

Chanequa Walker-Barnes. *I Bring the Voices of My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. xxii + 258 pages. \$25.

In five chapters, *I Bring the Voices of My People* exposes fallacies regarding surface-level racial reconciliation and simplistic solutions for systemic racial injustice within the context of a theological understanding of God's self-disclosure and Christian response. As a public theologian and an extensively-trained clinical psychologist, Walker-Barnes provides an in-depth argument for holistic approaches towards building a more just society and the role of the church in such processes. The author draws from critical race theory to challenge the following three assumptions about race: 1) race as a social construct and therefore not real; 2) racism derives from division rather than power dynamics, positions of privilege, and access to the means to improve social, political, and economic standing; and 3) interpersonal contacts lead to reconciliation (23). Walker-Barnes devotes much of the book to dispelling simplistic explanations regarding the evils of racism, sexism, and forms of intersectionality. The author confirms and recontextualizes the scholarship of social psychologist Gordon Allport regarding the "contact hypothesis," with the perspective of several decades of legal and practical desegregation and taking into consideration the potency of hegemonic dominance, which controls human behavior through ideas and information along with structural power. Such structures reproduce racism as they adapt to legislative changes and permeate cultural norms.

According to Walker-Barnes, broad institutional socialization of more privileged groups, which fail to recognize racism and its various manifestations, is deeply embedded in the fabric of the post-Civil Rights Movement where American society lies. As a result of such a mindset, racism becomes connotatively reduced to isolated incidents and individual encounters, rather than being systemic in nature. Despite narrow definitions of the colonial era, ranging from the fifteenth century through the eighteenth century, the gospel in a Western social context struggles against the long lifespan of colonialism, which extends into the twenty-first century. Just as W.E.B. DuBois coined the expression "double consciousness" in his classic *The Souls of Black Folk*, Walker-Barnes applies the context to the practice of the Christian life through a distorted Christological vantage point, where unmindful racial minorities, and especially Black Americans, may subconsciously see the Jesus of the Gospels through the eyes of others.

The author builds on a generation of womanist and feminist theologians and intersectionality scholarship. Early in the book, Walker-Barnes draws from the scholarship of sociologists Patricia Hill Collins and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to address theological themes about the human condition in terms of group interactions, gendered racism, and racialized sexism. The author's strongest critique of Christian racial reconciliation as part of a social movement lies in the collective intent of advocates to address racism while evading broad moral injury related to whiteness: "With their symmetrical treatment approach to race relations, many racial reconciliation efforts have advocated a mutual and equal obligations perspective, which assumes that white people and people of color are equally responsible for the sins of racial divisions" (114). Such treatment draws from the frame of "collective guilt" and functions as what twentieth-century social theorists Gresham M. Sykes and David Matza called "techniques of neutralization."

I Bring the Voices of My People has a broad intended audience, which includes scholars of the social and behavioral sciences, practical theologians, activists, and especially lay readers who seek to challenge assumptions regarding intergroup relationships, the role and function of white supremacy, and Christian racial reconciliation. The book's greatest strength rests in its

explicit account of what forgiveness and reconciliation truly entail, through the exposure of the subtleties of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva originally termed “color-blind racism,” gender-neutral sexism, colorism within the context of the politics of beauty, and expressing biblical justice in twenty-first century concrete terms rather than broad abstractions. Readers will most benefit from Walker-Barnes’ scholarship through attempting to understand the perspective of those outside one’s group. Readers will become awakened to the impact patriarchal privilege has on everyday life, and will seek to understand how racial minorities have been silenced in multiple ways. Towards the end of the book, Walker-Barnes transitions toward addressing aspects of liturgical expression and the inclination for a significant portion of churches to neglect lamentations from the oppressed: “U.S. church services are dominated by triumphalist praise and worship. While victory and triumph are important themes in the Christian tradition, they are incomplete without also giving expression to the grief, pain, and anger that arise from protracted suffering” (214). The timeliness of *I Bring the Voices of My People* rests in local and global reckoning with systems of injustice, the breaking of traditions of silencing, and a confrontation with the truth about the human condition, the role of privilege, and victimhood.

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