

Why didn't they tell us?: the racist & pro-segregation roots of the formation of RTS, the PCA, and the role of First Prez in Jackson, Miss in all of it

Anthony Bradley, 2010

Peter Slade's book *Open Friendship in a Closed Society: Mission Mississippi and A Theology of Friendship* (Oxford University Press, 2009) reveals difficult information about the racist and pro-segregationist ethos surrounding the formation of the Reformed Theological Seminary, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the role of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, MS., in addition to the theological concerns of that era.

If you're black in the PCA this book will be very, very hard to read. Sorry folks, the racial history of the denomination is more than just a "blind spot." According to Slade, there was more going on.

I am amazed that people outside of the PCA know more about the denomination's history than it's own members it seems.

After reading this history I have been struggling to answer why: (1) no one talks about these facts in general and (2) why were several of us blacks were not told about this in the early 1990s when many of us came into to the PCA? Why didn't anyone tell us the following as described in Slade's book 15-20 years ago:

- (1) First Presbyterian Church in Jackson's role in supporting segregation in Mississippi.
- (2) The "Spirituality of the Church" theology
- (3) Rev. James Henry Thornwell's call to "reform" not abolish slavery and the theology that led him to that position.
- (4) On December 4, 1861, the representatives of 47 Southern presbyteries formed an Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (PCCSA).
- (5) The racial views of Robert L. Dabney and Benjamin Palmer
- (6) The role of W. Calvin Wells, an elder at First Presbyterian Church, in fighting for racial segregation.

- (7) The failed attempt to launch the "Afro-American Presbyterian Church"
- (8) What led to the planting of Central (1898), Power Memorial (1924), Fondren (1930) outside of Jackson.
- (9) The paternalism that Mississippi Presbyterians had toward blacks in the formation of institutions and programs designed to help blacks.
- (10) The role of Westminster Seminary's J. Gresham Machen and Cornelius Van Til in the segregationist churches.**
- (11) The 1954 statement issued at First Presbyterian, Jackson rejecting the PCUS's support of the conclusion of Brown vs. Board.
- (12) Dr. Guy T. Gillisepie's (former president at Belhaven College) argument on favor of segregation.
- (13) How desegregation led to the launching of Christian schools in Jackson, MS.
- (14) That Mississippi Presbyterians equated desegregation with being a liberal in the 1960s.
- (15) The relationship between First Presbyterian Church and Westminster Seminary in the early 1960s.**
- (16) The non-theological reasons RTS was started in 1964 (consider the timing and national movements related to race) and the meeting at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Alabama, that formed a denomination called, the "National Presbyterian Church in America" resulting from it.
- (17) Morton Smith's book How is the Gold Become Dim!**
- (18) The letters that went around at First Presbyterian, Jackson condemning any involvement in racial reconciliation progress that was being made among some at the church on the early 1990s.
- (19) and more.....

For those us African Americans who came into the PCA in early 1990s (I came in 1994) and have been committed ever since (we're not going anywhere), I don't understand why Peter Slade, a United Methodist, has been courageous enough to bring these things to light. Why is the racial history never told as a part of the PCA's history? Why did I have to find this out after-the-fact? Why am I learning these things from a United Methodist? Why haven't I been told these details by Presbyterians?

For at least 6 YEARS I have been repeatedly, and regularly called "nigger," "Anthony Bradley, the Negro Prince of the PCA," "The Token

Negro and Filthy Pervert and a Stain on the Bedsheets of Life," "Anthony Bradley, the Affirmative Action Ph.D," and other racial slurs all over the internet since some white Reformed people discovered me; and it has not stopped. I had no idea what I was getting myself into in the early 1990's and nobody told me what to expect. I have been completely caught off guard and I'm lucky to get a shoulder shrug from people who knew this would happen. Why didn't anyone tell us?

On the one hand I get asked, "why do you stay in the PCA?" and on the other hand I get asked "do you love the PCA?" I have remained in theological circles where I'm regularly called racial slurs, and haven't left, and people ask me if I am "committed?" To some I am an idiot and to others a "loose canon" who does not express enough love for a denomination. Have you ever been called, "the Negro Prince of the PCA?" Don't people understand that if I leave the racists win. The racists should repent or leave. Why should the minorities leave?

Why didn't they tell us? I'm looking for anyone to help us make sense of the silence on this issue.

Why are people outside of the PCA more familiar with this part of the PCA's story than those inside the PCA?

It's difficult to encourage African Americans to embrace the denomination that won't disclose a major part of its history some would argue.

I am Reformed and Presbyterian for reasons that have nothing to do with the South, segregation, the Spirituality of the Church, or the Confederacy. Is that ok? Does that remain in the PCA? Should it?