Christians in the Americas to "reflect on America as a single entity."¹ Such reflection, he declared, would represent "an attempt to express not only the unity which in some way already exists, but also to point to that closer bond which the peoples of the continent seek and which the Church wishes to foster as part of her own mission, as she works to promote the communion of all in the Lord."²

More than a decade later, Christians in this hemisphere have yet to seriously engage the task of reflecting on America as a single entity – this despite the fact that soon Latinos and Latinas will constitute one-third of the U.S. population. Failing to try, we squander the extraordinary theological gift that this era of immigration offers – nothing less than the

Christians in this hemisphere have yet to seriously engage the task of reflecting on America as a single entity – this despite the fact that soon Latinos and Latinas will constitute one-third of the U.S. population.

opportunity to encounter the God of the gospels, a God whose extravagant love knows no bounds and, as such, always irrupts in our world in the most unexpected places and among the least "worthy" persons, such as those "heathen" who come to us from the other side of the borders we have erected to protect us from them. Insofar as the borders become not meeting places of different cultures but impenetrable barriers, what they ultimately protect us from will be the very God we claim to worship.

Mestizo History

The Latino community in the U.S. is itself very diverse. Despite this diversity, however, common

threads run throughout the histories of all U.S. Latinos and Latinas. In some way, for instance, all share the historical heritage and experience of "mestizaje" (racial-cultural mixture). The Latin American culture and people are the products of five centuries of racial and cultural intermixing. In North America, the British colonists exterminated the indigenous people. To the South, the Spanish killed millions of Amerindians, either through the illnesses brought from Europe or through outright violence, but the Spanish also intermingled with the native peoples. In the Caribbean region, the mixture over the past five centuries has been less between Spanish and Indian than between the Spanish colonists and the Africans brought to the islands as slaves.

The result of this hemispheric history has been a culture that still reflects not only Iberian influences but also African and/or Amerindian. And, of course, as Latinos and Latinas settle in the United States, a "second mestizaje" takes place: immigrants assimilate influences from the larger U.S. culture. So a Mexican American is similar but also quite different from a Mexican living in Mexico. Indeed, U.S. Latinos and Latinas are often derided not only by other Americans but also by Latin Americans still living in their native countries, many of whom look down on U.S. Latinos as not quite Latin American. Thus, living as part of a mestizo people means always living on the border, culturally and psychologically. One never feels completely at home on either side.

The historical experience of mestizaje originated in the violence of the conquest, in the violation of indigenous women by Spanish conquistadores. As the child of violence, the child of the violent European conqueror and the violated indigenous woman, the mestizo has historically suffered scorn and humiliation. This same mestizo heritage is reflected in the religious faith of Latinos and Latinas, an experience of ecclesiastical marginalization until a series of extraordinary events beginning in 1531 changed the history of a people, their self-confidence and political destiny.

The appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December 1531 signals a turning-point, or axial point in the history of Latin American mestizaje.³ In the Guadalupe event, “la Virgen morena” (“the dark-skinned virgin”) appears to an indigenous man (i.e., a “heathen”), Juan Diego, on a hill outside what is now Mexico City. The narrative recounts several encounters between “la Morenita” and Juan Diego, in the course of which she repeatedly assures him that, despite his own sense of worthlessness vis-à-vis the Spaniards, he is her most beloved, favored child. As she continues to reassure him, Juan Diego gradually develops a sense of his own dignity as a child of God.

Persistent Dark-Skinned Lady

In their first encounter, she commanded Juan Diego to ask the Spanish bishop in Mexico City, Juan de Zumárraga, to build a church on the hill where she had appeared. Juan Diego resisted, arguing that he was not worthy to be charged with such an important mission. But the Lady persisted, so Juan Diego eventually went to the bishop’s palace to make the request.⁴

At first, the bishop would not even receive the poor indigenous man. Later, the bishop received but did not believe him. Finally, the Lady gave Juan Diego a “sign” to take with him, a bouquet of roses she had ordered him to pick from a nearby hilltop. Since all knew that such flowers could not grow at that time of the year, they would recognize the miraculous nature of the sign. So Juan Diego put the flowers in his *tilma*, or cloak. When he arrived at the bishop’s palace and opened the cloak to reveal the flowers, another miraculous sign appeared, an image of the Virgin imprinted on the cloak. Stirred and convinced by these signs, the bishop relented and ordered that the Lady’s wish be granted.⁵

In the narrative, the traditional roles are thereby reversed: The dark-skinned Lady and the indigenous man themselves become the messengers of God, evangelizers to the Spanish bishop, who is portrayed

as the one in need of conversion. Here, as Mexican-American theologian Virgilio Elizondo notes, the one acting *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ) is not the bishop but the poor man:

“Juan Diego functions as the priest. He responds to the divine call and climbs the hill to be the mediator between the Mother of God and the bishop, between his people and the powerful people from Europe. ... The call of Juan Diego is a divine protest against the elitist policies of a church that refuses to recognize the giftedness of the poor and lowly, especially the non-Western ones.”⁶

The narrative and accompanying images also exemplify a fascinating religious, symbolic mestizaje. Tepeyac, the hill on which the Virgin appeared, was well-known to the Nahuas (the indigenous people to whom Juan Diego belonged) as the place where they worshipped the mother goddess Tonantzin. Likewise, the Virgin’s clothing was adorned with a mixture of Christian and Nahuatl symbols.⁷

Despair, Then Dignity

By 1531, the indigenous peoples of Mexico had been broken and nearly destroyed by the conquering Spaniards. Those who had survived the onslaught were demoralized and in despair. It was at this very moment of deepest anguish that Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared – to accompany them in their suffering, confirm them in their dignity as children of God, and herald the dawn of a new era of hope. Indeed, the image of Guadalupe that Juan Diego saw – an image that, to this day, remains emblazoned on the cloak as it appears in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City – is that of a pregnant woman, unique in the history of Marian apparitions: La Morenita gives birth to a new people, a mestizo people.⁸

The story of Guadalupe is today being re-enacted in our own country, where millions of Juan Diegos are crossing our borders, knocking on the doors of the powerful, and inviting us to hear the message of God’s special love for the downtrodden. The Rev. David García, former rector of San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas, explains the intimate identification between Juan Diego and the Mexican people:

“Juan Diego’s story is our story. His hesitancy is ours in the face of being called to share the Good News and change our world. His feelings of nothingness are reflected in our sense of inadequacy against a society that puts us down at every turn. His call to take the message

is our call to tell others that God wants things different, that God loves those who are poor and powerless, that God does not forget the sufferings of God's people, and that God is with us on our pilgrimage through a hostile world."⁹

Will we, like Bishop Zumárraga centuries ago, turn Juan Diego away, assuming that we cannot possibly have anything to learn from him, much less anything to learn from him about who God is? What is called for is nothing less than a genuine commitment to become a Church that recognizes, affirms, and witnesses to a God revealed on the border, a God who transforms that border from a barrier that excludes into the privileged place of God's self-revelation, recognizing among those persons who approach us from "the other side of the border" the messengers of the Good News.

The Borders of Faith

How we view the border and its inhabitants, then, is not merely a question of charity or justice (though it is that). It is, more profoundly still, a question of our own salvation, our own liberation.¹⁰ If the God we claim to worship is one who, as Mystery, "does not belong" to this world, then that God will approach us, in a special way, through the lives of those men, women, and children who themselves "do not belong" – because we have excluded them from our world. Consequently, we cannot claim to worship the God of the Scriptures unless we do so alongside and in solidarity with those persons with whom God has chosen to become identified in a special way, precisely to reveal a Love which knows no bounds.

To welcome the immigrant is thus to open ourselves to a love whose utter gratuity and extravagance liberates us as well – from that fear of powerlessness, insecurity, and vulnerability that has driven

Let us not once again, then, like Bishop Juan de Zumárraga five centuries ago, turn away Juan Diego as he approaches us bearing in his tilma the precious gift of God's great love for us all.

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Notes

- 1 John Paul II, "Ecclesia in America," Para. 5.
- 2 John Paul II.
- 3 Roberto S. Goizueta, *Christ Our Companion: Toward a Theological Aesthetics of Liberation* (Orbis, 2009), p. 142.
- 4 Goizueta, p. 142.
- 5 Goizueta, p. 143.
- 6 Virgilio Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Orbis, 1997), p. 46.
- 7 For accounts and interpretations of the Guadalupean narrative, which appears in the sixteenth century Nican Mopohua, see especially the following works: Clodomiro L. Siller-Acuña, "Anotaciones y comentarios al Nican Mopohua," *Estudios Indígenas* 8:2 (1981): p. 217-274; Idem, *Flor y canto del Tepeyac: Historia de las apariciones de Santa María de Guadalupe, texto y comentario* (Servir, 1981); Idem, *Para comprender el mensaje de María de Guadalupe* (Editorial Guadalupe, 1989); Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813* (University of Chicago Press, 1976); Virgilio Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Orbis, 1997); Richard Nebel, *Santa María Tonantzin: Virgen de Guadalupe* (Fondo de Cultural Económica, 1995); Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797* (University of Arizona Press, 1995); Jeanette Rodríguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican American Women* (University of Texas Press, 1994).
- 8 See Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation*, pp. ix-xx.
- 9 David Garcia, "You Can Do It," in Virgilio Elizondo, Allan Figueroa Deck, and Timothy Matovina, eds., *The Treasure of Guadalupe* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), p. 22.
- 10 Goizueta, p. 145.

If the God we claim to worship is one who "does not belong" to this world, then that God will approach us through the lives of those who themselves "do not belong."

us to surround ourselves with walls, turrets, and electric fences. It is the powerless in our world who are the bearers of the good news that, whatever our obsessive pretensions to the contrary, we are *all* ultimately powerless. Our lives are nothing but the pure gift of a God in whose hands we can rest and in whose wholly unmerited love we can trust.

