

"What Does It Mean to be Black?"

Socio-historically, being "black" has come with negative connotations, stigmas, stereotypes and perilous "ramifications." The recent surge in police killings of black people, especially young black men, has triggered the Black Lives Matter movement. But what does it mean to be "black"?

In recent news, Rachael Dolezal, who was the former President of the NAACP, Spokane chapter, was exposed and accused of as "passing" for black and lying about her race, when she was, in fact, a white woman. This case stirred many questions on the issues of racial identity in America. Dolezal's claims to identify as a black woman on the grounds that her "blackness" is a part of how she views herself in respect to her life's struggles, in spite of her white heritage. Many were offended by and took issue with Dolezal's claim to "blackness."

The question arises: What constitutes being black? Is it more than just race relations and culture, or is it something that transcends physicality and penetrates the essence of an individual's being and identity?

While some identify as "black" in respect to genetics and physical appearance, others may identify as "other," "African," or "British," culturally, in spite of their physical appearance of "blackness." What influences the dynamic of black identity and how does identifying as such influence one's life? How much does one's "blackness" matter? Let us explore this a little.

Ivan Milosi, a first-year Masters of Divinity student from the Congo says, "I have never identified myself racially, until I started applying for schools in the United States...We don't identify by race in Africa, but by ethnic groups...I identify as "other" but I do consider myself to be black...Being black is being an African, so I identify myself as African, culturally."

According to Donovan Archie, who is also a first-year Master of Divinity student from Detroit, Michigan, "To call an actual human, a color, is offensive...We are all technically people of color..As an individual, I identify as black; not because I was told I was black; it is because of how I identify with people who have cultural likeness."

Elijah Ferebee, a second-year Master of Divinity student, from Brooklyn, New York and of Dominican and African American descent, shared, "I identify as African American...I have Latino in my bloodline...being black to me means having strong biological, cultural and spiritual roots to Africa...I have experienced prejudice at the hands of others, usually unintentionally, and sometimes because of the attitudes that people hold, based on the knowledge or lack thereof, that they have about black people."

It is evident that black identity and experiences varies from person to person, from group to group. Yet, it exceeds physicality and includes cultural influence as a huge contributing factor. So, what does it mean to be black? It depends on who you are asking.

REFLECTIONS



Akira Bennett



Dr. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell

Reflection

(as part of her sermon during the September 29, 2015 Tuesday Chapel service)

I was one of the first African Americans to be accepted to George Washington University in 1958 when they opened their scholarship program to all the students in DC Public Schools. So there were only five us African American students there.

While completing my degree there, I encountered a fellow student – a young white male – in one of my classes. After class, lingering in the classroom, he began to ask me various questions. I responded to him thinking he was trying to be friendly, trying to understand me and my world. Clearly this was a new experience for him. I don't remember which class it was, I don't remember his questions. I don't remember his name now. But I remember the day I encountered him, for the first time outside of the classroom, on the steps of the Student Union building. We were the only two people there at that time, and he walked by me as if I was not there. I remember the pain, even after more than 50 years have gone by.

I came to realize that he was not interested in me as a person, as a friend, as a fellow student. At best, he saw me as a curiosity piece. But he could not "see" me in the stairwell.



Lucie Tshama

Welcome, Pastor?
(transcribed: Denise Haskins)

In 2009, my family moved to upstate New York area where my husband was appointed as the pastor of a three-point charge. We were still new to the US and were surprised by our experience.

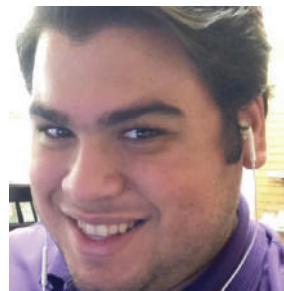
On our first Sunday, we arrived at the main door of the church to find it was locked. Outside the church building along with us stood some of the church leaders who stared at us without speaking single word. When they did speak, they said the bishop made a mistake to send us there. "You don't belong here." "Just you being here it is already a big change for us."

We stood there with our four little children outside in the very cold winter weather; no one would open the door for us to enter in the church.

After half an hour, the church lay leader arrived. My husband, the appointed pastor, asked him where the other members of the church were. With disdain, his reply was, "People do not expect a pastor like you! They want a pastor who looks like them."

The racist attitudes continued throughout our time at that church, even receiving phone calls to inform us that "we don't want the baboon in our church."

