



3-19-2023

## Anti-Blackness, Reparations, and Reconciliation: A Redemptive Call to the Altar

Mary J. Lomax-Ghirarduzzi  
*University of the Pacific*, [mlomax@pacific.edu](mailto:mlomax@pacific.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/dei-webinars>



Part of the [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), [Religion Commons](#), and the [Social Justice Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lomax-Ghirarduzzi, Mary J., "Anti-Blackness, Reparations, and Reconciliation: A Redemptive Call to the Altar" (2023). *Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Webinar Recordings and Conversations*. 20.  
<https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/dei-webinars/20>

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Webinar Recordings and Conversations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [mgibney@pacific.edu](mailto:mgibney@pacific.edu).

Anti-Blackness, reparations, and reconciliation:  
A redemptive call to the altar  
11am Sunday Service (Eucharist), May 19, 2023  
Grace Cathedral, San Francisco

I acknowledge that I occupy the unceded Ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples, who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. As the Indigenous protectors of this land and in accordance with their traditions, the Ramaytush Ohlone have never ceded, lost, nor forgotten their responsibilities as the caretakers of this place, as well as for all peoples who reside in their traditional territory as I give respect to the Ancestors, Elders and Relatives of the Ramaytush Community.

As a native Californian and descendant of enslaved persons in the United States, I'm reminded that, as a mother and leader, there is much work needed to keep Black children safe. I do this social justice work as the necessary safeguard to protect their futures; I do this work also to keep the children of all Black parents safe so that these parents, too, will have hopeful futures. As I strive to fulfill this mission, I call upon my ancestors as guardians and protectors to watch over me as I labor to uncover and dismantle systemic racism in higher education and beyond. I dedicate this sermon to my parents and ask for their guidance.

This morning I want to speak about spiritual blindness and anti-Black racism in our institutions and in society.

Our reading this morning is the story of Christ healing the man born blind in John 9: 1-41.

**1** As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

**3** "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. **4** As long as it is day,

we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. **5** While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

**6** After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. **7** "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

**8** His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" **9** Some claimed that he was.

Others said, "No, he only looks like him."

But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

**10** "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.

**11** He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

As the Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the University of the Pacific and board member of the San Francisco Interfaith Council, this week I was fortunate to participate in the San Francisco Interfaith Council Briefing for Community & Faith Partners on the Findings & Recommendations of California's Task Force to study and develop reparations proposals for African Americans.

The Reparations Task Force was established under Assembly Bill 3121 - (sponsored by Dr. Shirley Weber) in 2020. The law charges the Reparations Task Force with studying the institution of slavery and its lingering negative effects on society and living African Americans. The law requires the Reparations Task Force to recommend appropriate remedies of compensation, rehabilitation, and restitution for African Americans with a special consideration for descendants of persons enslaved in the United States."

We are at a critical juncture in the process of preparing ourselves to move forward to a path of healing and perhaps redemption with our national and perhaps original sin of slavery.

The court of public opinion is still out as many well-intentioned people throughout California consume false reports, pundit sound bites, and half-truths that can confuse their understanding and undermine their acceptance of the preliminary findings and future recommendations made by the Reparations Task Force.

My goal today is not to make the case for reparations, as the Reparations Task Force has taken on that critical assignment. Instead, my purpose today is frame anti-Black racism as a spiritual sin Christ wants to heal us and help us in three ways:

- 1) First, there is a need to educate and prepare our leaders and ourselves to better navigate our private and public discussions on the issue of reparations for the living descendants of persons enslaved in the U.S. We can do this by developing a deeper understanding of our own cultural positionality within the context of anti-Blackness in society and in California;**
- 2) Second, we must gird ourselves in a spiritual dimensionality grounded in sacred principle of reconciliation with a redemptive framework to help guide our thoughts, words, and actions as the Reparations Task Force prepares its final recommendations in the coming months and submits its final report to the legislature and public by July 1, 2023;**
- 3) Lastly, today I am sending a clarion call to action to the interfaith and religious community, as standard bearers of faith, hope, and love, in preparation for discussions as they relate to the forthcoming findings and recommendations of the Reparations Task Force. We need the faith and religious community to serve as standard bearers with authority and righteousness as transformative allies with the**

## **African American community in the days, weeks and months ahead of us.**

As the daughter and descendent of persons enslaved in the U.S., my life's work has been to deepen my understanding of the world through higher education. Over the years, I have cultivated a critical, soul-filled leadership practice grounded in empathy for the oppressed and cultural humility for the privileged.