The Sound of Silence in the American Pulpit

By Andrew M. Manis

Nobody seems to know who first made the observation or the exact moment when it went from new insight to old cliché, but two things we do know with some certainty: First, Martin Luther King Jr. often quoted it, and second, that it is still true: Eleven o'clock on Sunday morning remains the most racially segregated hour of the week.¹

This persistent truism set me to wondering what white and black ministers are saying these days to their congregations about race matters, utterances that are never heard on the other side of the color line.

To try to find out, I contacted homiletics professors at forty-one U.S. Protestant seminaries, soliciting their and their students' sermons on racial reconciliation. So far I've collected a whopping twenty-four sermons. Next I asked fifteen of the most prominent clergy around town to contribute a sermon for a new book project entitled, *Eavesdropping on the Most Segregated Hour: A City's Clergy Reflect on Racial Reconciliation*. So far, after recruiting for some eight weeks, I've managed to drag seven ministers (five white, two African American) on board with me.

Unpopular Topic

Three of the invitees declined – two whites, one black. One of the whites claimed he was not qualified, while the other needed to pray over the matter before he eventually said no. Suffice it to say that racial reconciliation appears not to be a favorite topic for sermons in the contemporary American pulpit.

Yet even as America nears this year's fiftieth anniversary of the Birmingham demonstrations and the "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington, African Americans still lag behind whites in every significant economic index. Yes, there has been progress. The combination of the civil rights movement and the activism of the Kennedy-Johnson administrations and a liberal Congress yielded the

two most important civil rights advances in our history. Thus we finally rid our American souls of Jim Crow (with the 1964 Civil Rights Act), and Congress forced the South to protect black voting rights (with the 1965 Voting Rights Act). But not without a white backlash, both South and North, that deposited a residue of bitterness on both sides of the color line that remains even in the second term of our nation's first African-American president.

So why have we not made more progress on race matters? Why does black life expectancy still average some six years less than that of white Americans? Why is black unemployment still double that of whites? Why does the average black college graduate

Risk too many homiletical references – never mind entire sermons – about race, and the preacher may soon be looking for a new gig elsewhere.

earn only 78 percent of her white counterpart? Why is Jennifer still 50 percent more likely to be called for a job interview than LaKeisha? Why is it still so easy, despite all the evidence of modern science, for some to attribute these deficiencies to blackness? And why it is still so difficult to hear a clear "Thus saith the Lord!" on these matters from our pulpits?

In white pulpits, anyway. Generally, ministers in black churches deal with race issues of some kind virtually every Sunday. This is why very few African Americans were surprised by the Rev. Jeremiah

Wright's prophetic utterances that shocked so many whites back in 2008. The difficult realities that still exist among blacks naturally elicit some harsh words from their preachers. But I am certain that my black minister friend who declined to contribute a sermon to my book knows many fellow ministers who, like he, have developed so strong a case of "race fatigue" that they have stopped even addressing the matter with white people. They echo an exasperated Thurgood Marshall who once said, "Sometimes I get so tired of trying to save the white man's soul."² Unlike Sisyphus, they've just stopped trying to push that particular boulder up that particular hill.

So our progress lags because many white Americans and their ministers are eager to convince themselves that we have already reached the Promised Land of a Post-Racial America. Seriously? Many of these otherwise caring, Christian citizens surely want it to be true. Others are, as the late scholar Ronald W. Walters suggested, frustrated by conditions they feel they've tried to fix but will not go away.³ Both groups perhaps think privately, "Oh, get over it. It's time to move on to other concerns." There are, of course, angrier versions of this response.

Why this recalcitrance and defeatism? Here's my theory: Some ideological stars in the American constellation burn so brightly that they blind most of us from seeing clearly the situation on the ground right before us, hidden in plain sight. How many such bright stars are casting their blinding light over us? Who can tell? For starters I can name two.

A Blinding Star

The first is American individualism, which dominates both our political and our religious language. Invoked as something sacred, it makes us praise or blame individuals for their good or bad behavior. It understands that the individual choices we make and actions we take really do matter. But the light of individualism is too bright to allow us to see that the collective, social situations around us matter just as much.

A survey conducted in 2000 by the University of Akron showed that 73 percent of evangelical laypersons agreed with the statement: "If enough people are brought to Christ, social ills will take care of themselves." Along the same lines, another white evangelical told researchers, "If everybody was a Christian, there wouldn't be a race problem. We'd all be the same."⁴

Individualism reads the New Testament and sees the missionary Paul converting individuals all along his journeys. It blinds us, however, to the Paul who tried to aid Jewish Christians by gathering money

from every Gentile church he visited all the way to Rome and perhaps to Spain. He even put off some of his missionary activity until he had taken the offering back to Jerusalem. We see his evangelism, but we seem oblivious to his social vision at work in virtually every one of his letters, which contains material designed to break down the "middle wall of partition" between Gentiles and Jews.

Being healed of this blindness would help us grasp that just as human nature has both individual and collective dimensions, so does racism. We'd see that even a miracle that changed our individual racial attitudes overnight would still leave us a society with deep inequalities that require collective action commensurate with our changed attitudes toward individual persons of color.

Satisfied Customers

The other blinding star in our sky is the tradition of voluntarism created by our freedom of religion. No government can force us to be religious or join a congregation. Our churches, as Sidney Mead told us long ago, must convince "prospects" to become voluntary members. This creates a marketplace of religion where religious organizations must compete. And judging from the typical customer service I see in the business marketplace today, our churches might be the last institutions in America where the old slogan still holds true: "The customer is always right." They are right even if they are actively racist or passive bystanders who allow the inequality of the racial status quo to remain intact. Either way, they want to hear something spiritually uplifting from the pulpit. Risk too many homiletical references – never mind entire sermons – about race, and the preacher may soon be looking for a new gig elsewhere.

Thus it was for the ministers in early America who avoided criticizing and then eventually advocated slavery for the sake of the wealthy Christians who owned both slaves to build their plantations and hireling ministers to build their churches. Thus it was for the ministers during the civil rights movement who joined the Rev. Jerry Falwell in lionizing Billy Graham rather than Martin Luther King as the model minister.

Such hireling ministers may be, in the terminology of evangelicalism, fine "soul-winners" or "church-builders." But are the churches they built mere monuments to expedience, where keeping one's pulpit meant keeping the customers satisfied and keeping their churches growing? We have to wonder about the nature, message, and spiritual legitimacy of such churches if it also meant keeping silent about the untold millions of sons and daugh-

ters of Africa whose lives were ended or damaged for generations to come by slavery and segregation. As Frederick Douglass told a London audience in 1846: "... the pulpit and the auctioneer's block stand in the same neighborhood; while the blood-stained gold goes to support the pulpit, the pulpit covers the infernal business with the garb of Christianity. We have men sold to build churches, women sold to support missionaries, and babies sold to buy Bibles and communion services for the churches."⁶

The Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth was one of the bravest ministers ever to set foot on this continent. He single-handedly carried the civil rights movement in Birmingham, Ala., on his shoulders, surviving three bombings of his church and home, along with several additional attempts on his life. After five years of cajoling, Martin Luther King Jr. joined forces with him for protest demonstrations that rocked America fifty years ago this spring. When white ministers told Shuttlesworth they would lose their pulpits if they spoke up in the movement's behalf, he replied, "I would do it at least once and see if God didn't find you another pulpit." He always added this tagline: "When God says 'Jump!' it's my job to jump; it's *his* job to fix me a place to land."⁷

Simplistic as it sounds, when we ministers look at the world through a faith perspective like this, our eyes can be shaded from the brightness of individualism and religious consumerism and actually *see* the continuing devastation caused by racism and our cowardly silence about it.

"The lion has roared," the prophet Amos once said, "Who can but prophesy?" Who indeed?

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Notes

- 1 The statement appears four times in James Melvin Washington's collection of King's most important writings, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Harper & Row, 1986) – King's 1962 "Address to the National Press Club," p. 101; "The Case Against Tokenism," p. 108; "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," p. 270; and "Stride Toward Freedom: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott," p. 479.

- 2 Juan Williams, *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary* (Random House, 1998), p. 199.
- 3 Ronald W. Walters, *The Price of Racial Reconciliation* (University of Michigan, 2008), p. 80.
- 4 Geoffrey Noel Schoonmaker, "Preaching About Race: A Homiletic for Racial Reconciliation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2012), p. 31; Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 117.
- 5 Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (Wipf & Stock; reprint edition, 2007).
- 6 Frederick Douglass, "Address in London" (1846), excerpt reprinted in James T. Baker, ed., *Religion in America: Primary Sources in U.S. History* (Wadsworth, 2006), p. 196.
- 7 Andrew M. Manis, *A Fire You Can't Put Out: The Civil Rights Life of Birmingham's Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth* (University of Alabama, 1999), p. 186.

LUNAR By Jim Harrison

Out in the nighttime in the caliche-gravel driveway
doing a shuffle dance to the music of the lunar eclipse,
a dark gray and reddish smear blocking the moon.
I'm embarrassed by my dance steps learned
from the Ojibwe over fifty years ago,
but then who's watching but a few startled birds,
especially a canyon wren nesting in a crack of the huge
rock face? Without the moon's white light the sky
is suddenly overpopulated with stars like China or India
with people. The stars cast the longest of shadows.
I dance until I'm a breathless old fool thinking
that the spirit of this blinded moon is as real
as that enormous toad that used to bury itself
between the house and the barn of our farm
in Lake Leelanau. One evening I watched him slowly
erupt from the ground. Now the moon's white light
begins to show itself, shining off looming Red Mountain
where years ago I'm told a Mexican boy climbed
to the top to play a song more closely to his dead sister.
Luna, luna, luna, we must sing to praise living and dead.