How is it that the United Methodist Church, a global and connectional church, cannot accept diversity as part of its global and connectional nature? Why is this kind of behavior still happening within the body of Christ that claims to be Christian and followers of Jesus Christ?



Ian C. Urriola

How Do You Pronounce Your Last Name?

I was recently helping a friend move and to say thanks he and his wife took me out to lunch. While we were eating, he posed the following question: "Have I been pronouncing your name wrong for the past four years?"

That's a fair question. Urriola is a fairly common last name in Panama, where my father immigrated from in the 1980s, but to English speakers it's a fairly difficult name to sight-read. This has led to some humorous exchanges with telemarketers:

"Hello, can I speak with Mr. 'uh-ROH-lee-ah'?"

I grew to adopt the simplest pronunciation for English speakers: "YOU-ree-oh-lah." Whenever I would meet someone new and they asked me "how do you say your last name" I would start with the easy way but always clarified "but the way it's supposed to be pronounced is 'Urriola'." Most often they would not be able to do the Spanish accent so they would just go with the Anglicized version. And that has always been ok by me.

I didn't give much thought to my race growing up. My mom's family has been here for centuries and probably came over on the Mayflower. I grew up in a white suburb with friends who are white. Even though my dad is a native Spanish speaker and my mom speaks fluent Spanish after living in Panama for six years during the early stages of their marriage, my brother and I are bilingual. Even though I was brown on the outside, I was white on the inside.

And that led to some really problematic thinking on my part throughout my life. I remember in particular that there was a summer science program when I was in high school run out of the University of Rochester aimed at minority students. At that point in my life, I was really into science, and my mom really pushed me to apply for it. However, I was of the opinion that a program like that was discriminatory against white people. After all, my best friend was white and he liked science just like me so why wasn't there a program like that for him?

Of course, as I grew up and matured—and thanks to a lot of grace from God—I realized the racism in my way of thinking. But even though I am, in fact, a person of color, I have difficulty identifying what exactly that means in my mixed race context. In a way, my last name is a perfect example of the cognitive dissonance I experience. It's clearly not an American/Anglo name, but I adopted an Anglicized version of my name for most of my life. But every now and then, some Latino pride bursts through, and I'll change the pronunciation of my last name on my cell's outgoing message. And then a friend of four years calls me up and gets my voicemail, hears the different pronunciation, and asks "have I been pronouncing your name wrong for the past four years?"



AhnnaLise Stevens-Jennings

Sometimes people use "respect" to mean "treating someone like a person" and sometimes they use "respect" to mean "treating someone like an authority" and sometimes people who are used to being treated like an authority say "if you won't respect me I won't respect you" and they mean "if you won't treat me like an authority I won't treat you like a person" and they think they're being fair but they aren't, and it's not okay. (found posted to social media)

When I was growing up, I was taught a lot about respect. I was taught to respect my parents and other adults who cared for me. I was taught to say please and thank you. I was taught to do as I was told without complaint, argument, or talk back. I did not realize it then, but my parents were not just teaching me manners, they were teaching me how to survive.

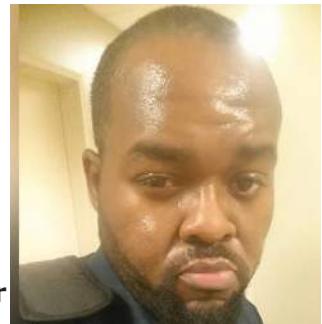
I grew up in a very homogenous area. I was the only Black student in every class I had until the 6th grade, when I met two other Black students. They were the only two other Black students that I had class with until I reached college. The only Black teacher I have had in my 20 years of school was my father. We were the only Black family in the neighborhood growing up. If I had not learned how to respect others, I would not have survived. Disrespecting a White person when you are Black and female is dangerous. If you do not believe me, please remember the stories of Rosa Parks, Sandra Bland, and the young woman who has recently become famous for being thrown across a classroom.

I have begun demanding the right to be treated with the same respect that I give to others. We teach our children to treat others as we want to be treated. When we grow up, some of us will still be held to that standard, while others will be allowed to treat people in whatever manner they feel like and will still be respected.

I have seen more than one person say that if Sandra Bland or the Spring Valley High School student had just been respectful, then none of this would have happened. Disrespect is not a good enough reason to harm another person. I have not heard anyone say that the White police officers should learn some respect to avoid situations like these, but that would be just as viable of a solution. An authority does not have a right to deny your humanity, even if you deny their authority.

