

JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

TRUTH IN LOVE

Glaude and His 'Masterpiece' in Spotlight Friday

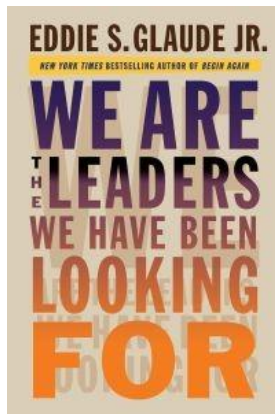
By Parris J. Baker
November 2024

Global Summit XVI: “Professor/Instructor/Speaker: Eddie Glaude, Jr., Ph.D., will discuss his book ***We Are the Leaders We Have Been Looking For*** on Friday, Nov. 15, at 7:30 p.m. at Gannon University’s Yehl Room at Waldron Campus Center, 124 W. Seventh St. Tickets at [Global Summit XVI - Jefferson Educational Society](#)

Many people know of Eddie Glaude, Jr. from his frequent appearances on MSNBC and other national media outlets. But his thoughtful work as an author and scholar will be in the spotlight Friday evening as the final event of the Jefferson Educational Society’s Global Summit XVI speaker series.

Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor and founding chairman of the Department of African American Studies at Princeton University, was born in Moss Point, Mississippi, a small town on the Gulf Coast, on Sept. 4, 1968.

He married Winnifred Brown-Glaude,^[1] and together, they have one son, Langston Glaude (named after Langston Hughes and Ralph Ellison). Glaude has earned a bachelor’s degree from Morehouse College, a master’s degree in African American Studies from Temple University, and a Ph.D. in Religion from Princeton University. He is also the former president of the American Academy of Religion, the largest professional organization of scholars of religion worldwide.



This New York Times bestselling author's most recent book, "We Are the Leaders We Have Been Looking For," was created from a series of W.E.B. Du Bois lectures he delivered at Harvard University in September 2011. In his book, Glaude illuminates how ordinary Black Americans can perform "prophetic acts ... striking the blow for freedom in the face of a world that insists we all become like sacks and stomachs in need of heroes to liberate us." Glaude continually challenges the reader's moral imagination to dream, like Martin Luther King, Jr., of a more just and loving world.

Glaude opens his book with "A Story," a tale taken from Zora Neale Hurston's collection of African American folktales^[2] during her travels through the Gulf Coast in the 1920s. He uses the allegory of flight captured in Hurston's work to illuminate the concepts of escape and ascent — the ability and agency of the human spirit to rise above the turbulence of living "melanin-rich" in the United States. Black people, stifled by living in systems of racism, oppression, and subjugation for decades, tended to imagine a freedom found only in death. Their Christian belief in life after death and ascension to heaven so occupied their imagination that Black people almost stopped living in the present.^[3]

These imaginations of heaven offer a certain spiritual freedom to escape the cruelty and hopelessness of living every day as a physically and socially imprisoned human being with little or no human agency and autonomy. Similar to an eagle, when current weather conditions change, they soar above the storm by flying directly and intentionally into the thermals, Glaude prophetically proclaims that through "the ugliness" of our histories, past and present, we all possess an imagination that gives us wings to escape and ascend above the storms and vicissitudes of life. We do not have to die to be free if we dare to become a "flying fool." (2)

A recent visitor to Erie, Rev. Jesse Jackson,^[4] making the same point, once said:

I'm tired of sailing my little boat, far inside the harbor bar. I want to go out where the big ships float, out on the deep where the great ones are. And should my frail craft prove too slight for waves that sweep those billows o'er, I'd rather go down in the stirring fight than drowse to death at the sheltered shore.

"Looking Back" begins with painful recitations of American history and Black history (as if they were two separate and distinguishable histories) under the Barack Obama and Donald Trump presidencies and a recognition that our nation is moving ever closer to social, spiritual, and physical annihilation. Glaude then identifies the recent mayhem that struck (and continually strikes) America: the

coronavirus pandemic, the damnation or recompense of classism, the pervasive and proliferation of police brutality, the election of an immoral president, the resurgence of white supremacy and racism, and the recapitulated grief and personal loss experienced by many Americans, including Glaude himself.

