

America's Unholy Ghosts: The Racist Roots of Our Faith and Politics, Joel Edward Goza

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How powerful are ideas? How important is it for this generation to take seriously Martin Luther King Jr.'s call to analyse and understand the ideational roots of America's racism? How critical is it to grapple seriously with Liberation theology's insistence to read history, philosophy, theology, and see our present historical, political, socio-economic situations "from below"?

This important and engaging work from Joel Goza responds to all these questions, and he does so in an entirely convincing manner. This book is a devastating attack on racism, in the form of a painstakingly careful, analytical deconstruction of the roots of racism in America, to conclude that racism is not an aberration, it is an ideological, philosophical, religious mind-set carefully and studiously cultivated, nurtured and protected in all the myriad ways white power, white superiority, and white privilege are able to do. So, Goza makes us not only understand the current racist realities of the United States of America, but also where these come from, and how they have been solidified by practical political engineering, intellectual, scientific and philosophical endeavour, and religious manipulation.

Goza's analysis of America's most beloved and revered philosophers, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Adam Smith, is careful and relentless. He convincingly shows how the "enlightened thinking" of these philosophers is revealed "through the work taking place in the bodies of Africans and Indians" (8). As a white person, growing up within that racially isolated bubble, he understands the meaning of white "generational wealth" and "generational privilege" which lead to "generational corruption." "The masterminds who harmonised enlightened ideologies with slavery are dead and gone, but their nifty philosophical footwork continues to shape our thinking and harden our hearts to our society's racial and economic iniquities" (8). And, "While racial thinking evolved, the basic ideological architecture that produces slavery never went out of style" (8, 28-33).



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That, in a word, is post-1994 South Africa. Goza can do this because he has clad himself in the authenticity of his embrace of “the prophetic Black Church” which he joined and served, taking upon himself what I called in 1976, “the condition of blackness” (Boesak 1976, *Farewell to Innocence. A Social-ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power*). Goza means the church that stands within the tradition of Martin Luther King Jr.; and its impact upon him is clear. One may perhaps ask if his embrace of “the prophetic Black Church” does not blind him somewhat to the fact that, like in South Africa, there is a huge difference between the institutional Black Church and the prophetic Black Church. The Black Church of T. D. Jakes is in no imaginable way the Black Church of Martin Luther King Jr. Here a much deeper, critical appraisal is needed.

The parallels between the US and South Africa are clear, despite the dissimilarities, and this immensely powerful book is a wonderful teaching moment for all of us on both sides of the Atlantic.