

TRUTH IN LOVE

Whiteness Must be at Center of Discussions on Critical Race Theory

(First of 3 Parts)

By Parris J. Baker

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Editor's note: Following is the second in an ongoing series of articles by new Jefferson Educational Society Scholar-in-Residence Dr. Parris J. Baker, an associate professor at Gannon University. It is also the first of a three-part series on Critical Race Theory.

When I attended McKinley Elementary School, all students were required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Each time I recited the pledge I questioned the validity of those words, troubled particularly by the phrase, “with liberty and justice for all.” Growing up in the 1960s, I was overwhelmed by the continuous volatility of America – the assassinations of the Kennedys, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr., the incineration of our nation (Newark, Watts, and Detroit), and the pain-filled protests and demonstrations against the Vietnam War.

In his book, *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes to his son, “when I was your age, the only people I knew were black and all of them were powerfully, adamantly, dangerously afraid.” Coates had captured my reality – fear. I was living and developing in an environment perceived through the lens of fear. What I was afraid of was unimaginable to me; what I did not see or understand was the cause of many of my fears. Throughout my K-12 and post-secondary education I was not educated about the ubiquitous power of whiteness.

Whiteness was and remains the guiding principle in the construction of American democracy. Writer and Professor Cornel West maintains the challenge of defending America as a democratic nation demands an acknowledgment of the historic subordination, subjugation, and enslavement of Black people and the near genocide of First Person, Native American Indians. Christianity cemented the racial caste in the United States. White Catholic and Protestant leaders alike were concerned about the hermeneutic interpretation of the scriptures regarding slavery, salvation, and freedom. Due to the enormous economic value in

maintaining a system of slavery, both Catholic and Protestant institutions invented nomenclature and principles justifying the protraction of slavery. These religious institutions assembled entire communities to teach rules and rituals that regulated the practice of slavery.

It is an undeniable truth that white people were largely responsible for establishing and maintaining the institution of slavery and constructing systems of racism, race, and religion to support its continuance. Copious and conspicuous evidence for this indisputable truth can be found in our legal, religious, and historic documentation. Some examples of these documented truths are contained in the declarations of confederacy.

The iniquitous Cornerstone Speech, presented by Alexander Stephens in 1861, Vice President of the Confederate States of America, clearly states: “Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite ideas (regarding the Declaration of Independence); its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.”

Aligning itself with the Cornerstone Declaration of Confederacy, the state of Mississippi (the last state to ratify the 13th Amendment – the abolishment of slavery, in 1995, and certified in 2013), recorded in its Declaration of Secession in 1861: “In the momentous step which our State has taken of dissolving its connection with the government of which we so long formed a part, it is but just that we should declare the prominent reasons which have induced our course. *Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery ... the greatest material interest of the world. Its labor supplies the product which constitutes by far the largest and most important portions of commerce of the earth.*”

The Declaration of Secession from Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia all list slavery as the primary cause of dissolution with the United States. Clearly, the belief in their cultural hegemony, racial superiority, and spiritual authority were the driving motivations for the creation of systems of racism and religious segregation. Explanations of their belief in white supremacy can be traced, in part, to the Doctrine of Christian Discovery^[1]. These Papal Bulls, issued by the Vatican, sanctioned the subjugation of any unknown land and its inhabitants. This doctrine provides a historic foundation of belief systems supportive of white supremacy, white superiority, and white privilege and was believed to be God-given, therefore morally uncontestable.

Here is an excerpt from The Bull Romanus Pontifex issued by Pope Nicholas V January 8, 1455: We [therefore] weighing all and singular the premises with due meditation, and noting that since we had formerly by other letters of ours granted among other things free and ample faculty to the aforesaid King Alfonso – to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetuate slavery, and to apply and to appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit.

... *Part Two will examine The Doctrine of Discovery, International Law of*

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End Notes

1. <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/what-is-the-doctrine-of-discovery/>

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