I was taught that I needed to respect others, and treat them as I wanted to be treated. I was not taught to treat them as they treat me, and that was on purpose. On some level, everyone who taught me that lesson knew that I would not be as respected as those whom I was told to respect. This is not just. We do not serve a God who loves us based on our class, our sexuality, our gender, or our race. We serve a God who created us, who died for us, who loves us all. We are called to be like the one that we serve. We need to rethink respect.

RUMINATIONS



Robert J. Dantzler

These were some of the phrases plastered across social media and websites, as well as communicated through various media outlets such as television and radio leading up to the 20th Anniversary of the Million Man March. The 20th Anniversary of the Million Man March took place on Saturday, October 10, 2015 here in Washington at the US Capitol. Hundreds of thousands of men and women of various nationalities and ethnicities, representing an array of religions and beliefs gathered in the nation's capital for the cause of bringing justice. Justice for who? Justice for "Black, Brown, and Indigenous Americans" as articulated by Nation of Islam Leader, Louis Farrakhan.

Minister Farrakhan called for the first Million Man March, which took place on October 16, 1995 around the National Mall. At this mass gathering of African American men from across the United States, prominent speakers from organizations such as the National African American Leadership Summit, the Nation of Islam, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People aimed to portray a vastly different picture of the Black male to the world. The speakers also called for Black men to come together in order to address and stand up against the economic and social ills that plagued the African American community.

Twenty years later Minister Farrakhan and other religious, organization, and community leaders were united to address some of the same issues as well as call for equal protection of the rights of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans by the American law enforcement officials and the justice system. This new call was spurred by a number of Black Americans who were murdered by law enforcement officers and grand juries failure to indict the officers. This was in the case of individuals such as Michael Brown (Ferguson, Missouri) and Eric Garner (New York). Leaders who spoke at the 20th Anniversary commemoration also encouraged Black Americans to register to vote, to show up to the polls, and to use discernment when selecting leaders who would properly and efficiently represent their respective communities.

On a personal note, what stood out to me the most was Minister Farrakhan's encouragement to those assembled at the march to cease living in fear. Minister Farrakhan stated that outside of fear is where we find our freedom. He continued by saying that freedom is a gift from God and we have the right to challenge anyone or anything that denies or attempts to deny us of what God gave us.



Bethany Printup-Davis

Those who come from Native American communities in the United States are well aware of the general invisibility of Native people in the life of our nation. While some Americans have a warm and sometimes romantic feeling about Native Americans or what they know of their spirituality or their artistic accomplishments, most have little knowledge of Native history or the struggles currently faced by Native people to stave off disease, hunger, unemployment, and poverty. In fact, large numbers of individuals still believe that Native peoples have long vanished. That perception continues to be reinforced as our education system neglects to teach about the role of America's first people in the history of the United States.

Fortunately, in recent years, The United Methodist Church, as well as other denominations, has been doing its homework regarding Native Americans and worldwide indigenous peoples. Schools of Mission have raised consciousness around critical issues. Studies have been written commanding attention to justice issues. General Conference legislation along with resolutions related to the survival of Native Americans have been adopted and incorporated into our Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions. Attempts have also been made by the church to recognize its role in the painful and destructive history of Native Americans resulting in their present condition.

The Act of Repentance held by the General Conference of 2012, in Tampa, Florida, raised the charge to change all of this. Now that this singular Act of Repentance service is over, what happens once everybody has gone home? What difference has it made to the Native American tribes, communities, and families who still suffer historic trauma that is as real and fresh to them as this morning's coffee? How will the high expectations of repentance, forgiveness, and atonement rest upon the shoulders of a great church that finds itself in the middle of restless change itself? And what impact will all of this have on other indigenous peoples around the earth in Asian, African, and Nordic nations who also have also been the inheritors of this history?

The first demand of Jesus' public ministry was, "Repent." He spoke this command indiscriminately to all who would listen. It was a call for radical inward change toward our Creator and humanity. Since 2012, repentance has been put into action down through the hierarchy of the connection. A resolution passed during that General Conference session committed all United Methodists to listen and to learn from indigenous persons before experiencing an Act of Repentance Service at their respective Annual and Central Conference sessions. In Upper New York that means listening to and learning from Native Americans. For example, since 2013, I have been a witness to the start of a new journey - one that

REPENTANCE

has been traveled along by a repenting and learning people. Throughout 2014, members of Upper New York have participated in Annual Conference session workshops and presentations at the local and district levels which led to Upper New York's Act of Repentance Service in May 2015.