From the Archives: Whither the Black Church in the Twenty-First Century?

By Moses N. Moore Jr. and Yolanda Y. Smith

As the church and wider religious community wrestle with the challenges confronting the nation and world in the new century, it is instructive to recall the prophetic response of an earlier generation of Yale Divinity School seminarians and alumni who similarly faced the known and unknown tasks of the early twentieth century.

In the spring of 1931, black seminarians preparing for religious work joined with YDS professor Jerome Davis to organize and host a three-day gathering titled The Yale Seminar on the Negro Church. This historic conference had as its theme “Whither the Negro Church?”¹ In attendance were well-known YDS black alumni such as Henry H. Proctor (YDS 1894) and other prominent clergy, scholars, and leaders, including George Edmond Haynes, A. Philip Randolph, and Benjamin E. Mays. In concert with

The contemporary black church is in a position to help bridge the gap between the church, the academy, and broader Christian community by “keeping it real.”

their seminarian hosts, they attempted to devise a strategy for addressing the spiritual, economic, and racial issues preoccupying black churches and the wider Christian community. Topics included, “The Negro Church in a Changing Social Order,” “The Negro Church and Economic Relations,” “The Negro Church and Education,” “The Negro Church and Race,” and “Future Leadership of the Negro Church.”

Acknowledging the historic contributions of the black church and clergy, seminar participants nevertheless warned of the inadequacy of traditional responses to the complexities facing the world in the 1930s. Resolutions adopted by seminar participants were far-sighted in their call for the black church to 1) “set itself to the task of developing a more pro-

phetic and fearless technique in making applicable the implications of the religion of Jesus in relation to our social order” and 2) “discover and develop a type of leadership that would do for America and the Negro race what Gandhi has done for India and what Jesus has done for the world.”² In keeping with its concern to “produce a new type of leadership,” the seminar concluded with a challenge to YDS and other seminaries to provide a theological education that would inspire and enable graduates to meet the spiritual, economic, and racial needs they identified.³

A Far-Reaching Revival

Although plans to hold future seminars at the Divinity School apparently failed to materialize, this pioneering gathering, little known and only belatedly appreciated, anticipated revival of the prophetic black religious tradition – a tradition that would provide leadership and inspiration for the emergent civil rights movement and its evolution by century’s end into a struggle for human rights that would enlist the efforts of later generations of YDS black seminarians.⁴

Now almost three quarters of a century later, the core questions and issues illuminated by the 1931 seminar loom again with increased urgency: Whither the black church and the wider Christian community in the twenty-first century?⁵ How will today’s church (to cite the language of the 1931 gathering) “set itself to the task of developing a more prophetic and fearless technique in making applicable the implications of the religion of Jesus” in the face of a changing social order contoured

by the new economic, technological, and political demands of a truly international community?

Though the dialectic of race, religion, and culture remains central to the witness of the black church and broader Christian community, new conditions and debates radically extend the agenda that the 1931 seminar forged. Among these: gender equality, economic justice, sustainability, shared access to global resources, inter-religious and inter-cultural tolerance, technological responsibility, heightened violence (personal, domestic, national, and international), and expanded access to quality education, advanced technology, and health care.

Relevant also is the seminar's question as applied to contemporary theological education: How will YDS and other seminaries equip students, alums, and faculty to meet the challenges confronting the church and world in the twenty-first century? How will they equip new generations of future leaders with "a more prophetic and fearless technique in making applicable the implications of the religion of Jesus in relation to [the increasingly diverse] social order?"

Just as in the last century, the contemporary black church is in a position to help bridge the gap between the church, the academy, and broader Christian community by "keeping it real" – by forthrightly addressing pertinent issues and creating partnerships that promote communally and globally engaged ministry and theological education.

Barbara Brown Zikmund, former president of Hartford Seminary and the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), captures the essence of this partnership model of church and seminary, observing that "theological seminaries live in a creative tension between giving churches what they want and challenging churches to rise to the radical demands of the gospel. By reminding seminaries that churches provide the context that nurtures mature faith ... churches [help] keep seminaries accountable."⁶ Relevant here also is the observation recently shared by Allan Boesak, the South African scholar, social activist, and minister, who calls for a "dialogue of equals." Such a dialogue compels each party (church, seminary, and community) to come to the table as "fellow seekers" with a genuine intention to learn from one another.⁷ Participants in the 1931 seminar knew that the black church at its best has long embraced similar models of partnership in its quest to do "what Jesus has done."

As we consider the 1931 conference in light of the demands of the new century, we should be prepared to extend its hard-won lessons and insights – and, in

its spirit, remain open to creative ways of addressing contemporary complexities and crosscurrents of religion, race, and culture. Thus the black church must be prepared and willing to enter into principle discourse and alliances with diverse communities such as Native Americans, Latino/Latinas, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and LGBTQ, applying the models of Gandhi and Jesus to the peculiar challenges of the current day.⁸

"Old Things are Passing Away"

Also of renewed relevance and inspiration is the perceptive counsel of conference participant and YDS alum the Rev. Henry H. Proctor. Almost a decade before the 1931 conference, he evoked the prose of Scripture as he described the conditions facing churches at the opening of the twentieth century:

Evidently, we are on the borderland of a new world, not only in the application of modern science to the progress of mankind from a physical viewpoint, but also in the application of the things of the spirit to the social relationships of man. Old things are passing away; all things are being made new.⁹

Consequently, Proctor boldly issued a call for the establishment of "a new type" of black church – a church willing to apply Christianity in innovative ways to meet the changing needs of a new era.¹⁰

Given the myriad challenges and heightened

i am accused of tending to the past
By Lucille Clifton

i am accused of tending to the past
as if i made it,
as if i sculpted it
with my own hands. i did not.
this past was waiting for me
when i came,
a monstrous unnamed baby,
and i with my mother's itch
took it to breast
and named it
History.
she is more human now,
learning language everyday,
remembering faces, names and dates.
when she is strong enough to travel
on her own, beware, she will.

risks facing the Christian and global community at the cusp of a new millennium, the black church of today must also be willing to reinvent itself, even as it continues to draw inspiration from its past. Like the black church of old, it must attempt once again to empower both itself and the broader Christian community in alliance with seminary and academy, to discern and forthrightly engage the present and future with the hard-nosed realism yet unflagging confidence voiced in the “Negro” spiritual *Been in the Storm So Long*.¹¹

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Notes

- 1 The genesis of the seminar appears to have been the founding in 1930 of a “Negro society called Upsilon Theta Chi whose motto was ‘Service and Sacrifice for Christ.’” Its aim was to “produce a new type of leadership,” which would “give itself unstintedly to the uplift of the Negro race and other oppressed peoples, and to the creation of a new social order based upon the principles of Jesus.” Jerome Davis, Foreword to *Whither the Negro Church? Seminar Held at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT, April 13-15, 1931*, p. 3. Among YDS black seminarians participating were Harry W. Roberts, Edward Carroll, John Dillingham, Everett Davies, Samuel M. Carter, Josephus Coan, and Charles H. Moss (absent because of illness), Davis, p. 48.
- 2 *Whither the Negro Church?*, pp. 45, 47.
- 3 Davis, Foreword to *Whither the Negro Church?*, p. 3.
- 4 Especially notable were the contributions of A. Phillip Randolph and Benjamin E. Mays. See Dennis C. Dickerson, “African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930–55,” *Church History* 74 (June 2005), pp. 217–235.
- 5 An ongoing research project by the authors of this essay shines light on the contemporary relevance of their question. With this project, entitled “‘Been in the Storm So Long’: Yale Divinity School and the Black Ministry – One Hundred and Fifty Years of Black Theological Education,” the authors have conducted interviews with black YDS alumni, gathering insights and historical

- perspectives. Several interviewees have emphasized the importance of ecumenical and inter-religious engagement, ecumenism, and inter-religious debate.
- 6 Barbara Brown Zikmund, “Theological Seminaries and Effective Christian Education,” in *Rethinking Christian Education: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, David S. Schuller, ed. (Chalis Press, 1993), p. 123.
 - 7 Allan Boesak, reflecting on the theme “Ministry with South African Youth: From Apartheid to the Twenty-First Century,” in Yolanda Y. Smith’s “Youth, Culture, and Christian Education” course at YDS, Feb. 5, 2013.
 - 8 It is commendable that current students, faculty, and staff at YDS have recently grappled with this question and the broader dilemma of diversity by embarking last fall on a year-long initiative on racial justice and inclusivity.
 - 9 Henry Hugh Proctor, *Between Black and White: Autobiographical Sketches* (originally published 1925, reprint Books For Libraries Press, 1971), p.182.
 - 10 Proctor.
 - 11 Notably, Proctor’s ministry drew inspiration from the spirituals; one of his most important publications was a pioneering study called “The Theology of the Songs of the Southern Slave,” *Journal of Black Sacred Music* 2, no. 1 (1988), pp. 51-63.

Hispanic Catholics: Sending Mixed Signals?

American Hispanic Catholicism’s path into the future is unclear, according to a Public Religion Research Institute survey.

American Hispanics have emerged as a demographic force in U.S. Catholicism: The percentage of American Catholics of Hispanic descent (now 29 percent) has more than doubled in twenty years. Nearly half of Catholics now under the age of thirty are Hispanic.

However, statistics also show signs of Hispanic Catholic decline. Three-quarters of American Hispanics reported having been raised Catholic, but less than half of them now identify as Catholic.

The survey said conversions to Protestantism and a shift to religious non-affiliation account for the trend. Nearly one-third of Hispanics are now Protestant.