Glaude, like his friend and mentor James Baldwin, does not hide or defend his deep-seated pains, nor does he shield himself from the vulnerability of what makes writing and storytelling good: truth-telling, even when telling the truth, hurts. His personal sufferings and grief journey, like the shameful behaviors recorded in American histories, are shamelessly communicated in this chapter in which Glaude's wounds are on full display.

Undergirded by the influential and prophetic voices of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, John Dewey, and Ella Baker, Glaude, also an ordained minister, does what all good Black preachers do! He pivots his delivery to directly confront the reader to consider the self as more than a repository of histories and the Valley Gate and Dung Gate.^[5] Glaude challenges each reader to imagine how things could be; to draw out the leader within each of us to become the dispenser of transformative truths through a process he calls "Black democratic perfectionism."^[6]

Apostle Paul authored an epistle to the churches in Ephesus, recorded in the Book of Ephesians that espouses a similar concept:

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ***For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*** Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.^[7]

Experiencing a sensation that Glaude had "double-dog dared me," I considered the possibility that I could be the leader that I have been looking for. In a momentary musing of possibilities, for whatever reason, I began to think about the complexity of automobiles and a Socratic question I often ask my students:

An automobile is made of many different composites, a series of interconnected and interdependent systems, each composite functioning together to maintain the whole. Some of the systems located within an automobile are the engine and engine cooling system, emissions system, braking system, exhaust system, fuel system, and the transmission system. When asked, "What is the most important system or part within an automobile?" My students confidently answer (like many others), "The engine, the steering system, or the braking system."

The reader is reminded and encouraged by the author, now transformed into our literary tour guide, to explore and even wrestle with several important pragmatic reflections that will help one discover the leader within oneself. Glaude writes about the Emerson notion that we all are born into a world, not of our own making, that contributes significantly to how we respond to our surrounding environments.

It was at this point in my reading that I thought of Bernard Lonergan,^[8] a Canadian Jesuit theologian and philosopher, who suggests that we move from the traditional classic paradigm of people living in history to a historical consciousness, that is, that people are responsible for making the history we live in. Moreover, Lonergan asserts that discretely, each person is responsible for his, her, or their own life, and as a human community, we create the world ecology where we live and develop.

Glaude reveals the conflicts and the confluence of Emerson, Ellison, and Baldwin, without the hubris regarding the extreme costs paid by some to protect the democratic experiment that allows each of us to find our best self. Sometimes, that cost is the sacrifice of one's life. According to Glaude, sacrificing one's life should be for a noble cause, such as freedom. Therefore, an individual's life should not be rapaciously wasted on immoral, licentious, or avarice deeds. Referring to the works of Ellison, Glaude reminds us of the somber reality that death is uncompromising and therefore, the deaths of the sacrificed and debt we owe them must be reflected in how we live our everyday lives.

The chapter concludes with a look back at the struggles of Black Americans in the visage of a nation hell-bound to maintain the discordance of Black democratic perfectionism and de jure and de facto white supremacy. The maxim, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes, (credited to Mark Twain)" or "the more things change, the more they stay the same (credited to Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr)" seems applicable here.

Beginning with the corruption of the Richard Nixon administration, through the repressive years of Ronald Reagan and the bombastic presidency of George W. Bush; from the hopeful but often disappointmententing Barack Obama years,^[9] to the treachery of Donald Trump, Black Americans have witnessed the execution of white power, economic, political, and legislative power, for more than six decades. Over that 60-year period, it appeared as if America had turned its back on the promise of Black freedom, or as King so eloquently stated:

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men — yes, Black men as well as white men — would be

guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds.

If James Baldwin (or “Jimmy”^[10]), who struggled to cope with the murders of his close personal friends, Medger Evers (1963), Malcolm X (1965), Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968), and his own unsuccessful suicide attempt in 1969, were alive, he would encourage African Americans with these words, “Hope is invented every day.” Jesse Jackson inspired Americans to “keep hope alive!” In Baldwin-like fashion, Glaude closes the chapter with this affirmation, “when we fly and we acknowledge the wind beneath our wings, we become the hope this dark world desperately needs.”

Chapter one, “On Prophecy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” opens with two citations, one from John Dewey and the other from James Baldwin, that re-enforce the importance of using our moral imagination and discovering that the power of prophecy rests within each of us. Glaude believes Dewey’s view of moral imagination, that we need a reconstructed notion of individuality so we can perceive ourselves differently and respond differently to new forms of concentrated power. Conformity, the process, and pressures of changing one’s belief to match a particular group, denies the human capacity to engage in individual intelligent actions. This reconstruction of individuality is acquired through:

1. Strong readings (interpretations) of the currency of particular words (in light of problems faced with intelligence).
2. An attempt to establish an original relation of their use (by exposing a bad question)
3. An effort to open up their earnings to doings and sufferings currently in view (by revealing historical nerve endings that excite the present).

