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Symposium Overview

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Symposium Overview

*Joel Pruce, moderator; Patricia Alvarez, Thomas Morgan,
Denise James, Una Cadegan*

Introductory remarks for this session included a recitation by Julius Amin of the passage below from W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Henry Louis Gates and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: Norton, 1999), pp. 10–11:

How does it feel to be a problem? ...

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world in which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, the sense of always measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this

strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

Remarks by Joel Pruce

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the opening session of our symposium, *Critical Examination of Our Times: The State of Race on the University of Dayton Campus*. We're looking forward to fruitful and provocative discussions and your continued engagement and participation is essential, so thank you for being with us today.

My name is Joel Pruce. I am an assistant professor of human rights studies and proudly serve on the Symposium Organizing Committee. I've been asked to moderate today's session, which is intended to provide the rationale for the symposium. Our speakers will offer reflections from their own areas and disciplines to frame the conversations and presentations that we'll all share over the next day and a half.

But, before we begin, some acknowledgments and announcements are in order.

This symposium would not be possible without invaluable assistance and support from Interim Provost Paul Benson, who will give an important keynote address tomorrow evening. Additionally, we'd like to thank Dean Jason Pierce and the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Office of Multicultural

Affairs under the leadership of Dr. Patty Alvarez. Thank you, all, for all you do.

As a series of reminders: later this evening, at 7 p.m. in the KU Ballroom, the UD Speaker Series is hosting Yale sociologist Dr. Elijah Anderson, who will give a talk entitled “The ‘White Space,’ the ‘Black Space,’ and the ‘Cosmopolitan Canopy.’” Tomorrow we begin at 10 a.m. in Sears Recital Hall with a panel featuring research conducted by students that will shine light on the history of race at UD and provide a glimpse into the experiences of current African American students. At 12:15, over lunch, we will hear from UD alumni and then at 2:30 p.m. a panel of current UD faculty and staff members will share their views.

As I mentioned, at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the KU Ballroom, Provost Benson will deliver a keynote address entitled “Race, Belonging, and Academic Community at the University of Dayton.” Finally, Thursday at 10 a.m., a panel of student leaders will highlight “Solutions and Next Steps,” initiatives already in progress at UD to address the climate for race on campus. I hope you can join us for as many of these sessions as possible. All are free and open to the public.

Our panelists tonight are all esteemed members of our UD community and we’re fortunate to have them with us:

- Patty Alvarez has been Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Multicultural Affairs since Fall 2010. Patty earned a doctoral degree in College Student Personnel from the University of Maryland and has over 17 years of professional experience working within student affairs and academic affairs at several institutions of higher education.
- Una Cadegan is Associate Professor of History and has taught at UD since 1987. As an historian of US Catholicism, Professor Cadegan has been involved since

the late 1980s in discussions of UD's Catholic and Marianist character.

- V. Denise James is Associate Professor of Philosophy and facilitates the Diversity Across the Curriculum faculty workshop. She received her BA from Spelman College and her MA and PhD from Emory University. She has published articles about street violence against young women and girls, black feminist pragmatism, and radical social justice theory.
- Tom Morgan is in his tenth year in the Department of English at the University of Dayton. His research and teaching interests focus on American ethnic literature, specifically African American and Native American literature, as well as Critical Race Theory.

We'll hear from each of our panelists in turn and then hopefully have some exchange. We'll take questions from the audience in time permits.

To start us off, I thought I'd offer some initial comments of my own, from my area of study: human rights. If human rights are about anything, they exist as a framework for making claims for recognition and inclusion. Human rights are tools marginalized people use to assert their dignity and their voice. A human rights approach demands we pay attention to those populations that are too often overlooked and left out of dominant narratives. For those reasons, a human rights framework explains quite clearly why we might undertake to hold this symposium.

But as noble as that sounds, it's not that simple. An overarching question I explore in my work asks why the human rights community is so seemingly resistant to critique? It turns out that the human rights community is not unlike other communities: it is insular and inward looking, it is an echo chamber, it circles the wagons and protects its own. Peering behind the curtain of the human rights movement reveals that

adhering to a common set of values in fact *prevents* communities from being self-reflective.

