

The Great Shift
Psycho-spiritual
Manual for Survival
and Transformation
in the Trump Era

The Great Shift Psycho-spiritual Manual for Survival and Transformation in the Trump Era

By

Melinda Contreras-Byrd

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This work is dedicated to and inspired by my mentoring communities:
The members of the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference, the Members of
the Transatlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race, and the Louisville
Institute who affirmed and supported my call to write.

I thank God for grace,

And for the love and support of my family

Rev. Vernon R. Byrd Jr, Kamaria Milagros Byrd and Alexa Esperanza Byrd

Ubuntu-I am because we are.

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FOREWORD

Dr. Melinda Contreras-Byrd has written a seminal interdisciplinary work that needs to be read by every seminary student, seminary professor, ordained clergy person and practitioner of faith - - whether the Christian faith, the Muslim faith or other faiths. Dr. Contreras-Byrd uses her training and thirty years of experience as a licensed clinical psychologist and her training and experience as an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and co-pastor of a congregation to examine and prescribe a remedy for the malaise in which the world finds itself in the year 2018.

Her findings and her suggestions for a remedy can be beneficial to persons of every faith, every race and every ethnicity on the planet Earth. Her focus, however, is primarily for citizens of the United States of America in general and African Americans in the Diaspora in particular.

In positing that humanity is on the verge of a “great shift” in this psycho-spiritual and sociological world, Dr. Contreras-Byrd has identified the offending culprit creating this malaise as the reality of *evil*. Her treatment of this reality is intense, thoroughgoing, enlightening and important both in the theological world and in the field of psychology.

The author’s examination, exploration and exposing the all-pervasive nature of evil - - both as a psychologist and a Christian minister - - is similar to the ministerial metaphor I have heard used in several sermons. With several variations, the parable or metaphor goes something like this: An Harvard-trained oceanographer, after years of research and intensive study, finally mastered and decoded the communication system of sonar used by dolphins and whales to communicate with each other. Having learned their “language”, the oceanographer was excited about her first opportunity to communicate with fish in ways that they could both “hear” her and respond to her in a fish language she could understand.

Her primary area of research was tracking the mating patterns of she crabs from the Delaware Bay down through the Chesapeake Bay into the Gulf of Mexico and the tropical waters surrounding the U.S. and British Virgin Islands. Submerged for months beneath the sea at depths extending at times up to a quarter of a mile for periods of time as long as six months, she finally located a school of tropical fish off the coasts of Aruba and Curacao.

Turning on her recording device to make the historic conversation a matter of permanent benefit for future scientists, she made contact with the school in their “language,” and with confidence asked her first question of the fish.

She asked, “How does this water in the Tropic of Cancer differ from the water in the Chesapeake Bay?” The fish quizzing looked at each other and finally responded to her by asking, “What is water?”

Water was such a natural part of the fish experience and existence that they had no idea that they were swimming in water, that they lived in water, that their life was determined by water; and as a result, they did not understand the question and could not respond to it.

Contreras-Byrd describes the reality and pervasiveness of evil in the same manner. Humans are so used to evil that they do not recognize it, cannot isolate it from their everyday experience and as a result do not know how to respond to it.

Rereading Contreras-Byrd’s work, and her scientific and spiritual examination of evil puts me in the mind of the underlying truth found in the story in the fifth chapter of Mark where Jesus confronts the “demon-possessed” man. One of the most important truths embedded in that story in Mark 5 is what happens in verse 8 and verse 9.

In verse 8, Jesus commands the “demon” (evil) to come out of the man and the demon does not budge. In fact the demon asked Jesus what he has to do with him? Why is he bothering him?

What most readers of Mark 5 miss is that this same Jesus who has all power in His hands, this same Jesus who a few verses earlier in Mark 4 commanded the winds and the waves to be still and they obeyed His command, is powerless when it comes to a confrontation with evil. Jesus has power over nature, but Jesus has no power over the demon—no power over evil. He commands the demon to come out of the man and the demon does not come out. That subtle truth is stated in verse 8.

In verse 9, Jesus asks, “What is your name?” The demon gives Jesus his name and then Jesus has power over the demon. Several truths from several different disciplines are embedded in verse 9.