But a new Latin America pope offers reasons for optimism. The survey reports: “Pope Francis reportedly is a traditionalist who also champions the issues of poverty and social justice. Hispanic Catholics are significantly more likely than white Catholics to believe the church should preserve its traditional beliefs and practices, and a majority of Hispanic Catholics believe that in its statements about public policy the church should focus more on social justice and the obligation to help the poor.”



American Religious Freedom: Pride and Prejudice

By Tisa Wenger

Many Americans take great pride in religious freedom as a pivotal feature of the nation's founding experiment, and a signal contribution to global practices of democracy. However, any amount of historical investigation reveals that this freedom has always had its limits, and Americans have always disagreed about its implications in practice.

I am currently at work on a cultural history that will chart the shifting meanings of American religious freedom, attending to the many kinds of cultural and political work it has performed. Among the most unsavory and least understood aspects of this history is the relationship of religious freedom to formations of race and racism. In many times and places, I have found, public discourses of religious freedom have worked subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) to reinforce cultural hierarchies of racial privilege and prejudice.

Christians and Heathens

This pattern is evident from the very beginnings of American history. In the colonial period, the development of slavery as a race-based institution drew

In many times and places, public discourses of religious freedom have reinforced hierarchies of racial prejudice.

on newly articulated Enlightenment ideologies of religious freedom. Early modern European cultural and legal norms used the Bible to define the limits of slavery, holding that the “heathen” could legitimately be enslaved while Christians could not. Many planters refused to permit the evangelization of their slaves precisely on these grounds. Some slaves did convert to Christianity, however, and at least a few successfully sued for their release on these grounds.¹

For the slave-owning society, new conceptions of “religion” provided a way to eliminate that legal means of escape. Distinguishing between the categories of race and religion enabled the slave’s racial identity, rather than his or her “heathenism,” to become the undisputed basis for bondage. Meanwhile, sharply separating the “religious” from the “civil” made it conceivable for slaves to be granted freedom in the former sphere without jeopardizing their enslavement in the latter.

All of this is very clear in the “Fundamental Constitution” for the colony of Carolina, drafted in 1669 by none other than John Locke, the early Enlightenment’s leading theorist of religious liberty. This governing document benevolently granted slaves the right to choose their own church, while specifying that this freedom was not to infringe on their masters’ authority over them in other respects:

“Since charity obliges us to wish well to the souls of men, and *religion ought to alter nothing in any man’s civil estate or right*, it shall be lawful for slaves, as well as others, to enter themselves, and be of what church or profession any of them shall think best, and therefore, be as fully members as any freeman. But yet no slave shall hereby be exempted from that civil dominion his master hath over him, but be in all things in the same state and condition he was in before.”²

This phrasing reveals how Locke’s newly theorized separation between the religious and the civil – and the religious freedom made conceivable by that separation – worked to solidify an increasingly race-based system of slavery.

After the American Revolution and throughout the antebellum period, white Americans' articulations of religious freedom frequently operated to bolster the system of slavery. This was the case despite the anti-slavery message famously preached by many black and white Methodists, Baptists, and Quakers at the time. In 1790 the General Committee of Virginia Baptists passed a resolution, proposed by anti-slavery minister John Leland, calling on church members to "make use of every legal measure to extirpate the horrid evil [of slavery] from the land." But the Baptists' radical insistence on absolute "freedom of conscience" for congregations and individuals meant that no such statement could serve as more than a recommendation. In repudiating the resolution, many Baptists insisted that the propriety of slaveholding could only be decided between God and each individual.³

"Conscientious" Objections

Thus the free-church insistence on the right to interpret religious teachings for oneself enabled the claim that slaveholding was a matter of private conscience, not something that should be dictated by authorities of any kind.

As debates over slavery intensified in the mid-nineteenth century, the system's advocates would more and more insistently assert slaveholders' rights on the grounds that the "peculiar institution" was part of (white) southerners' conscientious practice of Christianity. Apologists protested that under the Constitution northern abolitionists had no right to impose their own religious strictures on others. A group of South Carolinians advocating secession explained in 1861, "We detest Abolitionism because it trespasses upon our rights of conscience. It does not allow us to judge for ourselves the morality of slaveholding."⁴

Up until the Civil War many northern whites, both Protestant and Catholic, rejected abolitionist efforts on the same grounds. In the powerful logic of pro-slavery apologetics, therefore, the principles of property rights and religious freedom worked together to silence moral and religious critiques of slavery.

Of course, African Americans and other groups marked as racial minorities could and did rearticulate the idea of religious freedom in support of their broader struggles for freedom. But precisely because the discrimination against them was framed in overwhelmingly racial ways, African Americans (especially those who identified as Christians) only occasionally found this a useful tool. This dynamic would be somewhat different for the variety of new

religious movements that emerged in African-American communities in the twentieth century. Some of these groups quite deliberately worked to redefine their difference in ethno-religious rather than racial terms, and appealed to the principle of religious freedom as part of that effort.⁵

The Jewish Example

Far more than these African-American new religious movements, American Jewish articulations of religious freedom largely succeeded in defining Judaism as a primarily religious (rather than racial or national) identity within the American cultural landscape.

"The Israelites will think themselves happy to live under a government where all Religious societies are on an Equal footing," wrote the German-Jewish immigrant Jonas Phillips to the national Constitutional Convention in 1787.

Phillips' reference to the "Israelites" suggests the ongoing reality of other ways of defining Jewish peoplehood in the U.S. and around the world. European patterns of segregating Jews into ghettos, and assigning particular restrictions or rights to them as a group, continued to construct Judaism in ways that did not separate out categories of race, nation, and religion. But in the U.S., the logic and the promise of religious freedom encouraged Jews to present their identity in specifically religious terms. Jewish protests against the many legal manifestations of Christian privilege, such as Sunday laws and Bible-reading in the public schools, used the concept of religious freedom to call for equality in religious terms.

There were trade-offs, of course, that troubled many Orthodox Jewish leaders. As they gained legitimacy as a religious minority in the U.S., Jews (like many others) necessarily adopted the voluntary and denominational models forged by Protestants for what counted as religion in America. But for most, these pressures seemed far preferable to the extreme forms of marginalization and violence they faced in Europe – or to the status of those American minorities that were defined primarily in racial terms. Their religious freedom claims worked against competing images of Jews as racially other, reinforcing Jewish claims to the status of whiteness in America.⁶

Meanwhile, dominant articulations of religious freedom continued to bolster racialized systems of oppression against African Americans in the twentieth century. In the 1940s and 1950s, early civil rights activists seeking to desegregate residential neighborhoods were met with claims that God had creat-

ed the races separate, and that forced desegregation would violate the religious (and other) freedoms of those who believed in upholding that design.

Significantly, the early Cold War celebration of America's religious freedoms clearly served to deflect public attention from the problem of racism. In the early 1940s the newly created Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJC) – initially founded to lobby on behalf of persecuted Baptists in Romania and the Soviet Union – reluctantly agreed to include representatives from the major black Baptist church bodies. But white leaders rejected the black delegates' request that the BJC address problems of racial discrimination in the U.S. They explained that this would detract from the organization's primary focus on religious freedom, and that it would be likely to alienate white Southern Baptist constituencies. The BJC was not willing to allow black Baptists a voice in shaping its agenda, and for this reason the latter generally stayed away from its meetings in subsequent years.⁷

Privileging the Privileged?

What can we learn from this history about contemporary America's cultural and racial politics of religious freedom? It should be recognized that religious groups of multiple racial and confessional identities are working hard at tackling racial injustice, sometimes in profound ways. But I do find it disturbing that several of the nation's largest church bodies have recently headlined questions of sexuality and reproduction as the only ethical concerns that seem to merit the label "religious." For many Christian leaders, meanwhile, issues such as mass incarceration and immigration reform are categorized only as racial, economic, or political problems – but not as intrinsically religious problems as well. In some ways this replicates Locke's division in 1669 between "religious" and "civil" concerns, a distinction that (whatever its benefits in other respects) was used to shape systems of racial injustice in his day and beyond.

The religious freedoms asserted today, in my analysis, overwhelmingly function to privilege the already privileged, to make life more difficult for the poor and disenfranchised, and to detract the attention of our religious communities from the overwhelming racial and economic injustices of our society. In all these ways, contemporary invocations of religious freedom have moved too many American Christians away from any sustained attention to "the least of these."

The knowledge that religious freedom is not a simple or self-evident concept calls for both a sense

of humility and a critical hermeneutics of suspicion. This principle has been important to many religious minorities, including those who reject any conventional religious belief, both in the U.S. and around the world. But we should not hold any invocation of this freedom so sacrosanct that it blinds us to injustice, whether defined in racial or any other terms. I would like to see America's religious communities invest their energies in a far broader struggle for freedom and justice that includes us all.

Tisa Wenger, assistant professor of American religious history at YDS, is the author of We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom (North Carolina, 2009).

Notes

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- 2 John Locke, "The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina," March 1, 1669, available online through The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/nc05.asp. Italics added for emphasis.
- 3 Thomas S Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (Basic Books, 2010), p. 157.
- 4 James C. Furman et al., "To the Citizens of Greenville District," 1861, Correspondence of Rev. Franklin Wilson, Box 3, MSS 833, Wilson Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.
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- 6 Quote from Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (Yale, 2004), pp. 37–39; see also Naomi Wiener Cohen, *Jews in Christian America: The Pursuit of Religious Equality*, *Studies in Jewish History* (Oxford, 1992); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, 2006).
- 7 Joint Conference Committee on Public Relations Representing the Northern Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention, "Records of Meeting," April 27, 1943, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Minutes, 1938-1979, AR 378, Box 1:1, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

IF EVE SIDE-STEALER
& MARY BUSTED-CHEST
RULED THE WORLD

By Natalie Diaz

What if Eve was an Indian
& Adam was never kneaded
from the earth, Eve *was* Earth
& ribs were her idea all along?