My parents were part of the Great Migration. They left the segregated South and arrived in California in 1953. My father was born in 1918 and grew up in rural, eastern Texas in Texarkana, which is right on the border of Arkansas. My mother, born in 1934, was from central rural Arkansas, not that far outside Little Rock. They grew up in a society where public policy and the law were unfair and unequal. Neither of them was able to go to college and my father left school after the eighth grade. Still, they passed on powerful lessons to me at our kitchen table, stories of liberation that came through the Gospels of Christ and the parables of Jesus, how our Lord and Savior was always with the most dispossessed, the furthest at the margins.

My parents were refugees in their own country who had to leave their own communities and move elsewhere to gain a measure of freedom. With limited formal education, they had a discerning awareness of the cognitive dissonance and limitation in society and in our institutions, an awareness that grounds the work I do today. My beautiful parents have both passed on now. Yet I think back to countless lessons that I learned as a little girl not only in the Church but sitting at the family kitchen table. Without any formal preparation, they had developed a deeper understanding of their cultural positionality within the context of anti-Blackness in society and in California.

Growing up within red-lined neighborhoods, I was reared by descendants of enslaved people who raised me in the Black church, along with my four sisters - we were surrounded by other Black folks who also had a complex, nuanced and even sophisticated understanding of inequality and injustice. Much of that learning, that early spiritual discernment and formation within a Black family and Black church context, informs my work today as an academic leader in American higher education.

But outside of a Black family and perhaps a Black church context, where does one learn and develop the awareness, knowledge and skills to encounter and engage their own cultural positionality within the context of anti-Blackness?

As institutions and as a society, we are gravely plagued by a colonial-settler narrative of manifest destiny, pulling oneself up by the bootstraps, and the destructive myth of meritocracy. At the core of American colonialism was the violent removal and genocide of Indigenous peoples, the taking and acquisition of their land through the dehumanization of slavery and forced labor; this presumption of manifest destiny was essential and required for the freedom of those newly arrived.

This false idea of what American liberation is and how righteousness works in any faith tradition is wrong, backwards, and makes no sense. This is the premise of the origin of our nation and the beginning of the State of California. All of us, but especially the faith community, must challenge this idea standing on the authority vested in and given to us through our faith traditions.

The premise of meritocracy, defined as a system, organization, or society in which people are chosen and moved into positions of success, power, and influence on the basis of their demonstrated abilities and merit, must be challenged in our institutions.

As an educator I have mentored and supported thousands of people, and many women of color.

Women of color say, again and again, that they are passed over for promotion and held to a different (higher) standard while their female and male white counterparts are able to gain promotions with the support of influential institutional actors.

Their white counterparts deem their success to be the fruit of their own merit and happily claim that they've earned what they have - with neither any basic understanding nor nuanced, sophisticated comprehension of the intersections of race, gender and class and the realities of unearned advantages versus unearned disadvantages and their accumulating realities.

In 2020 I released my first book entitled "Twice as Good: Leadership and Power for Women of Color." In this book, I guide women of color to

understand that our school and work environments are troubled waters. The work often for them is to recognize when they are treading troubled waters and what they need to be strong and courageous in order to withstand and push through the currents.

I'll share one story of a Black woman I encountered who had not been promoted in over ten years and communicated her deep sadness and dismay about how her supervisor and employer didn't "see" her even though she had labored for years in support of the institutional mission.

Conversely, others witnessed how a white male counterpart, who reportedly worked his way 'from the bottom' as he proudly proclaimed, over the same period of time as the Black woman, regarded his achievement as a product of his hard work that resulted in a succession of promotions he earned and accumulated through his own merit.

I was blessed when Janice Mirikitani, the beloved late activist, poet laureate of San Francisco, and co-founder of Glide Memorial Foundation, agreed to write the introduction for my book.

Janice was a radical truth-teller. Here is an excerpt from what she wrote in the introduction: "I believe that racism and misogyny cannot be separated when you are talking about women of color. Racism and misogyny is more than an issue of personal ignorance; it is an issue of being institutionalized in a much more sophisticated way."

What I know for sure working in higher education for the last 30 years is that key senior leaders, including the story of the white leader I've just described here, lack knowledge and awareness and the ability to "see" of twelve areas identified by the Reparations Task Force in their preliminary report on the negative effects of slavery on living African Americans today in California.