First of all, the Afro-Asiatic teaching is that whomever has the power to name has power over that person or that spirit who is named! In West African religions, the naming ceremony that takes place eight days after birth is another example of this truth because the patriarch has the power to name the child and does so publicly; and whatever he names him or her becomes that individual’s name.

The same truth is found in biblical teachings when the male child is named and circumcised eight days after birth. The father pronounces the

name. That becomes the child's name. Examples of that naming process are found in Zachariah and Elizabeth's son, John, and in Jesus' naming ceremony by Joseph and Mary in the temple of Jerusalem eight days after he was born.

Today, in Christian churches, the baby baptism and/or the baby dedication carries the same implication as the child is named publicly in a service of worship before the gathered congregation of believers.

When parents name the child, this becomes the child's name. The parents who name the child have power over that child. A child never disrespects his or her parents because the parents became partners with God in giving the child life. God is the ultimate giver of life but the parents are used by God to bring new life into the world.

The same "naming" truth is found in several different addiction recovery programs. The 12 Step program for abusers of alcohol and narcotics has as one of its truths (its 12 steps) that one cannot "*tame* the demon" if one cannot "*name* the demon." That is why one hears in an addiction recovery meeting the individual standing up to say their name and to name their demon in the sentence which follows their birth name by saying, "I am an alcoholic," or "I am a (drug of choice) addict."

The belief is that you cannot *tame* the demon of addiction if you cannot *name* the demon of addiction. That same truth is found in verse 9 of Mark 5. When Jesus asks the demon, "What is your name," Jesus is asking that question to get power over the evil that has possessed the man. Once Jesus gets the name He is able to "tame" the demon.

Dr. Contreras-Byrd demonstrates quite masterfully in this book that same principle. She sagaciously suggests that until Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and practitioners of African Traditional Religions can name the demon of evil, they cannot tame that demon. Once they can name evil, however, they are able to tame evil.

Contreras-Byrd uses the metaphor of "staring evil down," looking evil in the eye and forcing evil to back down. She also uses the metaphor of evil making a move which forces believers to have to make a countermove in order to overcome evil, trump evil, or get the victory over evil.

That section of her work is all important because it lifts up both the cause of the malaise in America and the cure. It points out the all pervasiveness of evil like the fish surrounded by water, living in water and not knowing what water is; and it offers the possibility of hope and victory for the person of faith who has his or her eyes opened to the fact that they are engaged in spiritual warfare and they are surrounded by evil which makes itself manifest in individuals, in systems, in structures and in any

and everything that is opposed to or stands in contradiction to the goodness and grace of God.

Contreras-Byrd argues that evil created the *Ma'afa* of chattel slavery, the horror of the holocaust, the horror of apartheid, the horror of Jim Crow, lynching, the convict lease system and the system of mass incarceration. In addition, she demonstrates how evil causes the violence in our world that has young people picking up guns to shoot other people just to see what it “feels like” to kill somebody. There are individual acts of evil and there are systemic actualities of evil.

Naming the demon, however, “staring down evil” and confronting the evil - - whether personalized or systematized - - give the Christian believer the tools with which to “overcome evil with good.”

Dr. Contreras-Byrd carries the reader on a powerful journey through the investigation of the causes of the malaise in America and the world, and she does not leave the reader hanging and wondering what to do. She offers some very helpful and powerful suggestions as to how the malaise can be cured. Her interdisciplinary approach makes the journey exciting and I encourage you to read this volume and enjoy the journey.

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SECTION I.
THE SHIFTING

CHAPTER ONE

EVIDENCE OF THE SHIFTING

The clarion call is this. Movement is going to occur, for we are in a time of great upheaval, a time of great shift. It is both a warning and a pronouncement of the coming of an opportunity for unprecedented and redemptive change within the United States of America. We will either undergo a memorable second order change or we will suffer unprecedented losses on many levels, both nationally and internationally.