What if Mary was an Indian
& when Gabriel visited her wigwam
she was away at a monthly WIC clinic
receiving eggs, boxed cheese
& peanut butter instead of Jesus?

What if God was an Indian
with turquoise wings & coral breasts
who invented a game called White Man Chess
played on silver boards with all white pieces
pawns & kings & only one side, the white side
& the more they won the more they were beaten?

What if the world was an Indian
whose head & back were flat from being strapped
to a cradleboard as a baby & when she slept
she had nightmares lit up by yellow-haired men & ships
scraping anchors in her throat? What if she wailed
all night while great waves rose up carrying the fleets
across her flat back, over the edge of the flat world?

The Color of Racism

By Frederick J. Streets

My paternal grandmother was a domestic worker, a position many black women held during the 1940s and 50s. She took me with her to work during the summer. It took us three hours from where we lived in the city to get to her job in the suburbs by 8 a.m.

I watched my grandmother clean, cook, wash, and iron the clothes belonging to the white family who employed her. I played all day with the children of the family and their friends from the neighborhood while she worked.

A local company regularly sponsored a contest to select the “family of the week” who used their product. The family chosen would be featured in a television commercial advertising the product. My grandmother and I arrived one morning to discover the family awake and dressed. They had won the contest and were excitedly waiting for the TV crew to arrive to film them for the commercial. My grandmother went about her tasks with deliberate

The greater the gap between the ministry of the church and the religion of Jesus Christ, the greater the chances that racism will flourish.

normalcy. The camera crew arrived and gathered the family in the living room to capture a picture of an “all-American” family of the 1950s. I had been told by them over the years that I was a member of the family, so ... I stood there with the rest waiting to say “cheese” for the camera. I was gently told by the cameraman to stand to the side. My grandmother explained to me that the picture was to be just them.

This suburban neighborhood where my grandmother worked is one of my early memories of an all-white environment where I felt most different from those around me. The feeling of being an “other” contradicted my experience at home and

in my community. This early childhood incident, one of several, was the beginning of my awareness of experiencing the question W.E.B. Du Bois raises in his *The Souls of Black Folk*, first published in 1903: *How does it feel to be a problem?*

American Portrait, Incomplete

The analogy of the photo raises the question: Who is included in the picture of those whom we call Americans, and who decides who will be a part of this portrait? Albert Memmi wrote in his classic *Racism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000): “Racism is the generalized and final assigning of values to real or imaginary differences, to the accuser’s benefit and at its victim’s expense, in order to justify the former’s own privileges or aggression.”

Many of my students do not initially notice that the word “color,” which is commonly assumed to be a key component of racism, is missing from Memmi’s definition. For him the power to assign a prejudicial value to any characteristic of another human being – and then deploy the instruments of science, law, religion, institutional structures, and government for one’s own benefit and at the expense of its victims – is central to the way racism functions in the contemporary world as a force of discrimination. The physical features or other characteristics of people – their gender, sexual orientation, or age – are but a few of the attributes we use to discriminate against other people for our perceived benefit.

More elusive, though, is the persistence of racist values. Racist views of African Americans have been codified in our laws, supported by data classified as

“scientific,” rationalized by religious leaders and institutions as the will of God, and used to form economic and political policy. It persists despite overwhelming evidence that African Americans are not inferior to other ethnic groups, particularly white Americans. It persists as an ideology, a kind of “blood knowledge,” (see Jonathan D. Jansen’s *Knowledge in the Blood*, Stanford, 2009). Like DNA in our blood, racism is transmitted by the culture at large, affecting African Americans as well as everyone else.

Prejudice Old and New

This pernicious mental habit stands behind the movement that questions the citizenship of President Obama. It’s there in the recent incident in New York, where a prominent black American movie actor/director was frisked by a deli store employee who assumed he was shoplifting. The racism against African Americans time and again reveals its peculiar tenacity: American society has a difficult time letting go of these impulses despite the contributions of blacks to the nation. Black men are often assumed to be armed, dangerous, angry, and therefore subject to harassment, arrest, or even murder by the police or armed civilians. The election of a black president has not lessened whites’ negative attitudes toward black Americans.

The violent objectification of people extends to the abuse of women, children, and the LGBTQ community. It can be heard in the public debate about immigration reform.

Racists deny the humanity of those whom they hate and fight to keep them out of the picture of America. Yet hating other people is not a genetic disposition. We learn to hate others, and our hatred of them is reflected in the formal and informal rules that govern how we interact with one another. My generation is the last one to have lived under legal segregation in America. But each generation has the responsibility to be vigilant in identifying and challenging racism in its own time.

Congregational life should share in this vigilance. Fundamental to church teaching is that we are made in the image of God. Gardner C. Taylor calls this the “biography of the human soul.” (*The Words of Gardner Taylor*, Vol. 5., Judson Press, 2001). Ultimately racial hatred is a form of self-hatred, blinding us to our own humanity and the humanity of those we hate. Paul Tillich says in *My Search for Absolutes* (Simon and Schuster, 1967): “From the point of view of the holy, we do not belong to ourselves but to that from which we come and to which we return – the eternal ground of everything that is. This is the ulti-

mate reason for the sacredness of the person and, consequently, for the unconditional character of the moral command not to destroy our essential being which is given to us and which we may disregard and destroy.”

We sometimes forget: We are all connected. There is only one race and it is human. Howard Thurman in *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949) reminds us that haters and the victims of hate are caught in a mutual web of fear and deception. Only the love shown in the life lived by Jesus and others who do not try to escape the demands of love can cast out the darkness of hatred. This is the work and witness of the church and the religion of Jesus.

As friends of Christ we are called to withdraw from any practice of thought or habit that objectifies other people. We are called to distance ourselves from situations of oppression. Expanding our con-

King’s dream reframes our picture of one another – a picture framed with the four borders of love, justice, freedom, and community.

sideration of how racism functions today – how it includes but also goes beyond color prejudice – can make us more responsive to its traumatic and tragic effects.

I believe human beings are basically good despite the harm we do to one another. The picture of America that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream painted is not just deeply rooted in an American social ideal. The freedom and justice about which he spoke and for which he and others died are the freedom and justice God had in mind for us when God saw us for the first time and declared us good.

The divine character of the dream cannot be possessed or monopolized by any one group of people. The dream reframes our picture of one another – a picture framed with the four borders of love, justice, freedom, and community. The dream invites us all to receive courage from it so we can make it real for all people. It urges that we love and respect ourselves and one another for who we are, to accept each other as part of the picture of America and to dream about what we can become and contribute to the world.

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The Spirit of Ubuntu:

An Interview with Allan Boesak



Allan Boesak – minister, theologian, former politician – is a patriarch of the modern anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

He emerged as a public force thirty years ago as the most visible leader of the United Democratic Front, the largest anti-apartheid movement in South Africa's history. During that tumultuous decade, he also became the leader of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

*Boesak received a Ph.D. in theology from the Protestant Theological University in Kampen, the Netherlands, and is the author of seventeen books. His most recent is *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* (Orbis, 2012), written with Curtiss Paul DeYoung. Boesak is currently an honorary research fellow at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Last fall he was visiting theologian at Butler University and Christian Theological Seminary, both in Indianapolis. He spoke with Reflections in February during his visit to Yale Divinity School, where he lectured on “Reconciliation, Justice and the Spirit of Ubuntu.”*

REFLECTIONS: Why is the subject of race so hard to get right and so easy to distort and evade?

ALLAN BOESAK: It's a difficult conversation partly because so many people are unable to see that it's not just a matter of improving interpersonal relationships. It also involves addressing some real and difficult systemic problems – structures of injustice and privilege. If you don't see that, then there is little you will do to rectify racial inequality. You'll think all you can do is individualize it – improve relations between oneself and others of a different race – and deny the rest exists.

What's hard to see is that the challenge of the personal dimension is too indebted in the systemic to ignore. It affects friendships. To use the South

Africa situation, it is important to realize in our discourse with each other as friends that long before we met, the relationship itself has already been determined by structural realities – by white power and privilege that are so embedded in the system that they become normalized. We have to realize that we come into our conversation with this reality, and unless we grapple with it honestly, we'll find that the friendship that might have developed does not, or if it does develop it is too shallow to be real, because we keep running away from those things we find are too hard to talk about.

REFLECTIONS: In the U.S. there is often a sense of weariness or impatience around race, as if we have tried and tried but tensions remain.

BOESAK: Those who are fatigued by it are, I think, unwilling really to grapple with it. In South Africa as well as the U.S., we are no longer a racist society – that is, there are no more laws on the books or signs saying you can go here and I must go there. But we are both thoroughly *racialized* societies: Race has much more to do with what's going on in our minds and the ways power structures work. How hard have we really worked to eradicate those forces that cement racist power? We must answer that, because those are the things that prevent us from building the social cohesion we need.

REFLECTIONS: You've said the goal in South Africa is to build a non-racial society. Here, we embrace a multi-ethnic model. Is that a mistake?

BOESAK: I thought South Africa was race-obsessed, but I think the U.S. is more so – more into ethnicity and ethnic differences, and that makes the conversation harder. We think multiracialism is a bit of a copout. We think people have to come to an understanding that says not so much that “race doesn't matter” but asks why did we get caught up in race at all? Realize how irrelevant and even accidental it is. Ask how could something so irrelevant come to determine my life and relationships and the way my society is structured.

REFLECTIONS: The Obama election inspired some to declare that we live now in a post-racial society.