The cumulative impacts of anti-Blackness include:  
Slavery, racial terror, political disenfranchisement, housing segregation, separate and unequal education, racism in environment and infrastructure,

pathologizing the Black family, control over creative and intellectual life, stolen labor and hindered opportunity, an unjust legal system, mental and physical harm and neglect, and the wealth gap.

This earnest male administrator in a California higher education institutional context is in fact “blind” and doesn’t see nor understand the legacy of racism in society and its unfair and cumulative disadvantages.

Furthermore, his own cultural positionality in the context of anti-Blackness is a foreign concept.

This example is just one among thousands of leaders just like him.

With this lack of awareness and accountability, how can we possibly address the cumulative effect of the legacy of slavery and racism in schools, communities, and workplaces? What do we do when key leaders are not equipped to address and respond to this momentous occasion and the forthcoming recommendations from the Reparations Task Force?

When senior leaders of institutions lack the critical consciousness my Black parents and community have, that Janice Mirikitani is referring to, what happens is that every day, good, and sometimes seemingly faithful people with decent intentions will ultimately perpetuate the same indignities and transgressions they inherited as remnants of the enduring legacy of racism.

God’ people and the communities of faith must be ready and prepared with a redemptive framework to help society move forward on the issue of healing and atonement for structural racism.

In the Jewish Tradition, *Teshuva* is translated as returning in Hebrew. As humans we make mistakes, but the idea of repentance is that we return to the path of righteousness. *Teshuva* is a way back, a process through which we can restore ourselves with one another. To ensure the fulfillment of the promise of reparations as a reconciling atonement for the violence and accumulative effect of the sins committed against African Americans that impact society and California, as an act of reconciliation and justice, I would



like to offer a redemptive framework for racial justice and reconciliation informed by *Teshuva*:

1. **Recognition of harm and injury.** Recognition comes in the form of admission and acknowledgement of institutional harm to impacted persons and communities through repentance of the harm. This step is to rebuild righteous relationships with marginalized persons and communities. Recognizing that you have made mistakes and admitting wrongdoing is essential.
2. **Regret and remorse is expressed through asking for forgiveness.** This step expresses feelings of shame, guilt, and being able to sit with the discomfort of the harm one has caused. The stain of anti-Black racism is part of the fabric of our institutions and asking for forgiveness is critical.
3. **Desisting from the sin of anti-Black racism by stopping anti-racism.** This step examines attitudes, behaviors, institutional practices and procedures, whether intentional or unintentional, which have led to institutionalized racism that causes harm to Black children and youth, Black families, and Black communities.
4. **Make restitution.** Go back to the individuals in the community who have been harmed and make restitution of the damages to the injured in the forms of financial and relational restitution and the redistribution of privileges, power, and resources.
5. **Vow not to repeat the misdeed/s that caused the original harm.** Commit to changing one's actions, attitude, and behavior to integrate this reparational approach in institutional processes which adopts anti-racism and centers the needs and experiences of African Americans in one's mission work. Rebuild institutional cultures with empathy, accountability, and liberation.

Repentance, redemption, and critical allyship are essential to confront the harm of racial injustice and lead us to a place of healing and reconciliation.

On the surface, it may seem that the discussions surrounding reparations for accumulated effects of slavery is a mere public policy that is only for

African American/ Black people. Yet as God's people, we know that spiritual issues have spiritual outcomes and require spiritual responses.

The American history of anti-Blackness greatly contributes to our present-day situation. A through-line can be drawn from the current book bans to the history of prohibiting enslaved Blacks to read or write. For enslaved persons, having access to, or possession of, reading materials was punishable by up to death for the Black person and up to six months prison sentence for whites found guilty.

There is no authentic reconciliation outside of a redemptive process. We need people of all faith and religious communities to don the breastplate of righteousness and to armor themselves for the battle ahead. We were made for this and precisely where the faith and spiritual community come in:

Ephesians 6:11-17

**11** Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. **14** Stand therefore, having your waist girded with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, **15** having your feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace, **16** and above all, taking the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the fiery arrows of the evil one. **17** Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

We bring our Indigenous knowledge and wisdom, Catholic Social Teachings, Black Liberation Theology, Ignatian Spirituality, and the Social Justice Policies of the Episcopal Church, among other justice-oriented spiritual and faith traditions, where we leverage the radical inclusive gospel of Christ as a defender of the marginalized, outcasts of society, and a

preferential option for the poor in how we stand up and defend the case for reparations for the descendants of enslaved persons, as Godly, righteous, and within the duty of all persons who claim to be a Christian.