When I wrote and delivered these words in the summer of 2015, I had no idea, nor could I have imagined the actual and unbelievable level of shift that would occur within the United States of America. (US)

Through the years, the United States has undergone times of turbulence and critical self-evaluation that have resulted in major foundational shifts in our paradigms, our language, our laws, and the issues that have mobilized the social activists of each respective era. What have been the times of “great shift” that have characterized important historical epochs of our history? They have included world wars, stock market crashes, the invention of nuclear weapons, and the corresponding devastation of nuclear armament. They have included a diversity of nodal eras and events such as The Great Awakening, the posting of Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, and the Protestant Reformation. Times of great shift also have included US Civil Rights legislation, the Vietnam War, the rise of a feminist/womanist critique, LGBTQ education and struggles for equity, 9/11 and the nation’s response to suddenly realized issues of national safety, and finally an unfolding multicultural diversity movement to address the divisive issue of justice and race for those living in the United States. What I have listed does not begin to scratch the surface of the times of upheaval and change that have occurred in Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and throughout the world.

For many years, we in the US have been comfortable with ongoing internal struggles of race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. These issues have been our own personal matters to resolve as those in power saw fit—irrespective of the anguished cries for immediate relief from those forced to suffer unrelenting, generational injustice. However, a great

shift has occurred, and it is characterized by a growing and diversifying feeling of anger, outrage, and unrest. While these feelings are familiar to communities of color, they have transcended these communities, forcing the silent majority into a situation that demands they voice their frustration and outrage. The unfurling belief of the newly empowered and continually disaffected communities is that they cannot wait for others to experience or comprehend their pain before they begin addressing these needs. In this era of shift, the suppressed voice of Black outrage has been joined by voices heretofore believed to be part of the majority.

When it comes to Black pain, the US government has been slow to act, and any action taken can be characterized by cultural ignorance. But the country is shifting. The disgrace of US problem-solving policy as it relates to all but the wealthy, White, male, and straight, can no longer be a family affair. The plight broadcast by great and growing numbers of US “Dreamers,” Black Lives Matter advocates, #METOO survivors, and most recently a student-led March for Our Lives movement has elevated our national failures from the privacy of US homes onto the world stage. In response, international eyes have looked on with shock and outrage, sparking supportive protests in countries throughout the world.

Where is the Black community during these times of upheaval? Once again, we are protesting, marching, writing and voicing the particulars from our side of US life. In 2013, in response to a not guilty verdict in the Trayvon Martin murder case, three Black women created what they called a “Black-centered political will and movement building project.” These women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, named the movement, “Black Lives Matter” (BLM). As the numbers of unarmed Black people killed by police grew in rapid succession, their supporters began to grow as well. Age-old US racial issues and their horrendous ramifications were now becoming more and more common and visible to a slowly awakening and outraged body of not just Black people.¹ BLM now boasts forty chapters, representing a global network of workers and supporters. Things are shifting.

The killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black man, in Ferguson, Missouri did not go unchallenged. Large groups of Black and White people came from all over the US and took to the streets in solidarity demanding an end to the ongoing killing of unarmed and innocent Black people. Following both the killing and the failure to indict officer Darren

¹ Luke Visconti, “Starbucks’ Optional Diversity Training Empowers People Like Roseanne,” DiversityInc: Ask the White Guy, May 29, 2018, accessed May 30, 2018, <https://www.diversityinc.com/news/starbucks-optional-diversity-training-empowers-people-like-roseanne>.

Wilson, chaos and rioting told the story of the voiceless. Seminary students created forms of protest on their campuses and in their communities. Black organizations such as The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference staged “die-ins” where people gathered in groups to lie down in public places as a form of visual aid to passersby. High profile Black people staged individual acts of solidarity in protest. In an act of solidarity, 49ers player Colin Kaepernick “took a knee” during the national anthem. Despite quick and harsh repercussions, other athletes and citizens staged similar group knee-in protests. Beginning with Derrick Rose, basketball players took the risk to voice their protests against the killing of unarmed Eric Garner, donning t-shirts that read, “I can’t breathe.” Aided by New York social justice organization, Gathering for Justice, his individual protest began to spread. T-shirts became available and high profile Black ballplayers like LeBron James, Deron Williams, and Kobe Bryant followed suit. Black churches declared a Sunday of protest with pastors and parishioners also donning “I can’t breathe” t-shirts. They also read solidarity liturgies distributed by Black social justice groups or ones they created. Here is the litany I wrote for my church in Trenton, NJ.