BOESAK: I think “post-racial” is a dangerous trap. You can fall into complacency and give your complicity a much more dangerous character. The election of President Obama was an amazing thing. The rest of the world saw it like that and we embraced it. What we cannot embrace is the use of this extraordinary event to suppress crucial issues that with him should have been aired with much more confidence. You have elected an African-American president who does not talk about race himself because he is afraid that it might land him in hot water. It's always a sign that something is very wrong: A black person with power in a white-controlled society is afraid to raise even the question of race. He feels he must be very cautious.

The question ought to be: How do we use this moment to create momentum? I don't see the Obama election and re-election as closing the doors on the racist past. I see him flinging the doors open to a future that people can move into together. I don't mean an artificial togetherness. We have not defeated the structures that allow perhaps one person to rise but millions to languish in the old racist ways. Flinging the doors open seems to me a better metaphor for understanding Obama's rise and seeing opportunity for community to be built.

REFLECTIONS: In your country you've talked about the importance of Ubuntu, the idea of human interconnection, affirmation, openness to others. Can that be a practical guide for reform?

BOESAK: When the aim of society is to be non-racial, then the question of race is subsumed under the question of our common humanity. We've had help with our thinking from the concept of Ubuntu. The concept has been abused, sentimentalized, and romanticized by many and almost disempowered. But in essence, if I really believe that my humanity suffers when your humanity is undermined, and I cannot be fully myself unless I make sure you can be fully yourself, and the recognition of your humanity actually enhances my own – so that I embrace you, embrace the other, and therefore the other-

It's always a sign that something is very wrong: A black person with power in a white-controlled society is afraid to raise even the question of race.

ness of the other person doesn't matter and has no impact on me – then Ubuntu is a wonderful, powerful concept. It says the humanity of the other is what binds us together. Now, too often we claim Ubuntu without really meaning it. I ask that we not underestimate its immense value or trivialize what is unique about it. Ubuntu allows us to move away from the power of ethnicity that was part of racist apartheid thinking.

REFLECTIONS: Can Ubuntu be translated in Christian terms?

BOESAK: Ubuntu is not a biblical concept but an ancient African one. Nevertheless it falls back on one simple thing: that humans have been created for togetherness, and what drives us apart is greed, lust for power, and a sense of exclusion, but those are aberrations. What always strikes me in the story of Cain and Abel is how often the word “brother” is used. Cain killed his “brother.” God says it was “the blood of your brother.” The killing was done to another human being, a child of God like you, breaking that sacred bond of common humanity. Ubuntu understands that, and that seems to me also a biblical idea. Then Jesus comes and reaffirms our humanity by taking it upon himself and identifying moreover with the poorest of the poor, the set aside, the least of these. These are the ones who exemplify my humanity in the world.

REFLECTIONS: Is this a biblical message you customarily hear in churches?

BOESAK: If your starting point for understanding humanity is a racist viewpoint, with superiority and inferiority projected onto people because of the color of their skin, then it's so easy to take the next step of justifying that point theologically and read-

I thought South Africa was race-obsessed, but I think the U.S. is more so – more into ethnic differences, and that makes the conversation harder.

ing it into the Christian scripture. And that makes it harder to understand what scripture is actually saying! I happen to believe in the old Reformed adage that scripture explains itself. I believe scripture is not just resilient but rebellious against its abuse by people. Scripture says it refuses to be used in that way for long. That is why the gospel that has been used by the oppressors is the same gospel that liberated the oppressed: They were reading the same book. Something in the DNA of Christian faith and in the Bible agitates against that kind of misuse.

REFLECTIONS: Yet still we distort Jesus' message?

BOESAK: If we read the New Testament honestly, Jesus emerges as the figure who radically changes lives. I think most of us in the churches really do need a conversion experience, a move away from the sentimental and comfortable ways we have reduced Jesus. Some will be upset, but it takes prophetic preaching. Jesus makes demands on us.

The fundamentalists may have created a personalized Jesus we don't even recognize, but the liberals' Jesus, too, is an individualized Jesus who serves the empire – a Jesus painfully divorced from his ministry of justice. It seems liberals tend to ignore him or doubt the historical context or just take him as a teacher who had little sayings he gave to small groups of people but without impact on wider society. The books I read that take Jesus seriously in his historical circumstances are by progressive theologians who embrace his message of liberation and then take stands against structures of injustice.

REFLECTIONS: What has your political experience taught you? Do churches have an untapped moral power to contribute?

BOESAK: If there's one place where we ought to start talking about social change, it's the churches. How in the world can you preach the gospel without teaching about justice, equality, our common humanity? We need to start those conversations and realize they'll be difficult ones. But we have resources, much more than people in city hall have: We are not supposed to give our higher loyalties to

the things on earth that divide us. We have far too much unity in what we say we believe, if we would begin to be serious about it. Then we could challenge politicians and say we as a community believe these unjust structures lead us to places we really don't want to go to anymore.

Now, politicians are not willing to have such a conversation. I've been a politician and so I'm sometimes cynical about what politicians won't do. When I hear a politician say something that makes no sense whatsoever, I think there's one of two things there: There's money or the promise of money.

But our society is not just politics. Our society is us. How is it possible that we talk with such conviction about the right to own instruments of murder and death and not have the same enthusiasm for the right of people to have shelter, the right of the vulnerable to be taken care of? We have the freedom to redefine power as a force based on servanthood and not just domination. Ordinary people – churches, too – have a role to force politicians to respond. Governments are not impressed with theories, but governments are impressed with people who change their minds about things.

Extremism's Bullish Market

Last year, the Southern Poverty Law Center counted 1,007 hate groups in the U.S., an increase of 69 percent since 2000.

"This surge has been fueled by anger and fear over the nation's ailing economy, an influx of non-white immigrants, and the diminishing white majority, as symbolized by the election of the nation's first African-American president," a press release by the center said.

The center placed some blame on mainstream politicians who spread conspiracy theories and false information about immigrants and minorities, fueling anti-government militia groups, neo-Nazis, Klansmen, white nationalists and others.

The center defines extremist group activities to include "criminal acts, marches, rallies, speeches, meetings, leafleting or publishing." The statistics do not count websites that appear to be the work of an individual instead of a group. The center's website says its list of hate organizations "does not imply a group advocates or engages in violence or other criminal activity."

Based in Montgomery, AL, the SPLC tracks hate groups, mounts legal challenges against extremist violence, and offers Teaching Tolerance programs that promote inclusivity.

Source: Southern Poverty Law Center (splcenter.org)



Pledging Allegiance to a New America

By Hua Hsu

When Pat Buchanan took the stage for a primetime address at the 1992 Republican National Convention, he was tasked with uniting a party that had suffered through a contentious primary. But he did much more than that. For Buchanan, the crucial contest wasn't the one that would be decided in November. He wasn't addressing potential voters so much as warriors-in-training. For the conservative commentator, politics was but a proxy for a deeper and far more consequential standoff on the horizon.

"Friends," Buchanan said, "there is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America."

A few years removed from the Cold War, Buchanan foresaw a future in which issues like abortion, gay rights, environmentalism and, in a sly invocation of the previous year's riots in L.A., racial inequality would come to define the country's mission. "It's not the kind of change we can abide in a nation we still call 'God's country,' " he warned, imploring those assembled to take back America, just as the National Guard had taken back Los Angeles from the rioters and looters.

This wasn't about policy. This was about the faces you were imagining when you said the word "America."

Resetting American Identity

Buchanan didn't coin the term "culture war," and he was merely conveying ideas that had been circulating for some time. But his speech outlined a set of new political objectives, a new universe of big ideas and demographic possibilities that bore an acute relationship to matters of policy.

For others, however, the 1990s – the mainstreaming of "alternative" cultures, the rise of the internet, new global possibilities of exchange and trade, the Baby Boomer optimism (and contradictions) of Bill

Clinton – was the period when any possibility of a fixed notion of American identity was vanquished forever. This was the America to which I pledged allegiance. The 1992 election was the first one I paid attention to, and while I didn't then possess the language for it, it felt like something was changing within the "culture." As the son of immigrants, I recognized that I wasn't assimilating into the same

As the son of immigrants, I wasn't assimilating into the same American mainstream that my parents had navigated some twenty years prior.

American mainstream that my parents had navigated some twenty years prior. There seemed to be more spaces of possibility in the margins (at least from the perspective of a teenager) to pursue one's own version of American identity.

All of which made moments like Buchanan's speech or Vice President Dan Quayle's attack on the TV character Murphy Brown earlier that spring so baffling. Debates that seemed cosmically unimportant to a teenager – whether Arizona would recognize Martin Luther King Jr. Day, which books appeared on our school reading lists, Clinton's facility with a joint – seemed to disturb the pundits in ways

I couldn't comprehend. Culture seemed to reset itself monthly, and it was thrilling; the impossible was happening all the time. Weren't there better things for politicians to worry about than sitcoms or rap lyrics? What was so threatening about all these new ideas?

What I didn't realize at the time was how vital the preservation of tradition was to Buchanan and his culture warriors. Central to this past that Buchanan and his famed brigade of supporters sought to defend was a mythic "whiteness." This was what was at stake. For Buchanan and his ilk, the period I described above, where previously marginal people were busy remaking the American center, inspired an astounding retreat to ideas of public morality, the exclusive virtues of Western civilization, stable identities and an untroubled heritage built on exceptionalist American might.

Sounding the National Soul

While the election of Barack Obama seemed a final victory in the "culture wars," his emergence merely gave birth to a newer, more modern version of Buchanan's fears. According to recent census figures, we are still about thirty years away from America becoming demographically "majority minority." And just as kids my age began to glimpse the possibilities of Obama's America in the multiculturalist 1980s and 1990s, there are moments today that seem to foreshadow future struggles. The Tea Party, for example, might be seen as a moment when a certain kind of disaffected white American began to claim post-civil rights era identity politics as their own – something unimaginable fifty years ago. How will technology and media continue to shape our sense of self-identification? The personal remains political, but what, in a moment when we instinctively understand networks and webs of affiliation, *isn't* personal?