We must frame our work for anti-racism as servants of a sovereign God with moral authority and presence, as an act of service, duty, love and solidarity for the liberation and reconciling freedom of all persons.

We need to wrestle with and take head on the enduring legacy of slavery and racism and its negative and cumulative consequences as an act of righteousness, risking our own social, cultural, economic and political capital as we help other dominant cultural congregations keep their focus on the spiritual element of the reparations issue.

- How long it takes the work of the Task Force to become a reality depends on how much the Beloved Faith and Interfaith Communities, in allyship with the African American community, will hold ourselves and our leaders in our spheres of influence accountable to addressing anti-Blackness where they are located.
- How deep the City and State can go to reconcile themselves with the legacies of anti-Black racism and white supremacist institutional conditioning depends on the willingness of the faith community to serve as arbitrators of racial justice and to be honest with themselves about our own complicity in the racial injustice they seek to address and resolve.
- How far we can go on our road to redemption for our collective sin of anti-Black racism will depend on the courage of leading faith and religious colleagues and friends to submit to be healed by the blindness of racism.

If you want to do racial equity work, you have to wage a war on inequality and racial injustice.

In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. released his third book, “Why We Can’t Wait”, which captures how activism by African Americans from the spring and summer of 1963 accelerated social change. “Why We Can’t Wait” was written at the conclusion of key national events that had exposed deep racial injustice and vast economic inequality so plainly that the title alone was a spiritual call to action to help arouse many Americans from their slumber.

To cite an excerpt from that book, Dr. King writes, “Human beings with all their faults and strengths constitute the mechanism of a social movement. They must make mistakes and learn from them, make more mistakes, and learn anew. They must taste defeat as well as success and discover how to live with each. Time and action are the teachers.”

My parents understood the premise of Dr. King’s book, even from the title itself: Why we can’t wait, which was an indictment on the slow action taken by white religious and political leaders; Dr. King called it gradualism: the concept that things can only get better if we allow people in the dominant culture enough time to get there, in their own time.

Gradualism centers the needs of the privileged. And Dr. King, as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus, could only do what God commanded, which was to center the needs of the marginalized, rejected, the set-aside, and oppressed.

His was a liberatory message of justice which was the exact opposite of what the dominant political and religious leaders of his time wanted.

He said,

“This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.”

This was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s response to their requests or demands of gradualism.

So I ask you, Grace Cathedral Community: who are the marginalized, rejected, set-aside, and oppressed among us in 2023?

If Jesus were walking the earth today, where would his justice work be situated? Where and with whom and what issues might he be engaged with?

- I believe that he would be comforting those families devastated by the ways in which violence has come upon so many, that he would be there when Black and Brown bodies are slain in the streets, with Jewish communities experiencing anti-semitism and Muslim experiencing hatred. With Asian Americans sisters and brothers experiencing violence in the United States.
- I believe that he would be among the multi-racial coalition urging us to end racial injustice and supporting the labor and efforts of the California Reparations Task Force.
- I believe that he would have a piercing message around anti-Black racism as all the above exists because we need to atone, as a society, for the enduring legacy and sin of slavery.

Placing our traditions, language and gifts of our ministries in a 2023 context is to understand that we're being urged to uproot the racism deeply embedded in our own institutions.

As we come to a close today, my hope and prayer is that we will respond to the urgency of now.

Within my early Christian formation in the Black church context, there's a time in the service, after the sermon, that an invitation is extended to all in attendance, to respond to the message, to come into the fold of God's love that offers redemption and the community's care as safeguards of security and belonging.

The Altar Call has historically been an invitation into the beloved church community as a sanctuary and place where healing, hope, and redemption occur. It's a calling into the fold if you will - a blanket of love where people are supported, build meaningful relationships, and are connected to others.

Where people get the help they need to learn and grow, a home to gather, reconcile, and to forgive and be forgiven, for a higher purpose.

In this spirit of calling people to the altar, I want to close with a reading from Ephesians 5:8-14,

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.”

Just as Christ healed the man born blind, may He also heal us today from the spiritual blindness of anti-Black racism.

May God open our eyes as we become light-filled w/ and prepared to take on the sophisticated structures that hold on to anti-Blackness as the church’s role to foment societal redemption. My hope is that we’ll rise up from our slumber as Dr. King called us to do 60 years ago and respond to the light and calling of Christ today.

Thank you for listening to this message of redemption, reconciliation and love, and may God help and bless us as we respond to the call to end anti-Black racism in San Francisco, in California, and in the United States.

Amen.

\*\*\*\*\*