A Litany for a Grieving Community

Leader: *God of love and God of mercy we come into your house today as a community united by grief and loss. All over America we are grieving our growing loss.*

Congregation: *God who has been our help in ages past, we come today seeking to see you and to hear you and to feel the movement of your Spirit in our midst. But we confess that we are weary.*

We confess that we are angry. We confess that we are saddened by the repetitive realities of Black life in America.

Leader: *We come to you today asking that you will remove the heavy burden that takes our attention away from you. We come to you today asking that you might quiet the loud and rising voices that make it difficult to hear your still small voice.*

Congregation: *A sound is heard throughout the nation and in every Black community. It is like the sound heard in Rahma, the sound of Rachel mourning and weeping for her children because they are no more.²*

Leader: *It is the sound of Black mothers and Black fathers weeping, weeping for their children because with constancy and consistency and in growing number all across America, they are no more.*

² See Jeremiah 31:15 where Rachel weeps for her children.

Congregation: *God of justice, we come to your house asking that you might move to still the voices, because the parents are weeping for their children.*

Leader: *The parents are weeping and so the community also weeps, for the lost life of 34-year-old **RUMAIN BRISBON** of Phoenix AZ, an unarmed Black father who was killed by police when they mistook his medication bottle for a gun. (DEC. 2, 2014)*

*For 12-year-old **TAMIR RICE** of Cleveland Ohio, a black child shot and killed by police when they mistook his BB gun for a real weapon. (Nov 22, 2014)*

*For 28-year-old **AKAI GURLEY** of Brooklyn, NY, an unarmed Black man shot by police in his stairwell in an incident in which police state they do not know what happened. (NOV. 20, 2014)*

*For 25-year-old **KAJIEME POWELL** of St Louis, MO, shot and killed within 15 seconds of the polices' arrival from a call stating that he had stolen soda and donuts. (AUGUST 19, 2014)*

Congregation: *Parents are weeping and so we of the community weep for the lost lives of: 25-year-old **EZELL FORD** of Los Angeles, CA, unarmed and lying down when shot and killed by police. (AUGUST 12, 2014)*

*For 36-year-old **DANTE PARKER** of San Bernardino County, CA, unarmed and riding*

his bicycle when tasered to death by police looking for a black male suspect on a bike. (AUGUST 12, 2014)

*For 22-year-old **JOHN CRAWFORD III** of Beavercreek, Ohio, unarmed and shot by police as he examined a gun that was for sale at Wal-Mart. (AUGUST 5, 2014)*

*For 38-year-old **TYREE WOODSON** of Baltimore MD who died of what was reported to be self-inflicted gunshot wounds while in police custody at the station. (AUGUST 2, 2014)*

*For 22-year-old **VICTOR WHITE III** of Iberia Parish, LA, who died from what police reported as self-inflicted gunshot wounds sustained while he was handcuffed in the back of their squad car. (MARCH 22, 2014)*

Leader:

*For 25-year-old **MCKENZIE COCHRAN** of Southfield, Michigan who died of "position compression asphyxia" during a struggle with mall security as he shouted, "I can't breathe." (JANUARY 28, 2014)*

*Of 43-year-old **ERIC GARNER** of New York, NY who died of neck compression from the chokehold along with "the compression of his chest and prone positioning during physical restraint by police. He died pleading, "I can't breathe."*

Of 18-year-old MICHAEL BROWN of FERGUSON, MO. (AUGUST 9, 2014) and others this year who are too numerous to cite!

All: We mourn the loss of the Black men of our community who have been cut down in fear and anger, in hatred and in ignorance and in disrespect.

*Like Rachel *– we too refuse to be comforted. Instead we choose to pray and fight.*

Like the righteous warriors of the Old Testament – we choose to pray and struggle.

Like Richard Allen – we choose to pray and stand against all that would stand for the lie, that Black lives do not matter.

Leader: God of Justice rise up in all-power and righteous indignation, stop the horror, convict the guilty, order the steps of the righteous, ease the pain of the grieving and silence the voices of our mothers' dead children crying out for justice.

