

**Black Texans Like Me?  
Rev. Tony Lorenzen  
Pathways Church  
Southlake, TX  
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Anthony Maddox arrived in my third grade class during the middle of the year. I was fascinated with him because of his lunch. He was eating a pomegranate. I had never seen one or eaten one. By the end of his first week at Northwest Elementary School, I had tried a pomegranate and invited him to my house after school. I remember he came over to the house, walking home from school with me one day as I lived just down the street from school. I can't tell you what we did to pass the time that day. I do remember that the next day he got into a fight and I was, well, let's say, roughed up a bit, on my way home from school. Some fourth grade toughs wanted to know what I was doing with him. No punches, just the pushing and shoving and posturing little fourth grade toughs use. Scared me enough, though. Anthony Maddox was black. Little Anthony Lorenzen was "white." This was in the spring of 1975. I

was nine years old. Anthony Maddox and I remained friendly, but he wasn't around when fourth grade started in the fall.

This was my first real awareness of racism. I had seen the news for the last couple of years. It was a nightly event. I was too young to remember the war in Vietnam being on TV every night. The first thing of real life significance I remember watching on television was Richard Nixon resign the presidency that August afternoon in 1974 while on vacation at my grandfather's in Ohio. But the Boston busing crisis, I remember that being on the news every night while I was in grade school. I remember people screaming at each other, throwing rocks and bottles at buses as white students were bused to black high schools in Roxbury and black students were bused to white high schools in Southie and Dorchester. I remember police inside and outside the schools and the buses. I remember the names of Judge Arthur Garrity and Mayor Kevin White and Governor Michael Dukakis. Ted Williams has a tunnel named after him on the way to Logan Airport, but Teddy Ballgame, the Splendid Splinter

never won anything but a batting title in Boston. Bill Russell doesn't have enough fingers for all the NBA Championship rings he won with the Boston Celtics and he still can't get an alley named after him in Boston. Boston has a history of racism and so does Massachusetts, so I'm not coming off any high horse as I make my life now as a white Texan UU Minister to reflect on Black History month as a white Texan UU Minister.

Today, Black history month, Black Texas and Black Texans and the impact of racism on all of us just allows us all another opportunity to explore what it means to contemplate that we are all in this together and that systemic issues such as racism affect all of us. This day and this month also offer us the opportunity to reflect on history and to see history or try and see history in its broad sweep and from many perspectives, aware that our own eyes are only one lens.

Black History Month has its origins in the work of Dr. Carter G. Woodson and Rev. Jesse E. Moorland. Woodland and Moorland co-

founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915. Carter was the son of former slaves and the second black person to receive a degree from Harvard University, the place where I got this fancy dress.

Black History Month began as Negro History and Literature Week in 1920 and became Negro History week in 1926. The week took place in February because of the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln on the 12<sup>th</sup> and Frederick Douglas on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson died in 1950, but celebration of Negro History Week continued to gain speed especially as the Civil Rights movement grew during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, Negro History Week became Black History Week and in 1976 the observance grew to the entire month of February.<sup>1</sup>

So why should we, a predominately white congregation that's part of a predominately white religion, take such notice of Black History Month? Perhaps, precisely because of our lack of color, our history and our collective memory, and our concern for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.biography.com/blackhistory/history/black-history-month.jsp>

We have and will always struggle, I suppose, with the role of race in our history, both personal and communal. We need to be aware of our history, how history is communicated and how it affects us.

We need not seek to be colorblind. In fact not seeing color is to deny characteristics that cause people to be oppressed and discriminated against. To see our brothers and sisters of color and say I don't see your blackness or your Mexicanness or your Asianness is to say I refuse to acknowledge your particular experience and that it has any significance for better or (and this is worse) for worse on your life and how you experience things.

While reading and researching and reflecting for this sermon, I came across a great web site of the Texas State Historical Association and went mining for particulars on Civil Rights in Texas and Black Texas History and I started to notice some interesting things. I noticed the site had an entire biography of Governor John Bowden Connelly, Jr. who opposed the national civil rights legislation

of the 1960 including the Voting Rights Act and an entire biography of Governor Allan Shiver who opposed the 1954 supreme court ruling in Brown vs Board of Education desecrating public schools, Yet no entire biographies of any Texas civil rights leader linking off the article on Civil Rights history. Although I was able to go back in and search for famous black Texans by name, such as Barbara Jordan, no Black Texans were given bios in the Civil Rights article, nor were there links to any bios in the Civil Rights article.

I also found statements like this very interesting:

*“By the latter half of the sixties, some segments of the black community flocked to the cause of "black power" and accepted violence as a means of social redress, though the destruction of property and life in Texas in no way compared to that in some other states.”*

I’m still not sure what to make of this statement. The statement does use a limiter, the word “some,” and says that black violence in Texas wasn’t as bad as it was in other places, but it also

implies that the only way to view Black Power is violently and that is incorrect. Black Power is also about seeing oneself, if one is Black, as equal to white people and all other people, of being proud of one's heritage, of never again accepting second class status on the basis of the color of your skin. There is nothing violent in these ideas. I don't see any references to the Ku Klux Klan (and there is an entire article about them on site) mentioning white power and the destruction of Black property, Black families and Black lives. That's probably because all power as it is, is white and power to shape the narrative of history is still in the 21<sup>st</sup> century male and white.

