

WITNESS for JUSTICE

A weekly commentary from
the United Church of Christ

Issue #797 | July 11, 2016

Let Us Not Forget

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Americans celebrated our nation's 240th anniversary since its founding earlier this month on July 4th. Many people spend the day grilling food, swimming, and relaxing with family and friends. A tradition in several communities is to end the day with a display of fireworks. Some even choreograph them to music. It's normally a wonder to behold and fun to be had by all.

Many music, news, and cable outlets provide programming in honor of this important day. One such cable network, WGN-America, broadcast their original series, named "Underground," which tells the story of a group of slaves from a Georgia plantation and their plans to escape enslavement via the Underground Railroad in 1857.

As an African American, and a descendant of enslaved peoples, it can be difficult to view movies and/or television programming which depict this nation's original sin of racism through the enslavement of Blacks or land theft of Native Americans via the Doctrine of Discovery, but I feel it's as important. To not remember the shame and horror of America's chattel slavery system merely "whitewashes" over the physical, psychological, and spiritual toll forced upon the millions of Africans who were brought here and their descendants.

There are some in the African American community who believe that retelling this truth is as important to and for us as the retelling of stories depicting the Holocaust is to and for Jewish people. In effect, we retell these stories to all children in hope that we always remember and learn to never allow such an unconscionable blight on humankind to be repeated.

Over this past Memorial Day holiday, three cable networks debuted simultaneously an updated adaptation of the classic tale, "Roots: The Saga of an American Family," originally written by Alex Haley. It is a powerful story of a man who is captured in Africa and brought to America and his descendants. There is much to be learned in this story about the strength of a race of people

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who were kidnapped, raped, bought and sold, beaten, stripped of their culture, faith, and identities, and renamed, all for economic empowerment of some slaveholders. There is also an important story about economic greed.

At the signing of the Declaration of Independence, black people were legally viewed as having a mere three-fifths of the value of a white person. This was based upon tax apportionment, since they were property. While that was eventually corrected in 1865, this stain still haunts our consciousness. This is conflated with an erroneous biblical interpretation of Genesis 10:6, known as the descendants of Ham, and continues to give rise to the views of some white supremacists. Thus, it remains important for people of African descent to retell our children the horrific truth of the chattel slavery system that was alive and fully operational in this nation as we demanded our freedom from Britain.

Let us never forget where we have been, so that we never repeat the horrors of our past. Let us strive to continue to live into the ideals at our nation's founding as a beacon of light and hope to all peoples arriving here escaping all forms of tyranny and oppression.

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