All: And let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.³

In Jesus name, Amen

A British daily newspaper, *The Guardian*, created a database of people killed by police in the United States. The statistics showed that police killed 266 Black people in 2016, fifteen of which were slain since Colin Kaepernick staged his personal protest against the killings.⁴ Not only have high profile athletes, clergy, and social activist organizations raised their voices and used their ingenuity to protest, but Black recording artists have responded as well. Kalli Holloway of *Alternet* reported that artists such as T.I., Public Enemy, G-Unit, The Game, and J. Cole recorded songs of protest in response to the Ferguson killing.⁵ Black recording artists have long used their platform to voice outrage against police brutality in the Black community. The most well-known and iconic song expressing animus toward police is NWA's "F**K tha Police."

This great shift is not solely characterized by Black unrest, but it is also characterized by an expanding population of the disenfranchised, oppressed, and silenced. If US polls are correct, more than half of the citizens of the

³ Amos 5:24.

⁴ "The Counted: People Killed by Police in the US," *The Guardian*, accessed June 4, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database>.

⁵ Kalli Holloway, "F*ck Tha Police: 20 Songs Against Police Brutality," *Alternet*, December 8, 2014, accessed May 30, 2018, <https://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/fck-tha-police-20-songs-against-police-brutality>.

US are dissatisfied with the present state of affairs in our country on many levels. Headed by organizers, Tamika Mallory, Carmen Perez, and Linda Sarsour, the Women's March on Washington made an inescapable, inexorable statement about the dissatisfaction of a large and diverse body of US and world citizens. The placards and unflattering Trump effigies carried by the ubiquitous groups' pink-hat-wearing women made it very clear that there were serious issues regarding the exhibited disrespect for women and the lack of priority for our concerns. According to *USA Today*, a record two million people gathered in Washington to resist what they feared would be coming after the inauguration of Donald Trump: "a roll back of reproductive, civil, and human rights."⁶ On that day, there were over 600 marches in all fifty states as well as in thirty-two countries; the largest was the Women's March in the US capitol. The march united women and men of all ages and from all walks of life around a diverse platform. The issues included reproductive rights, respect for women, immigration reform, prejudice against Muslims, Black Lives Matter, and LGBTQ rights to name a few. The electricity, size, and passion of these marches were reminiscent of that of the Civil Rights and the Vietnam War eras. Having participated in the Million Woman March in Philadelphia in October 25, 1997, the size of this march felt both formidable and triumphant. Its size and force felt like the rumblings of a great shift.

At the time of this writing, students across the nation have united in organized and determined action against the NRA and our nation's failure to protect children from gun violence in schools, as well as its laws concerning the availability of weapons. Ray Sanchez reported that over 800 sister marches, in addition to simultaneous student marches across the globe, supported the major march held in Washington, DC.⁷ For the first time in my lifetime, a critical mass of diverse articulate, high school-aged students took center stage. Rather than participants in an adult-led revolt, these enraged, vocal, and relevant young people raised issues about the unique and ongoing threats that US students face in their schools as a result of gun violence. In addition to declaring statewide school walkouts, students have been organizing, studying, networking, and forming power

⁶ Heidi M. Przybyla & Fredreka Schoulen, "At 2.6 million Strong, Women's Marches Crush Expectations," *USA Today*, January 27, 2017, updated January 22, 2017, accessed May 29, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/01/21/womens-march-aims-start-movement-trump-inauguration/96864158/>.

⁷ Ray Sanchez, "Student Marchers Call Washington's Inaction on Gun Violence Unacceptable," CNN, March 24, 2018, accessed June 4, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/24/us/march-for-our-lives/index.html>.

coalitions to eradicate gun violence through awareness and legislation. Youths such as David Hogg, Emma Gonzalez, eleven-year-old Naomi Wadler, and nine-year-old Yolanda Renee King—granddaughter of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—made it clear that they would not be silenced or prevented from raising their concerns.

Do not be mistaken. This is a time of Great Shift on many levels. I am compelled to raise the following questions:

- 1) Does the re-emergence of unrelenting violence against the Black community in the US represent a unique era in US socio-political thinking and behavior?
- 2) If we look at the present happenings in US society through the eyes of one who is Black, will it yield relevantly different wisdom and strategies?
- 3) How can we approach these issues in a way that results in a second order change that will address both the process and content of US dialogue, especially as it relates to its Black and White citizens?
- 4) Because Black America is in the midst of an increasing crisis that once again has become a matter of life and death, how can all of the factions within the Black community respond decisively?