But history, black or white, is shaped by many factors and the black and white history of Texas gets molded by facts such as these that make those who write it, if they are white emphasize one thing and if they are black another:

□ *At the end of the Civil War, by the time of Juneteenth, there were 250,00 slaves in Texas*

- ❑ *1900 The number of blacks in Texas grew to more than 600,000 even though the percentage of the blacks in Texas fell to 20 percent of the population by 1900.*
- ❑ *1901: The New Century Cotton Mills at Dallas was organized by a Negro Masonic Lodge.*
- ❑ *1906 Fewer than 5,000 blacks voted in the state after the imposition of a poll tax in 1902 and the passage of the white primary law in 1903.*
- ❑ *1956 Opposing the Brown decision R. Allan Shivers, Texas Governor, called out Texas Rangers to prevent Black students from entering the public school in Mansfield.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/world/texasblackhistory/Chronology.html>

Black history in Texas, like any history, is also viewed through the lens of age. Professor Yvonne Davis Frear of Sam Houston State College writes about this in her essay “Generation versus Generation: African Americans in Texas Remember the Civil Rights Movement.” Professor Frear became worried when her stepdaughter didn’t want to watch a made for TV movie about the Montgomery Bus Boycotts with her, dismissing it as “boring.” Professor Frear first thought that her stepdaughter’s history teachers had failed to teach her the importance of the movement, failed to teach the movement through primary sources and oral histories and then Dr. Frear realized, “the problem was not the pedagogical negligence of her instructors but an individual assessment based on the least considered component – age.”<sup>3</sup>

Professor Frear goes on to explain that different generations use collective memory differently. First generation participants in the Civil Rights movement rely on their memories to reconstruct

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<sup>3</sup> Frear, Yvonne Davis, “Generation versus Generation: African Americans in Texas Remember the Civil Rights Movement.” In *Lone Star Pasts*, Cantrell and Turner, Eds. Pg 204

events, but second and third generation African Americans only interact with the legacy of the movement and must rely on the memory of the first generation or the selective memory or narrative woven by commemorative festivities and narratives, which are based on the first generation's collective memory.

Professor Frear says that:

*"If challenged about validity of a particular presentation, an individual will comfortably rest on the authoritative nature of his or her interpretation and even reject the documented accounts of professional historians. In the end, the imagined past becomes the standard in which history and historical events are remembered and defined."*<sup>4</sup>

This is why Martin Luther King can become a sanitized saint who benignly talked about a dream of tolerance and equality and not a true radical who called his nation to task on unnecessary wars, obscene poverty and the hypocrisy of power. This is why 60 years after the genocide of European Jews, people who denied it ever

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid pg 204-5

happened can actually be taken seriously by some folks and gain audiences for their books, movies, and lectures. Unbelievably this is why a President can claim a criminal bombing of building in New York was carried out by a nation state instead of an international terrorist network and people believe him.

Professor Frear goes on to report that

*“Other research has that older participants in the modern civil rights movement and the younger beneficiaries agree about the significance of the movement during the 1950s and the 1960s, but the two groups disagree about the continuing significance of the movement and its legacies.”<sup>5</sup>*

So what does the Black History of Texas lead us to today? I don't know. I'm not Black, but I live in a postmodern world. Tony Jones, one of the Emergent Church movement's leading spokespersons explains the postmodern world view using a baseball metaphor in his essay Whence Hermeneutic Authority.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid pg 205

There are three major world views. Classical, modern and post modern. They can be compared to umpires calling strikes. The rule book says a strike is any pitch over the plate between the armpits and the knees, but all you have to do is watch a baseball game to know that's not how they get called.

The pre-modern or Classical world view  
umpire says, "I call 'em as they are!" - like the rule book says

The modern umpire says, "I call 'em as I see 'em!"

The postmodern umpire says, "They ain't nothin' 'till I call 'em!"

The world looks different, history looks different - depending on who you are, when and where you are. That's a post-modern critique. It ain't nothing until you call it. But you have to agree to let others call it too and then compare and contrast your calls.

All I can offer is what I see. Wealth and class and status is still largely tied to the color of a person's skin - in Boston, in Dallas, in Massachusetts and in Texas. Last week, as some of you know I went to Navasota, TX in the Piney Woods, just northwest of Houston for

retreat with all the UU Ministers in our district. We stayed an Episcopal Church retreat and conference center in the woods. Nice place. There were no Black People in our group. There was one Asian person – Pam Wat. The only Black people I saw all week, with the exception of one man in another church group, were the one's serving the food and cleaning the dishes. It seems we haven't come very far at all since Jim Crow was segregation by law and then by custom.

I'd like to compare my view to that of other Texans who are like and not so like me.