

“Black Bodies and the Justice of God”
a lecture given at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary by
The Rev. Canon Kelly Brown Douglas, Ph.D.



STUDY / DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

developed by
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Part I: 0:00-14:32 → The Historical Significance of Martin Luther King Jr.

1. Douglas references her early memory of watching the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. deliver his “I Have a Dream Speech” at the 1963 March on Washington in the company of her parents. She recalls being struck by her parents’ reactions to King’s words as well as the song *We Shall Overcome*. In your own lifetime, can you recall a similarly transformative moment where you were inspired to work toward an unfulfilled dream?
2. Douglas boldly contends that the “color line remains a problem” today as much as ever—more than 50 years after the assassination of King and one and a half centuries after the abolition of slavery. She cites the rolling back of the Voting Rights Act, the prison-to-school pipeline, and the violence leveled at black bodies as a few examples of the lack of American progress when it comes to issues of race. Can you identify a few concrete manifestations of today’s “color line” in your local community?
3. Douglas sets forth a challenge to the Christian church in proclaiming we must “tell the truth regardless of how uncomfortable it makes us feel.” In an attempt to respond to Douglas’s challenge, discuss a recent experience with racism, and describe your reaction to this particular event.

Part II: 14:33-30:18 → The Narratives of White Supremacy and Anti-Blackness

1. What, according to Douglas, are some of the historical origins of the anti-blackness narrative?
2. Douglas repeatedly emphasizes that the narrative of anti-blackness is, in and of itself, violent, for it, “fortifies the notion that African men and women are dangerous” and leads to the conclusion that they must be patrolled and controlled. How might you see this narrative play out in the contemporary, American context?
3. Douglas’s argument hinges on a construct of blackness as pitted against whiteness. Given the complexity of racial, bi-racial, and multi-ethnic categories, particularly in the context of the American melting pot, how can Douglas’s framework be expanded to include all persons of color? Moreover, describe how you might see gender identity intersecting with racial identity to complicate the impact of white supremacy and anti-blackness.

Part III: 30:19-49:03 → Making Sense of the “Make America Great Reality”

1. Douglas indicts President Trump and his “make America great again” rhetoric as one more example of Anglo-Saxon superiority. She then outlines how 81 percent of white evangelicals, 58 percent of white Protestants, and 60 percent of white Catholics supported Trump’s presidential candidacy. If you agree with her indictment, what does this situation mean for the broad Christian church?
2. Douglas’ entire argument is rooted in her notion of the cross and resurrection. She argues that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is God’s non-violent defeat of violence—God’s affirmation of life as exemplified in Jesus Christ. How does this understanding of the cross compare with or differ from what you’ve come to understand in your own faith context and walk with God?
3. Douglas leaves her audience with the following ethical challenge: What is the Christian church prepared to do *now* in behalf of victimized communities of color? How is the church prepared to respond to structures and systems that contribute to the dehumanization of God’s people? Think globally and locally as you attempt to identify some ethical solutions.
4. Describe how you were personally challenged by Douglas’s work. What questions remain for you as you continue to ponder her message?