My repeated argument is that the United States is in a new area, a Great Shift. However, I also believe that despite the daily unfolding of a seemingly ongoing national pledge to bigotry and racism, this era offers the redemptive possibility for changes in the psychological, theological, and socio-political life of not only Black, but all citizens of the United States of America. I further believe that redemption will lie in a commitment of the silenced to find and use voice, and to take major risks through transparency, dialogue and multi-modal transformation. This commitment must include US citizens in general and Black citizens in particular. Therefore, there is a need to understand the historical context of race relations in the United States. Our present status tells us that it is time to examine, re-appropriate, and re-vision the theological underpinnings that have for so long served as the moral compass for life in every facet of US life.

Historically, Black writers and every form of artist have tried with limited success to paint the picture of the true America as seen from the underside. So much of the harsh realities of being a minority person of color in the United States and elsewhere in the world have become accepted as merely one among other ways of being.

Race. Class. Gender. Culture. Color

Sometimes the boundaries fade into each other – but the color boundary rarely seems to lose any of the strength of its protective walls. The election and inauguration of President Donald Trump has served to both polarize and unify factions within the United States. Another characterizing feature of the proposed Great Shift is that perhaps for the very first time in US history, the truth about our having realized a dream of equality for all citizens and residents of this country is being “weighed in the balances.” Sadly we are polarized because our real-life choices have caused us to face our reflection in truth’s mirror. In truth’s mirror stands a picture of who we really are. We are a nation who, with respect to issues of race, has “been weighed in the balances, and found desperately wanting.”⁸

⁸ In chapter five of the Old Testament book of Daniel, God used Daniel to give the king a message. The message was that his kingdom has been weighed in the balances and found wanting.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

For Black Christians within the US, this has been an increasingly infuriating and faith challenging time period. For a few years now, I have been struggling with a deep sense of disquiet as I attempt to find the spiritual meaning of the recent racial events unfolding across the United States. The foundation for my musings was laid as a result of my participation in a series of dialogues that took place at the annual conferences of The Transatlantic Roundtable on Religion & Race. This conference draws religious scholars, clergy, and social activists from across the African Diaspora. Despite a diversity of national, linguistic, religious and ethnic differences, there are realities that unite the participants. Questions are asked from many perspectives, and shared experience deepens the meaning of so much about life. The artful storytellers enrich dialogue and challenge unproductive and twisted theologies. Perhaps it was the influence of theologians, Dr. James Cone, or Dr. Gustavo Gutierrez or even ideas of Praxis, but I have come to understand true faith as a thing of voice. What is believed must be spoken in order to give rise to truth.

I have come to believe that there is a positive correlation between dark skin, African heritage, and the probability of experiencing racism, injustice, hatred and oppression. I believe that on every continent, dark color appears to predict the probability of being singled out as less than and not entitled to. And while focusing on the complexity of these realities, US media provided the catalyst that would constitute the backdrop for this writing. The list of unarmed Black US citizens who were brutalized by police continued to lengthen week by week. Seemingly without notice, Black life in the US had taken a turn for the horror-filled worst. And the horror seemed to take on its own life, writhing menacingly throughout communities of color. Choking. Shooting. Beating. Youth, adults, and even children are dying. Men, women, boys and girls. Murdered. Lifeless. Dead. They are left on display like so much trash in the middle of the streets of the United States of America! A mass shooting occurred in an African Methodist Episcopal church. Black churches are

once again burning, lighting US skies with the ongoing, generational, and wide-spread fires that are continuously reported as “isolated incidents.” Finally I spoke aloud to myself saying, “This is no coincidence. All of this has to have some spiritual meaning.”

The list including harmless Black and dead continued to grow, and the terrorists continued to wage war on an unarmed nation living within its midst. I did not want to know the names or learn about the circumstances. I was born and raised in the urban city of Newark, New Jersey and survived the 1967 riots. I did not want to hear the story that seemed to perpetually end in not guilty verdicts. I had heard this story before. I knew the plot. I knew the end. I knew the names: Eleanor Bumpers, Abner Louima, Amadu Diallo, and Rodney King. In my closet still hung a black t-shirt from times passed that reads, “No Justice. No Peace.” So I began an earnest exploration into areas that might uncover viable interventions to address a situation that was growing more and more out of control.