I still wonder about this idea of America's "soul," though not Buchanan's version. From the nation's founding to the present, there have always been invocations of some coherent American essence or identity. But how does this idea look to us in 2013? Is it possible to still speak in such lofty terms? Was it ever possible, or does this unifying essence only emerge in retrospect? Will the idea of the American "soul" continue to hold, or will such universalist declarations come to seem quaint and old-fashioned? Will we merely rearrange the "minority majority" into the same hierarchies of privilege and power we thought we were leaving behind?

Twenty years after Buchanan's "culture war" speech and he is no longer the type of figure invited

to give a primetime address. We now understand how much appearances matter. During the 2012 primaries, both parties gave top billing to Latinos – San Antonio mayor Julian Castro and Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa for the Democrats, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio for the Republicans. It's too soon to predict the impact of those speeches – for the speakers themselves, but also the millions watching at home, some of whom will surely become tomorrow's warriors.

Hua Hsu, an assistant professor of English at Vassar College, is an occasional contributor to Grantland, Slate, New York Magazine, and The Wire. He is on the board of the Asian American Writers Workshop.

American Intermarriage

Some 15 percent of all new marriages in the U.S. are between spouses of different races. In 1980 the number was 6.7 percent. Among all married couples as of 2010, 8 percent were intermarriages, an all-time high, according to Pew Research Center analysis.

Statistics from 2010 say 9 percent of whites, 17 percent of blacks, 26 percent of Latinos and 28 percent of Asians married outside their race.

Other Pew analysis findings:

- 24 percent of black male newlyweds in 2010 married out, compared with 9 percent of black female newlyweds.
- 36 percent of Asian female newlyweds married out in 2010, compared with 17 percent of Asian male newlyweds.
- The intermarriage percentage did not vary by gender for white newlyweds who married out nor for Latino newlyweds who married out.
- Intermarriage was more frequent in western states (22 percent) between 2008-10. In the South it was 14 percent; the Northeast, 13 percent; the Midwest, 11 percent.
- 43 percent of Americans say more intermarriage has been a good change for society; 11 percent say it's for the worse; 44 percent say it hasn't made any difference.

Source: Pew Research Social & Demographic Trends



Becoming Trustworthy White Allies

By Melanie S. Morrison

Twenty years ago, an African-American friend and colleague, Lynnette Stallworth, challenged me to critically examine why I, as a white woman, so often looked to her as the expert on racism, depending on her to call me out or advise me when racist words, behaviors, or policies were at play.

"What happens when I am not here, Melanie?" Lynnette asked. "How are you, as a white person, holding other white people accountable? How are other white people doing that for you? Racism is a white problem and it is long past time for you all to do your own work!"

I was stunned and convicted by her challenge. I had to acknowledge that I and many of my well-intentioned white friends did not have vocabulary to talk about racism in an everyday kind of way. We were frequently mired in feelings of guilt. When we encountered racism, we could not be counted on to speak up and confront it. Too often, we fell mute, became confused, reacted with defensiveness, or simply wanted to disappear. I could see that I was not trustworthy, especially when things got hot.

To understand what it means to be white in America and break the silences that surround it requires arduous, persistent, and soul-stretching work. Sadly, too many of us stop short of that deep work. We assume that our good intentions and eagerness to help are enough. We come into multiracial gatherings or organizations expecting to be liked and trusted. But trust isn't something we are granted simply because we finally showed up. Trust has to be earned, again and again. Or better said, we need to become trustworthy white *allies*, people passionately committed to eliminating systems of oppression that unjustly benefit us.

Lynnette's challenge inspired me to launch Doing Our Own Work, an anti-racism program for white people who seek to deepen their commitment to confronting racism and white privilege where they live, work, study, and worship. Doing Our Own Work is designed as a supplement to, not a substitute for,

contexts where people of different races discuss and strategize together how racism can be confronted and dismantled.

It has been an honor and a joy to do this intensive work for the past two decades with hundreds of people from communities all across the U.S. and Canada. Out of that work, I want to share some reflections about the deep and sustained work I believe white people can and must do if we want to be effective and trustworthy allies in the struggle for racial justice.

Own that we are "raced"

As white people, we have inherited an intergenerational legacy of silence, looking away, pretending not to notice, and numbness to pain. As Robert Terry said, "To be white in America is not to have to think about it."¹

As a beginning exercise in Doing Our Own Work, we ask participants to take out a blank piece of paper and write this incomplete sentence at the top: *To me, being white means ...*² They are given three minutes to list as many things as they can think of to complete the sentence. We then invite them to take out a fresh sheet of paper and write the same incomplete sentence at the top: *To me being white means ...* Again, they have three minutes to list their responses. By the third and fourth time they are asked to complete this same sentence, some people are laughing nervously, others are scowling, yet others put their pens down and stare out the window.

"This was really hard," is the most common feedback. "If the sentence had been, '*To me, being a woman means ...*' I could have written pages. But I had nothing to say about this."

"At first I wrote really negative things, and then I made a list of privileges I have as a white person. The third time, I tried to go deeper, write about things I had never thought about or allowed myself to feel before."

In the conversation that follows, we talk about why we so seldom have to think about our white racial identity when people of color have to think about and navigate race and racism day in and day out. We also reflect on what might happen if we paused several times a day and asked: "What does it mean that I am white in this situation, in this encounter? What am I failing to see? What is the work I need to do, here and now, as a white person?"

The challenge Lynnette issued twenty years ago I've heard restated many times since by other people of color in my life who've said: "I appreciate that you want to understand my experience as a person of color in this country. But what I most need from you, Melanie, is that you begin to understand your own. I need for you to do the strenuous work of understanding what it means to be *white* in America. Unless you do that, you are dangerous."

In my experience, those of us who are white are far more apt to identify people of color by their race than we are to identify ourselves as "white." Too many of us have not begun to explore how we feel about being white or how racism has shaped our lives. This means we frequently enter multiracial conversations and collaborations expecting people of color to open up and share how racism affects them without being willing to share an equivalent level of vulnerability and self-disclosure.

Make privilege visible

One meaning of being white is that we are granted unearned privileges and structural power simply by reason of our race, without regard for our personal attitudes, values, and commitments. Peggy McIntosh has noted that "privilege is a fugitive subject" about which white people were meant to remain oblivious.³ Making privilege visible to ourselves and others demands constant vigilance. Without that vigilance, we are indeed dangerous because we behave like dinosaurs that drag a large tail behind us. Unable to see the tail, and convinced of our good intentions, we are oblivious to the havoc we wreak as we move through the world, knocking people over and flattening things in our path.⁴ How do we do this? By presuming we can speak for others, imposing our mission and outreach projects on others, discounting as "ungrounded" the fears and criticisms voiced by people of color, dismissing their pain as overreacting, accusing them of "playing the race card" when they call us on our

oppressive behavior, and then shifting the focus to our hurt feelings.

Making privilege visible is only the first step. In our spheres of influence, we need to interrupt racism by challenging the practices and policies that protect privilege and keep it in place. We can use privilege to ensure that power is more equitably shared. We can shine a light on every program, ministry, and endeavor we are engaged in, asking: Whose voices are being sought out and heard? Who decides what is right, beautiful, true, and valued? Whose cultural perspectives are overrepresented and whose are underrepresented? Who is seen as important to the mission and who is seen as less important?⁵

Work collaboratively with people of color

As we seek to make privilege visible and interrupt racism, it is essential that we do this in partnership with people of color. Otherwise we may do more harm than good. If we charge ahead, eager to impose our solutions and interventions, we replicate old patterns of missionary zeal as we plant our ally flag and run the risk of jeopardizing those we are presuming to "help."⁶ Our work as allies must always and everywhere be grounded in humility, collaboration, and accountability. This means becoming engaged in organizations led by people of color, respecting the priorities they identify as strategies for change, and sustaining our engagement over time. It also means learning about the ways people of color have resisted racism long before we arrived on the scene. By showing up consistently and acting collaboratively, we have the possibility of developing authentic relationships of mutuality and accountability with people of color.

Nurture truth-telling relationships

Becoming trustworthy white allies is something we cannot do by ourselves. We need the support and challenge of relationships where there is a shared commitment to speak our truths and hear each other *all the way through*, no matter how uncomfortable the revelations may make us. This, too, takes time and effort. Such relationships "do not spring ablaze of themselves;" they need to be sought out, nurtured and sustained.⁷

Work through shame and guilt

When denial gives way, and the breadth and depth of racism is acknowledged, a profound sense of shame or guilt can consume white people for a time. While shame and guilt are not the same, both can surface in us as we awaken to the devastating realities of racism. Neither is particularly useful to people of color because both have the effect of turning the spotlight on white people once again. For example,

white people may seek forgiveness from people of color to lessen their shame. This request can be toxic for people of color if the focus is the feelings of white people rather than the continuing inequities of racism.

I do not believe it is possible for white people to go *around* shame and guilt, but we can learn to move *through* those feelings into something deeper and more productive. The critical question is what we do with those feelings and the discoveries that birthed them. As Audre Lorde said, “If [guilt] leads to change then it can be useful, since it is then no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge.”⁸

Do the work from a place of self-love⁹

When Lynnette and other people of color challenge me to understand what it means to be white, I don’t think they are asking me to be consumed by guilt, shame, or self-hatred. On the contrary, I believe they want to be met by white people who love themselves and others enough to do the deep work of truth-telling and healing so that together we might repair the breaches that racism creates. I am utterly convinced that those of us who are white will not be able to keep showing up, resist checking out, or stay in difficult yet essential conversations across racial difference if we cannot come from a place of self-love.

