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## **Review – *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*, by Eddie S. Glaude Jr.**

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***Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* by Eddie S. Glaude Jr. Crown Publishers, \$26.00, 275 pp.**

Glaude is outraged by the police killings of black people like Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddy Gray, and Eric Garner, and he is inspired by the activists of the "Black Lives Matter" movement. While he teaches at Princeton, he is speaking here mainly to his black sisters and brothers. No more business as usual! In this moment in our tortured history of racial oppression, we must generate dramatic new ways of grappling with white supremacy. Glaude's other readers, also outraged by those killings, can learn here the full sweep of the crisis that now engulfs Black America and what might be done about it.

His first seven chapters describe the symptoms of the enslavement and the last two propose some transformative strategies. Not only could these bring about genuine democracy, as opposed to the sham version we have now, but they could also be the innovative steps needed to put white supremacy on the path to extinction. Yet, he admits, these strategies might well fail. If so, then US democracy will be effectively dead and the evils perpetrated by white supremacy will go on.

We really do not have genuine democracy, he argues, though most Americans like to think so. The US is effectively "Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal," as Andrew Hacker puts it. African-Americans have always been deliberately excluded from full participation in the "American dream." Racial oppression is not some accidental aberration or occasional failure to live up to the ideals in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution's Preamble. Rather, white supremacy is systemic, codified, and "normal." It operates in and through our political, economic, and cultural processes (which Glaude calls "racial habits") to damage and destroy black lives.

The National Urban League's 39th annual State of Black America (2015) contains the latest evidence of its workings. Research summarized in the report details the effects of racism in nearly every major "quality of life" category. As usual, the black unemployment rate is double that of whites and far worse in some metropolitan areas. For every dollar of median white household wealth, the median black household has only six cents. Over a quarter of the black population lives below the poverty line, but only 11.1% of whites do. Studies of

black health care, infant mortality, and homicide rates expose the devastation of black life at the hands of white supremacy. The Urban League's CEO, Marc Morial, had it right: "I must use the word 'crisis' for the state of black America in 2015."

For Glaude, white supremacy is ultimately rooted in what he calls the "value gap," the pervasive sense that white skin designates superiority of character or culture or some mix of these, while black skin designates inferiority. This gap is taught and reinforced in the racial habits, the ways by which the systems, structures, and routines that govern daily life all convey the message: "White skinned people are inherently worth more than black skinned people."

The "business as usual" of black liberal politics does not address this value gap. It even marginalizes the realities of black suffering. For Glaude, leaders like Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, and, yes, even Barack Obama, have demonstrated their strategic and moral bankruptcy. Black diversity means there can no longer be one dominant black leader like King. This moment calls for creative, dramatic, and genuinely democratic initiatives at the grassroots to bring about the necessary transformation of our country.

He calls for vigorous street protests to interrupt our settled routines and compel attention to racial injustice, though he admits that their staying power is doubtful. He urges activists to form organizations focused on local issues of racial justice. When these organizations form regional and national networks of collaboration, they will revitalize democracy such that politicians can no longer ignore black suffering. Yet this strategy's effectiveness is doubtful, too. Movement and organizational leaders can drop out or be co-opted. Black people are not more virtuous and moral than other people. Failure is a real possibility.

He urges blacks to vote in the November 2016 elections, but to leave the space for President blank or simply write in "none of the above." This "blank-out campaign" will demonstrate that black voters are no longer "captured and silent." It entails huge risks to black lives and the common good, but he dismisses the risks too easily because he wants nothing less than to "remake American democracy."

Glaude envisions no significant role for white allies here, but that is not why the protests, networks, and blank-out campaign are not enough to end racial inequality. Ultimately, that requires "ridding ourselves of the value gap." This deep root of white supremacy underlies the racial

habits, while the racial habits reinforce the gap. We must change those habits "that reproduce so much evil," but how can real change take place when, as he admits, the value gap will predetermine the final results every time?

He suggests the answer in his book's subtitle. Since race enslaves the soul, our very *souls* must be liberated. The value gap is more than a political and moral issue. It is fundamentally a religious challenge. "Social sin" is Catholic social teaching's term for the racial habits that reinforce the gap, but the systemic devaluation of people with black skin is actually idolatry, as James Baldwin clearly perceived. Thus, only a faith like Martin Luther King Jr's, mated with genuine and ongoing conversion, offers any hope of transforming those habits.

Nonetheless, Glaude makes an important contribution to the national soul-searching that we need so urgently. His accounts of the state of our union and the brutalities incessantly inflicted on Black America overwhelmingly support his main thesis: it is time – it is long past time! – for creative, dramatic, and democratic strategies to dismantle white supremacy. Those strategies, however, must come from a depth that Glaude acknowledges, but does not explore here.

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