I investigated psycho-spiritual, socio-political, historical, and theological foundations. The church members and youths I encountered looked at me and other clergy with that dreadful expectation, wearing the expression that asked, “Is there a word from the Lord?” Yes! This was what I needed, a word from the Lord to dispel my disquiet and smoldering rage. I wrote this book because finally, there came a word from the Lord with directions to share it. The “word” was simply this: This is a Time of Great Shift, a mighty revision is going on and we need to *get prepared to transform and be transformed*. These were simple words that held profound possibilities. The truth of this “word” began to unfurl across the nation and the world.

White Christians (and some non-White ones) embraced the leadership of a man who was clearly imperfect. Even though we are all imperfect living by the grace of God, not all of us are called or competent to be placed in leadership as a role model for those who are encouraged to imitate our leadership.

In the shifting, I began to see something wickedly and insidiously divisive and hypocritical. I began to see something that attacked a hope of being “one in Christ” or “ambassadors of Christ”. US culture was uncovering a deep-seated desire for something so strong that it caused White Christians to overlook the vulgar, immoral behavior and completely inappropriate language of a would-be leader. The shift had uncovered the presence of a need in the fabric of US life that was so strong that it caused my White brothers and sisters in Christ to overlook racial stereotyping, immorality, and characteristically mean-spirited, vengeful behavior. It caused them to accept “alternative facts” and the casting away of love. It made them blind to ominous threats to people of color, especially those in

urban areas. The April edition of *The Atlantic* magazine offered a thorough and credible explanation for this situation within a historical context. Speaking of this incongruence Michael Gerson wrote:

Trump supporters tend to dismiss moral scruples about his behavior...but the problem is the distinctly non-Christian substance of his *values*...his unapologetic materialism—his equation of financial and social success with human achievement and worth—is a negation of Christian teaching. His tribalism and hatred for “the other” stand in direct opposition to Jesus’ (sic) radical ethic of neighbor love...and yet a credible case can be made that evangelical votes were a decisive factor in Trump’s improbable victory...Evangelical...too many...identified the word with conservative political ideology...Indeed a number of serious evangelicals are distancing themselves from the word for similar reasons...⁹

Despite the fact that our new President embraces and encourages behavior and thinking that is diametrically opposed to Christian teachings, he is still embraced and supported by a significant number of White Christians. I watched horrified and yet intrigued as a clear exhibit of cognitive dissonance producing behavior unfolded before me. I studied footage from a Trump rally at which a young Black woman was surrounded by adult White men who watched and cheered on as an elderly White man violently pushed her around in the crowd. Along with me, scores of betrayed Black Christians watched White evangelicals support a would-be president who encouraged this behavior. To a cheering crowd, he stated his penchant for doing the same. He obviously did not believe in the biblical tenet, “turn the other cheek.” He expressed no “live by the sword, perish by the sword” mentality. I wondered what about him was so beguiling that Christians who served a Messiah of sacrificial love were willing to overlook the disparity between *this* candidate’s words and actions and those of *Jesus*? How could devout followers of Jesus support a violent and warmongering man who used public vulgarities that glorified sexual assault? This was more than locker room talk. The gospel elevates the practice of love—especially to those unlike ourselves—as the greatest demonstration of our faith. This was absent from the candidate’s platform. The words of Leviticus were transformed into a new Christian theology that allowed us to build a wall to keep out people who first owned the very land in which they were being declared aliens.

Leviticus 19:33-34 declares:

⁹ Michael Gerson, “The Last Temptation,” *The Atlantic*, April 2018, 45.

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.

What happens to hope, when your supposed allies turn their backs on you to embrace everything that you have taken the risk to join them in combating? What happens to faith, when the integrity you struggled to live out in front of your children is publicly demonstrated to have been a façade? How do we who are called followers of Christ preach that love is the first priority when we agree to the passing of laws that separate families and deny a chance for a good life to those who “sojourn” among us, cleaning our homes, mowing our lawns, picking our crops, and often working two and three jobs so that they can send money home to their families? Herein lies another characteristic of this Great Shift. It not only holds ramifications for national ethos, but it also holds critical possibilities for the Church universal.