With Jesus' call for repentance, Matthew 4:17 continues on to claim "for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Since the General Conference's call for the Church to repent in 2012, we are beginning to see the embracing, the acknowledging and encompassing of indigenous communities and tribal/nation of various countries around the world where the United Methodist Church has spread its blanket. We are striving to re-establish the communities that make up the Kingdom of God. Since Upper New York's Annual Conference 2015, clergy, laity, and members of the community have strived to rebuild relationships and to mend those bridges that had left communities divided and unbeknown to one another.

Unfortunately, we've missed the scope of Jesus' teaching if we limit repentance to a confession or obligation to admit wrongdoing in order to be accepted by God and ultimately admitted into heaven. Jesus' teaching is much more transformational than that. What Jesus invited us into was a complete reform of thinking, intention, and behavior so that we could experience heaven now—liberation, unity, peace, love. If we can get this on a personal, relational level, we have the chance of getting it on a communal, national, global level. As Gandhi so wisely admonished us: be the change we want to see in the world.

Contrary to historical white dominant consciousness, stripping our Native brothers and sisters of their holy practice is the actual evil, leaving them naked and vulnerable. As they are disgraced, bare and wounded, we are left wanting what they now struggle to give. In their torturous stripping, we are all robbed of sacred ritual and practice that can heal our world. But naming their holy ways as "evil" disrobes our Native brothers and sisters of more than their holy ritual and practice, it tears beneath their skin into their very identity and dignity—a wound that does not quickly heal. This kind of government and religious exploitation is nothing short of unjust, for it steals from all of us the presence of our Creator that unifies, heals, and transforms our world as the Kingdom of God.

"Humankind has not woven the web of life.
We are but one thread in it.
Whatever we do to the web,
We do to ourselves.
All things are bound together.
All things connect."
-Chief Seattle



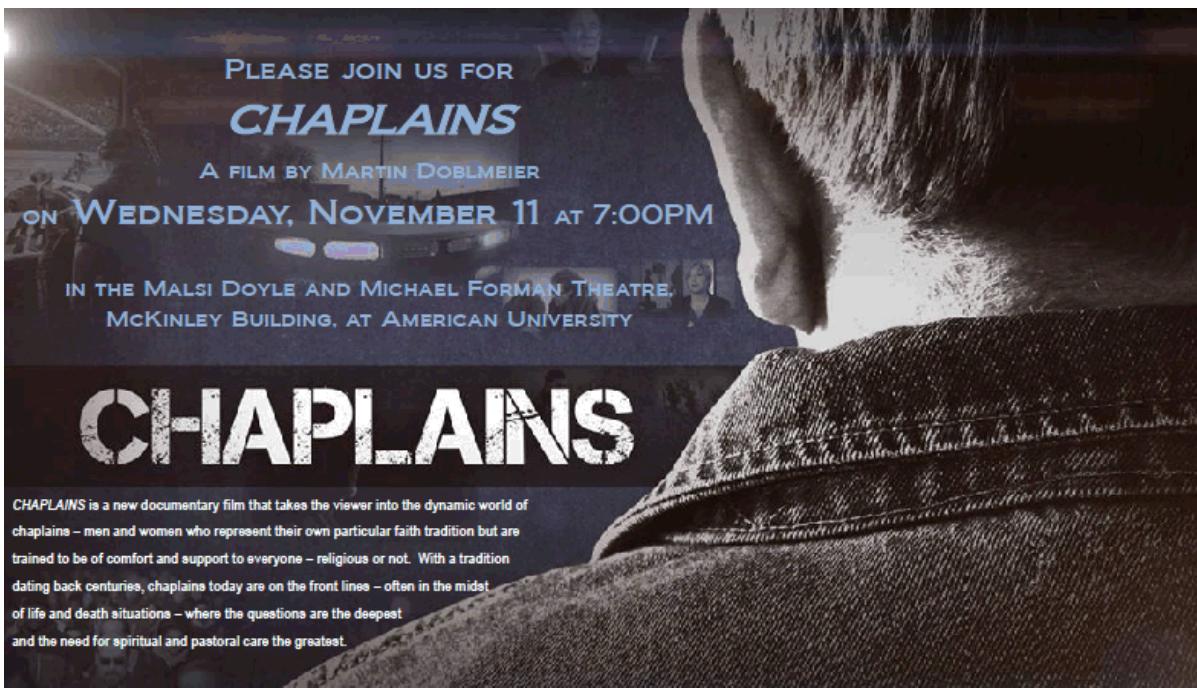
Garth Stevens-Jenning

When asked to write about my experience for this edition of the Wesley Journal, I was initially confused as to how I could contribute meaningfully to the publication. As a heterosexual white man, what could I add to this conversation that someone else is not better equipped or better situated to be the bearer of? I have never faced any form of discrimination leveled against me as an individual, and am a part of the social group which enjoys the highest level of social capital in the United States and most of the wider world. I have never felt the sting of racial epithets, loaded with hatred against my very identity. I have never been dismissed, judged, derided, or attacked because of my name, speech, color, or gender. Socially, I am about as near the top as one can get. All of these facts mean that I have no personal, individual experience to draw insight from or to reflect upon.