This notion informs our symposium at its core. When we use the phrase “critical examination of our times,” as drawn from the mission statement of UD’s Common Academic Program, we don’t mean “critical” as in “crucial.” We mean “critical” as in “critique”—because it is beholden on all communities, as tough as it may be, to engage in self-critiques, in order to move ourselves forward.

What prevents us from having this conversation about identity and community and inclusion more often? Why is this the first time we’re holding a university-wide dialogue on the state of race at UD?

Remarks by Una Cadegan

Good afternoon. My name is Una Cadegan. I have taught at UD, mostly in the history department, since 1987, and I am also an alumna of the university.

I am honored to be asked to speak today as part of the opening of this symposium. I will make two brief points as a historian, a cultural historian of US Catholicism, and then make a final observation more as a Christian, a Catholic Christian formed by long association with Marianist education.

First point: the history of the Catholic Church in America with regard to race is partly admirable and partly shameful. We could go a long way back and talk, for example, about Catholic slaveholders in colonial Maryland. But even if we concentrate on the more recent past, we can see both things to admire and things to be ashamed of. In the photographs of the marches of the modern civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, we often highlight the priests and religious sisters and brothers who marched in their Roman collars and their habits, advocating for racial justice. We Catholics are proud of them, as we should be.

We hold them up as examples of the best of our tradition, which is what they are.

But we also know that many of the people opposing civil rights for African Americans, especially in the cities of the North, were also Catholic. White urban ethnics—and I am very aware that I am talking in some cases about the parents and grandparents and great-grandparents of people in this very room—opposed integration in their neighborhoods; then sold their homes and moved to the suburbs; then participated in political movements and political decisions that made sure that the policies, which had made their own assimilation and social mobility possible, were unavailable to the new citizens of the city centers of the urban North. And many, many of these voters and their political leaders were also Catholic. This is a failure that is still affecting our society and our church today, and we have not yet really begun to grapple with it.

So that's the first point: we have not yet truly begun to face the whole truth of the extent to which Catholicism was complicit with racism in the very recent past—a past so recent it shapes the present in direct, tangible, measurable ways.

My second point is related, but briefer. When these issues are raised among white Catholics (not only among Catholics, but that's my focus here today), one response that often comes up is: well, Catholics were also discriminated against, and look at us now. We're fine. If we did ok, then whatever is the problem with African Americans must be their fault, not the fault of the discrimination.

If you are tempted toward that argument (and I understand the temptation), or if you know someone who has made it (and I think we all do), let me just say very clearly—it does not work. The differences between anti-Catholicism and anti-black racism in the US, at every point where we can make the comparison, are more crucial for the present moment than the similarities. This is not a historically defensible way out of our need to face the truth

about Catholicism and racism in the US, in the deep past, the recent past, and in the present.

Which brings me to my third point. Christians do not need to fear the truth. We all know the present moment is difficult, contentious, and often ugly—but I can’t avoid the feeling that is it also graced. Something is moving that is different from anything I can remember. We might, as those formed by Marianist educational purposes, call it a sign of the times. We might, as Christians, call it the Spirit. But make no mistake about it, we are being summoned to respond. Here, in this place, dedicated to knowledge and service, but for so long so, so separate from our neighbors across the river in the city whose name we took on nearly a century ago. As I’ve heard and read in several places recently—if you ever wondered what you would have done during the civil rights movement, now is your chance to find out. As a historian, it is my job to see clearly just how deeply racism is intertwined with the history of this country. But as a Christian, I have to believe what our president [Barack Obama] said last week in his State of the Union address, quoting Dr. King: “Unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.” Let’s try it and find out.

Resources for Further Reading

Bishop Edward K. Braxton (Diocese of Belleville, IL), “The Racial Divide in the United States: A Reflection for the World Day of Peace, 2015” (available at www.usccb.org).

Shawn T. Copeland, LaReine-Marie Mosely, and Albert Raboteau, *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience* (Orbis Books, 2009).

Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Orbis Books, 2010)

John McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North* (University of Chicago, 1996).

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Research Report
Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of “Brothers and
Sisters to Us,” US Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Racism
(2004; available at www.usccb.org).