

FEATURE ARTICLE

New Book Examines Anti-Black Racism and U.S. Churches

By Rachel M. Anderson, Contributing Writer

(Brooklyn, NY) – America is changing. According to new U.S. Census projections, by 2045, whites will no longer be the predominant race.

It is predicted that within just a little more than 20 years, whites will comprise 49.7 percent, or less than half of the U.S. Population. As for the rest of the U.S. population, 24.6 percent of Americans will be Hispanic, 13.1 percent black, 7.9 percent Asian and 3.8 percent multiracial.

Realizing that change is afoot, most industries are making a concerted effort to become more inclusive. Companies big and small are doing this by embracing work cultures that promote Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). The goal is not only to open the potential talent pool and attract the best of the best, but to win over more diverse customers.

According to Fast Company, Google, Amazon, Sales Force and LinkedIn are among the companies doing the best job of working to improve their DEI effort. Meantime, it seems the biggest faith-based businesses in America, namely churches, are lagging behind. Why is that?

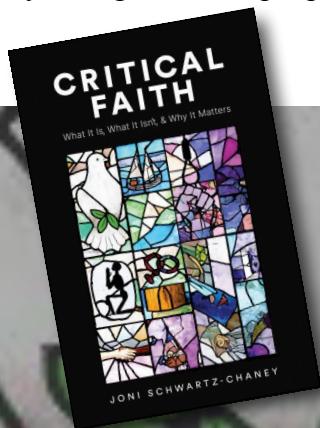
Dr. Joni Schwartz-Chaney, a Professor of Humanities and social activist scholar at the City University of New York's LaGuardia and John Jay Colleges, has taught Critical Race Theory (CRT) for more than 20 years. She says the problem is that racism is systematically entrenched into the institution of the church.

In her soon-to-be released book, *Critical Faith: What It Is, What It Isn't & Why It Matters*, which will be published by Fortress Press in April of 2024, Schwartz-Chaney examines racism in U.S. churches, particularly the intersection of faith and Critical Race Theory or CRT.

Schwartz-Chaney says CRT is both misunderstood and demonized and many are unfamiliar with what the theory really states. In brief, it holds that racial bias is inherent in western society—especially in its legal, education, health-care, criminal justice, and other social institutions—on the basis of their having been primarily designed for and implemented by white people.

Schwartz-Chaney has been a member of interracial churches in New York for more than 20 years, and begins her latest book with why the institutionalized protestant and Catholic church has struggled with racism in the 21st Century. The author points out the problem can be traced back to our beginnings.

“Many of the founding fathers of our nation were slave holders and church leaders and theologians. Thomas Jefferson, Jonathan Edwards, and Cotton Mather influenced religious and intellectual thought while also propping up a racist institution. After the Emancipation Proclamation, the Civil War, and Reconstruction; the institution of the church supported Jim Crow and segregation with KKK members often being churchgoers. Lynchings of black people were sometimes announced at church services with members leaving church to



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watch this domestic terrorism. With few exceptions, during the Civil Rights Movement, the white church was either absent, resistant or in opposition to Dr. King and the Black church movement,” points out Schwartz-Chaney.

Today, churches are still segregated. White theology dominates seminary training with little interest in black theologians like James Cone or Howard Thurman, or black liberation theology not to mention womanist theology. “Today, the church continues to prop up racism supporting the oppression of people of color and women,” says Schwartz-Chaney.

Critical Faith: What It Is, What It Isn't & Why It Matters is divided into 12 chapters. The book begins by examining Critical Race Theory, its history, how it is misunderstood, and its usefulness in examining today's church institutions. Also explored is individual versus institutionalized racism, white supremacy and privilege, white saviorism, white allies, and suggestions for a way forward for the church.

“To build a more equitable world, I think at this juncture we have to tell the truth about our history. We have to read banned books. We have to engage in dialogue. We have to make our systems more equitable and that means the church,” says Schwartz-Chaney, pointing out that the white church in America has a reckoning to do.

Will the church continue to concentrate on issues like abortion and gay marriage to the exclusion of racism while breeding polarization and ignorance instead of a critical and informed faith? Or is it going to be the impetus for racial equality?

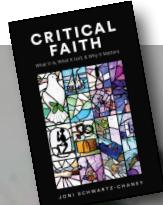
Early reviews for ***Critical Faith: What It Is, What It Isn't & Why It Matters*** call it a book that people need to read.

“The predominant emotion elicited from this book was sorrow and grief.... Having everything so clearly defined as to the state of affairs concerning the church community's handling of the race issue. Watching it on a weekly basis, it's easy to excuse and compensate for the “evil” that's constantly staring me in the face,” said C.P., a long time church member.

“I have been enlightened. You have put to words the cry of my heart. The church should be the spearhead designed to vanquish racism. Yet racism exists and even thrives in so called ‘Christian’ environments,” said R.C., a church deacon and long-time church member.

“Keep doing the awesome, healing, bridge-building work you're doing!” said R.P., an artist and writer.

Copies of ***Critical Faith: What It Is, What It Isn't & Why It Matters*** are available for pre-order on the Fortress Press website: Fortresspress.com. The book is set for release on April 23, 2024.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For most of her adult life, Dr. Joni Schwartz-Chaney has worked, taught, and lived in multiracial settings, often being one of the few whites. She is a Professor of Humanities at the City University of New York's LaGuardia Community College, and teaches in the graduate program at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

She is also a former STEM research coordinator for the Black Male Initiative at New York City College of Technology. She teaches writing at New York State's Queensboro Correctional Facility, a minimum-security prison in New York City.

A critical researcher, critical race theorist, and social activist scholar, she co-edited *Race, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens: Counterstories & Counterspaces*, published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2015. She is the co-author of *Gifts from the Dark: Learning from the Incarceration Experience*, published in 2021, and also co-authored *Learning to Disclose: A Journey of Transracial Adoption* published by Peter Lang in 2020.

Her latest book, ***Critical Faith: What It Is, What It Isn't & Why It Matters*** will be released by Fortress Press on April 23, 2024. "My commitment to Christ and living faith coupled with the disturbing and polarizing misinformation around race, racism and continued racial segregation and disparities drove me to write this book," said Schwartz-Chaney.

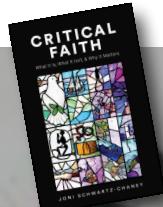
"I have recently witnessed the escalation of polarization, toxic conversations, and Christians talking past each other. I have witnessed harsh words, name calling and breaches in friendships within the church when discussing race. I feel my silence means complicity, and I think that my professional writing experience, lived experience, family experiences and stance as a CRT scholar positions me perfectly to add my voice to the dialogue."

In Spring 2024, Joni Schwartz-Chaney and her husband, John R. Chaney, will begin work on a new program funded by the U.S. Department of Justice called the "Second Chance Act Improving Reentry Education and Employment Outcomes." The \$900,000 grant over three years (beginning in Oct. 2023) will fund the development of college credit bearing classes in prison for mainly men of color returning home.

Joni Schwartz-Chaney lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband, John R. Chaney, a City University of New York associate professor, whose background includes practicing law and criminal justice administration.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This feature article and the accompanying photography are available for your use copyright free and cost free. If you wish to request review copies of any of Joni's books, or to arrange an interview with her, contact Rachel M. Anderson, Publicist, at 952-240-2513 or rachel@rmapublicity.com

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