I believe that we are in the midst of a unique era in the movement of US History, one in which the church is given a second chance to show ourselves strong. I believe that the Spirit has a word for the Church of this new unfolding era and the word is this: There is a Great Shift, a mighty revision going on and we need to get prepared to transform and be transformed. I believe that this nation has been forced into a time of Great Shift, and all people who call on the name of the Lord are charged with leading in the difficult work of applied truth and authentic love. Join me on a journey to discover the applied truth of these words.

SECTION II.

EVIL

CHAPTER THREE

EVIL AS AN INTEGRAL FACTOR IN THE SHIFTING

This time of shift has driven many people to engage in deep conversations, debates, and self-analysis. As we review the number and nature of the crises this era of Great Shift affords us, there is a word that many are using. The word is startling, frightening. The word is, “evil.” We hear stories that strongly suggest that Black people are being deliberately killed because they are Black. We see a man in a van deliberately mow down innocent bystanders at a rally. Daily stories assail us of collusion, political scandal, and blatant, organized dishonesty. Next, we hear stories of parents who take the lives of their children. Simultaneously, we hear of isolated incidents of parents who for years starve and psychologically torture their children. Meanwhile we are introduced to men who arm themselves with an arsenal of weapons and head for concerts, nightclubs, schools, and other public places with the planned idea of random murder. As of May 31, 2018 we have heard the story of school shootings in Noblesville, Indiana; Santa Fe, Texas; Palmdale, California; Ocala, Florida; Gloversville, New York; Lexington Park, Maryland; Jackson, Mississippi; Mt. Pleasant, Michigan; Norfolk, Virginia; Parkland, Florida; Benton, Kentucky; and Italy, Texas. These upsetting stories are more than clashes between political, social, or religious groups. The incidents are more than just differences of opinion, creeds, or orientations. They cannot be easily chalked up to disagreement of facts, personality nuances, or errors of interpretation. To a growing number of people (at least in Black churches), they can best be described as the unleashing of evil.

Discussing the feasibility of continued use of the concept of evil to psychologists, psychologist Ervin Straub wrote:

The word *evil* is emotionally expressive for people...I originally used the term evil to denote extreme human destructiveness as in cases of genocide and mass killing. But evil can be defined by a number of elements... extreme harm...not commensurate with any instigation or provocation... the persistence or repetition of such acts...as well as action, omission may

be evil...It may be appropriate to regard it evil when destructive actions are intentional.¹⁰

My initial encounter with South Africa came many years ago by way of a Black Studies course that introduced my class to a profanity pronounced, "apartheid." It seemed impossible that anything could upset me more than the realities of living under such an evil rule. That groups of seemingly sane and intelligent adults would actually devote the time and energy required to meticulously create and enforce a way of life/death so profoundly depraved, was completely unconscionable. How could beings fashioned after a loving Creator conceive of not only apartheid, but human gas chambers, ethnic cleansing, human slavery, and senseless acts of torture and death? The answer had to lie in the fact that there is also an active force, evil.

I began researching evil in its many forms, and from this point of exploration came this word that I was wrestling to share. I believe that if people of the African Diaspora are to discover ways to continue to exist and thrive, we must develop an applicable understanding of the role that the presence of evil has played in our history as well as in our present international realities. I have said that this is a time of Great Shift. I have given examples of clashing factions in this new era. I have argued that these frictions affect an unusually diverse group of people; and I have argued, that the nature and strength of these problems are so unique as to be characterized as A Great Shift. I want to make clear that the struggle these states of affairs represent goes beyond the mundane and physical. In fact, I want to propose that this Great Shift is one that also has roots in and implications for the metaphysical world of spirituality. While the concept of evil has roots in sociological and psychological thought, it is often defined within a theological context as well. Within this context evil is seen as a metaphysical formula for all that is the opposite of what is good and of God.

People of color embrace a theological hermeneutic that differs from that of Western Protestants. Moreover, this hermeneutic allows for strong beliefs in the reality of the metaphysical and spiritual. In fact, if a researcher assessed a population of Black and brown people, I believe the majority would hold beliefs that qualify them to be characterized as mystics. While we, like White Christians, also hold a doctrine of the Holy

¹⁰ Ervin Staub, *The Psychology of Good and Evil: Why Children, Adults, and Groups Help and Harm Others*. (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 48-49.