After consideration, what little I do have to offer comes from familial experience. I am married to Ahnnalise Stevens-Jennings, who is black. She has experienced many of the forms of discrimination listed above on a regular and lifelong basis. Likewise her family, now my in-laws, have experienced much of the same, and in my time among this family I have been witness to numerous instances of systematic racism leveled against them, and to a lesser extent against us as a married unit. All that I have personally been subject to is disapproving glares by people seeing me and my wife together, but among my new family much worse has

PERSPECTIVE

been suffered. I have watched my wife followed around stores by employees who assumed her to be a thief while all-but ignoring me. I have comforted her as she came home sobbing as a result of racial insults thrown at her from a pickup truck window. I have watched her be ignored in conversation in favor of literally every other white person in a given room. I have seen people consistently walk around me on the sidewalk only to barge straight into Ahnnalise as though she weren't even there. I have watched her be intellectually brow-beaten by people who instantly back off the moment I interject. I have watched her tolerate strangers "petting" her hair as though she were an animal, watched her be patronized by those who assume she is of lower intelligence or education than I, and watched her be fetishized with exclamations about her skin tone or how exited people are for us because "mixed race babies are so beautiful." I have seen her be treated as anything but the worthy and wonderful person that she is. So I suppose that what I can contribute is to assure those who may doubt or disbelieve the testimony of the other writers in this issue of the following: racism is real, it is virulent, it is widespread, and it is embedded within the structures of our society. I have seen for myself the immense and constant disparity of treatment and consideration between my wife's family and I. It is a disparity of status that runs deeper than I ever imagined it could, and it shows no signs of abating.



RESOURCES

Looking for more information? Help keep the conversation going with these resources.



GENERAL COMMISSION ON RELIGION AND RACE

of The United Methodist Church

GCORR.org

GCORR is building the capacity of The United Methodist Church to be contextually relevant and to reach more people, younger people, and more diverse people as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

- Stories
- Resources
- Vital Conversations
- General Conference



www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/racialjustice

The UMW's Charter for Racial Justice was created and adopted in 1978 before being successfully adopted by the whole denomination in 1980. This site promotes advocacy and education.

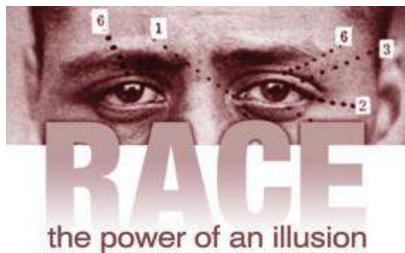
- Charter for Racial Justice
- Racial Justice Time Line
- Workshop Resources for organizing advocacy and educational events



www.splcenter.org

Founded in 1971 by civil rights lawyers to ensure the promise of the civil rights movement became a reality for all, this organization focuses on fighting hate, teaching tolerance, and seeking justice.

- Case Docket offers summaries of the center's current and historical civil rights cases.
- Extremist Files contains profiles of prominent extremists and extremist organizations.
- Hatewatch monitors and exposes the activities of the American radical right.
- Check out their free publication *Speak Up: Responding to Everyday Bigotry*.



Race, the Power of an Illusion is a three-part television program produced by California Newsreel to challenge the fundamental belief that human beings can be divided into a few distinct groups and to look at why race is not biologically meaningful yet nonetheless very real.

- Available from the Wesley Theological School library's circulation DVD shelf (DVD 016)



From the cover

Top row, left: Lucie Tshama

Top row, middle: CJ Rodriguez
Abramowitz

Top row, right: Ginny Slayton

Middle row, left: Yvenais Pierre
Middle row, right: Bethany Print-
up-Davis

Bottom row, left: Suka Joshua

Bottom row, middle: Jean Lee

Bottom row, right: Lawrence Pelham

rac·ism

the perception that people can be defined, distinguished as inferior or superior, and judged as a group by physical characteristics or ethnic origin.



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