

IN THE WAKE OF BUFFALO

America's Future: 'It's in Our Hands'

By Parris J. Baker

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Like most Americans, I watched in utter horror and disbelief the premeditated murder of 10 people at a Tops Friendly grocery store in Buffalo, New York on Saturday afternoon. There is a pain, a grief so incredibly horrific, so indescribable, and insidious ... there are no words. A place where one goes to communion with the acute ache, the anguish, and the angst, in search of elusive answers, transcendent, spiritual responses, and fleeting moments of solace that all too often are never found. We tend to go to this place alone because even with the most caring person by our side, his or her attempts at providing justifications, condolences, or a shoulder does not fill the emptiness, brighten the darkness, or transform death into life.

It is our direct confrontation with this new reality, an unchanging reality that requires herculean efforts just to continue breathing. Every breath becomes a reminder that a grandparent, parent, or a child is no longer alive and is no longer with me. Every thought held hostage, paralyzed with fear, sorrow, and rage. This new reality creates an existentialist uncertainty, "How can I live without you?" Engaged in a sort of cyber voyeurism, while we watch silently and reverently the surviving family members search for peace, once again, on display in Buffalo, is our nation's sullen, dirty, plausibly deniable truth: America is a violent nation with a racist history. We are a Christian nation built on the Christian values of love, justice, liberty, and democracy (self-determination and choice). This might explain many of our nation's behaviors. Austin Brown^[1] challenges how Christian love is taught and exhibited.

Brown affirms that Christians talk an awful lot about love. However, unilateral love is largely inconsequential, primarily because whiteness sees love as a prize it is owed. Love developed in an environment of whiteness dissolves quickly into demands for grace and mercy, asks for forgiveness and absolution, petitions for patience and gradualism, and seeks comfort and convenience. Love from the white people consumed in whiteness (therefore not all white people) is sometimes aloof and therefore useless.

Love must be troubled by injustice, motivated, and concerned with life, burdened by senseless death and murder, intolerant of hate, and have no provisions for

racists. What is becoming more evident are the missing courageous, thoughtful people with hypopigmented skin “who get it!” Those white human beings who understand that being white offers neither poverty nor prestige, power and privilege until one experiences the advantages of living in whiteness. It is the daily experiences of whiteness that can produce white nationalists and neo-Nazis. American rapper and actor Tupac Amaru Shakur (professionally known as 2Pac or Pac) wrote an idiom that captures the process of socialization in whiteness. @Pac referred to it as THUG LIFE: The Hate U Give Little Infants F**** Everyone. As a black colloquialism this idiom refers to a resilient and determined attitude to succeed despite racism and injustice.

For once I am in complete agreement with my conservative colleagues and the ideology that Critical Race Theory is bad for America, and that it must be banned. CRT, properly known as Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory, is a fear-based ideology rooted in racism, white supremacy, and disinformation. It produces delusional, demented, hate-driven white nationalists with a mission to rid the world of all non-white threats to their perceived freedoms. This perspective replacement theory is constructed on the baseless premise that the racial and ethnic population shifts in the United States have been coordinated by powerful leaders.[2] However, the fringe replacement conspiracy theory is finding its way into mainstream America.

The Pew Research Center reported hate crimes, assaults, and acts of intimidation against members with visibly recognizable differences – race, ethnicity, gender, and religion – have increased significantly since 2015. Below is a list of heinous, premediated acts of murder, all committed by white nationalists:

1. In June 2015, nine African Americans were murdered by a white nationalist at a bible study in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Charleston, South Carolina.
2. In August 2017, in Charlottesville, Virginia, white nationalists and neo-Nazis rally and protest shouting, “You will not replace us! Jews will not replace us!”
3. In October 2018, 11 worshippers were murdered by a white supremacist at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
4. In March 2019, 51 people were murdered by a white nationalist at the Al-Noor Mosque and the Linwood Mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand.
5. In April 2019, one person was murdered and three injured by a white supremacist at the Chabad of Poway Synagogue in Poway, California.
6. In August 2019, an attack by a white nationalist murdered 23 people and wounded another 23 people at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas.

As Fannie Lou Townsend Hamer[3] stated in a speech delivered to the National Council of Negro Women in Mississippi (1967), “We have a long fight, and this fight is not mine alone. But you are not free whether you are white or black, until I am free.”

Where do we go from here? Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer offers America some wisdom:

I would like to tell you in closing a story of an old man. This old man was very wise, and he could answer questions that were almost impossible for people to answer. So, some people went to him one day, two young people, and said, "We're going to trick this guy today. We're going to catch a bird, and we're going to carry it to this old man. And we're going to ask him, “This that we hold in our hands

today, is it alive or is it dead?' If he says 'Dead,' we're going to turn it loose and let it fly. But if he says, 'Alive,' we're going to crush it." So, they walked up to this old man, and they said, "This that we hold in our hands today, is it alive or is it dead?" He looked at the young people and he smiled. And he said, "It's in your hands."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Parris J. Baker is an Associate Professor at Gannon University, where he is the Social Work, Mortuary Science and Gerontology Program Director. An alumnus of Gannon, Baker received his graduate degree from Case Western Reserve University, Jack, Joseph, & Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences and his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work. Presently, Baker serves as the Senior Pastor of Believers International Worship Center, Inc. He is married and has five children.



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References & Suggested Readings

1. Brown, A. C. (2018). *I'm still here: Black dignity in a world made for whiteness*. New York: Convergent.
2. <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/17/1099233034/the-great-replacement-conspiracy-theory-isnt-fringe-anymore-its-mainstream>
3. Blain, K. N. (2021). *Until I am free. Fannie Lou Hamer's enduring message to America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

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