We need to love ourselves and others enough to forge new ways of being white in this world by nurturing an anti-racist identity. We need to recover the stories of white ancestors who resisted racism and worked with people of color to keep hope alive by creating change. Their witness and resolve can strengthen our own.

We need to feel, claim, and give voice to our grief, distress, and rage at racism. The hunger and thirst for racial justice must be our own. Otherwise we will be driven by the desperate need to seek approval and love from people of color. Writing about her work as a Latina multicultural educator, Lillian Roybal Rose says: “I tell white people in my workshops that I expect them, as allies with power in the oppression of racism, to act justly and not dominate, regardless of the fact that we may never love them.”¹⁰

Stay on the journey

I believe it is possible to become trustworthy white allies if we are willing to move out of our comfort zones, risk having our assumptions challenged, our lives disrupted, and our way of viewing the world transformed. Most important is the commitment to stay on the journey. Unlearning and interrupting the habits, practices, and policies that keep racism and white privilege intact is life-long, life-giving work, never done once and for all.

Melanie S. Morrison, Ph.D., '78 M.Div., is Executive Director of *Allies for Change*, providing education, training, and resources for individuals and organizations seeking to deepen their commitment to social justice. She is ordained in the United Church of Christ.

Notes

- 1 Robert W. Terry, “The Negative Impact on White Values,” in *Impacts of Racism on White Americans*, ed. Benjamin P. Bowser and Raymond G. Hunt (Sage, 1981), p. 120.
- 2 This exercise is adapted from an activity created and led by Frances Kendall and Paul Kivel at the 2003 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity.
- 3 Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies,” Working Paper No. 189, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, p. 9.
- 4 I am indebted to Kate Runyon for this image.
- 5 In his article, “The Culture of Power,” Paul Kivel provides a helpful list of questions to identify and assess cultures of power within organizations. See www.paulkivel.org.
- 6 In his essay “Authenticity in a Community Setting,” Dionardo Pizaña describes how “outreach” programs are too often grounded in a savior mentality that fails to honor the wisdom and culture of the people being targeted. Pizaña suggests an alternative model – “in-reach” programs – that seek to incorporate and build upon the wisdom, assets, and leadership of all parties involved. “Authenticity in a Community Setting,” (2003), pp. 3-4. See this essay at alliesforchange.org.
- 7 In “Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying,” Adrienne Rich writes, “Truthfulness, honor, is not something which springs ablaze of itself; it has to be created between people.” *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (Norton, 1979), p. 193.
- 8 Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. (Crossing Press, 1984) p. 130.
- 9 I am indebted to Ruth Frankenberg for her insight that antiracist work by white people requires “doing the work from a place of self-love.” Frankenberg’s journey as an anti-racist activist and writer is described by Becky Thompson in *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism* (University of Minnesota, 2001) pp. 162-166.
- 10 Lillian Roybal Rose, “White Identity and Counseling White Allies about Racism,” in *Impacts of Racism on White Americans*, ed. Benjamin P. Bowser and Raymond G. Hunt (Sage, 1981), p. 28.



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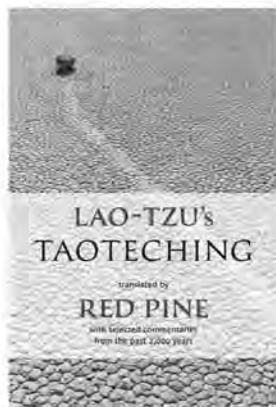
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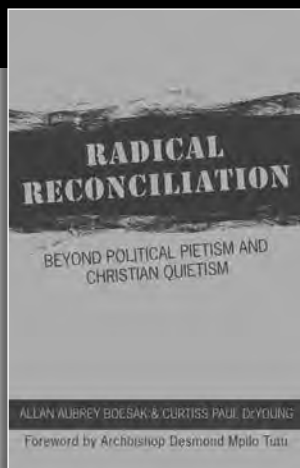
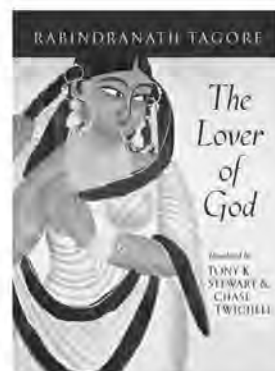
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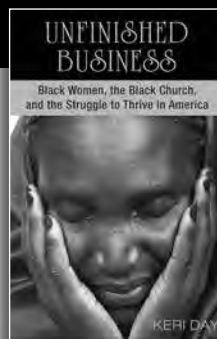
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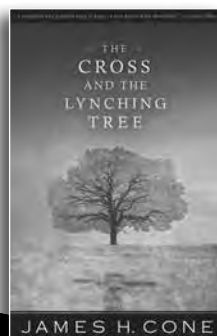
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From the Editor: Off-White

By Ray Waddle



There's a satirical website called "Stuff White People Like" (created by a white blogger) that pokes fun at the trendy passions of white folks, at least certain kinds of whites (liberal, urban). The list of favorite white things includes the TED Conference, sea salt, World Cup,

Mad Men, hummus, and "threatening to move to Canada." The list runs to nearly 150 items at stuffwhitepeoplelike.com.

No doubt one reason the site and a spin-off book became a sensation was: The public rarely sees white tastes so brashly identified or called out as *racial* behavior. Critics of institutional racism might say with satisfaction that such a list violates one of the first rules of white privilege: Being white means you don't have to think about it or answer for it.

Yet even when the list rings painfully true, it's not exactly foolproof. I know non-whites who like stuff on the list, and there are entire demographics of white people who don't care for any of it. Some things listed are personal favorites of mine (Wes Anderson movies), others aren't (camping).

This notorious but affectionate list can be seen as a study in class markers as much as race — a roster of tastes that depend on money, a liberal arts culture, leisure time. None of these markers define race or racial difference in any rational sense. But in America they do. Security and stability are associated with whiteness, which means advantage, a presumption of innocence, and a standing invitation to join the national conversation (unless you are white and poor).

That's the slippery thing about a discussion about race. It can fairly quickly move away from ethnicity and toward questions about class: financial stability, family expectations, the shining status of certain neighborhoods and schools, the squalor of others — which raises questions about why such patterns exist at all, which then leads to uncomfortable inquiries about economic inequity, the decline of unions, regressive tax rates, the power of rich lobbyists, the foreclosure of American dreams. We avoid that skein of questions if we can, because we

fear class war more than race war.

The race war is familiar ground. It started with the campaign to destroy the native populations, then spread to the buying and selling of human beings from Africa. It continued with Civil War, segregation, then into the twenty-first century in subtler but persistent ways.

It doesn't matter that the American Anthropological Association, in a public education project called *Race: Are We So Different?*, promotes the scientific consensus that race is a modern invention, not a fact of biology. Scientific evidence remains irrelevant to public tensions over race. Far more powerful is the belief that skin color and physical traits give us an existential identity to boast about and a handy way to label or shun others.

This old impulse sustains contemporary mythic dream worlds of resistance and denial. I could name two sentimental myths that flourish even now. One is that the Civil War had to do with the arrogance and overreach of the federal government and nothing to do with slavery. Another is that Martin Luther King Jr. can now be safely ignored because we've given him a national holiday, put him on a stamp, and done our duty. As for his urgent latter-day plea to all Americans to embrace a more generous vision of human rights, we're free to change the subject.

The nation's preoccupation with race is a daily test for religious tradition. On this point, will churches follow culture or disrupt it? The faith's teachings about gospel truth have nothing to do with race, except to urge a turning away from sources of hate that destroy the soul and tear down one another.

Maybe religion underestimates our anxiety — the need to label the next person we meet based on first impressions in order to boost our own self-importance. What are you? Where from? Are you a friend? A threat? The itch to prejudice is a form of self-protection. But religion is there to rise up to challenge those impulses, meet the nervous questions, and supply courage to live out more humane answers.

Until that happens, we'll fall back on the familiar business of resentful divisions and funny lists.

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POETRY

Lucille Clifton (1936-2010) was an award-winning poet and woman of letters. *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton 1965-2010* (BOA Editions), edited by Kevin Young and Michael Glaser, includes all eleven of her published collections and more than 60 other poems.

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Natalie Diaz is a Mojave who currently lives in Mohave Valley, AZ. She directs a language revitalization program at Fort Mojave in Needles, CA, her home reservation, where she works with the last elder speakers of the Mojave language. Her first book of poetry, *When My Brother Was an Aztec*, was published last year by Copper Canyon Press.

"If Eve Side-Stealer & Mary Busted-Chest Ruled the World" from *When My Brother Was an Aztec*. Copyright © 2012 by Natalie Diaz. Reprinted with permission of Copper Canyon Press.

Jim Harrison is the author of more than twenty books, including the novella *Legends of the Fall*. His collections of poetry include *The Shape of the Journey: New and Collected Poems* and *Songs of Unreason*, both published by Copper Canyon Press.

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Etheridge Knight (1931-91) became widely known as a poet with his first book, *Poems from Prison* (Broadside, 1968). He had been wounded in the Korean War and later spent six years in prison on armed robbery charges. He once wrote: "I died in Korea from a shrapnel wound and narcotics resurrected me. I died in 1960 from a prison sentence and poetry brought me back to life."

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Janice Mirikitani is an activist, poet, editor, and founding president of the Glide Foundation, an organization in San Francisco (founded by her husband, the Rev. Cecil Williams) dedicated to empowering marginalized citizens and breaking the cycle of poverty.

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Dudley Randall (1914-2000), poet, editor, translator, and publisher, established Broadside Press in 1965 as a vital platform for African-American poets and political writers.

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