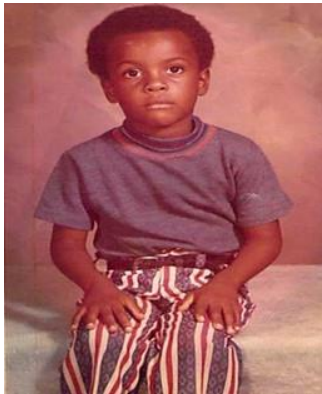
Prophetic processes that activate moral imagination take on a more democratic function in the lives of everyday, ordinary people. The possibility that different perspectives can be created from a reconstructed notion of individuality is converted to potential energies. This converted energy is expressed as hope for a present future. Glaude declares that we are the prophets we have been looking for; not waiting to be rescued or delivered, but self-determining prophets. Prophets, according to Glaude, profess and exhort, aiming to change minds and behaviors, and are less concerned with the hopes of demonstrating competence.^[11]



Analogous to meteorologists, prophets attempt to forecast future conditions that might affect our present-day lives and how we should engage that environment, Glaude calls the decisions of conduct. Many of us fear making the wrong decisions. Glaude encourages readers to use their moral imaginations to experiment with different environments; to jettison comfort and exchange

and embrace the “messiness of our moral lives.” By utilizing our moral imagination, we move into prophetic action – to imagine beyond the opacity of current conditions. Although our reflective imagination may not be observable and measurable, the activity is nonetheless important, valuable, and valid.

After defining and describing the prophet, Glaude “democratizes the prophetic,” by telling the reader to become the prophet. Glaude then affirms that we all have the capacity to engage in prophecy through exercising our critical intelligence and committing ourselves to imagining effective possibilities; the possibility to face our fears and see victory on the other side. The inspiration to imagine, to fantasize in the face of fear, is captured in Dr. King’s iconic speech, “I Have a Dream.” The courage to imagine a future different from the present requires a readiness to act and a willingness to die. For Black people this is nothing new. Black people have always possessed this imagination and this courage.



However, King, according to Glaude, is not to be perceived or remembered as a moral giant with exceptional prophetic powers. Glaude insists that we learn that everyday ordinary people have the power to unsettle the present by persisting in discovering the open-ended character of the future. Black people have always possessed the power of hope, experienced the power of resurrected hope, and have been comforted by the idea that dying daily is always followed by the resurrection of hope. Austin Channing Brown^[12] asserted, “Resurrection is a Christian concept because hope has died a thousand deaths and has been

resurrected and revived a thousand times.” (178)

The voices of Black prophets, asserts Glaude, are all too often thought to be unique individuals (typically men) with special callings that distinguish them from the rest of us. We end up giving our power over to them and are inevitably left disappointed. It is time we put such a view aside. (34)

King challenged all Americans, white and Black, to become better people. King recognized that changing America was only made possible by individuals who would believe in and imagine a new age. His challenge was not an exercise in

passive philosophical reflections. Similar to Apostle James, who wrote, “Faith without works is dead,” King knew that change would require committed courage, tenacity, and work, and that Black people could not wait for willing white people to cherish democracy over privilege.

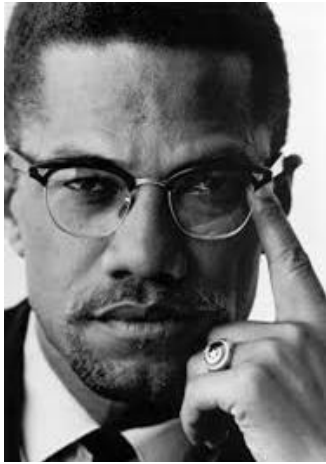
According to Glaude, King offered Americans a vision of his prophetic moral imagination, a vision for a more just and loving world. Moreover, even after the murder of the dreamer, death cannot kill moral imagination unless the person is dead. The power of resurrected hope is part of everyone’s moral imagination; our capacity to think beyond death. Glaude continues, “No more prophets descending from mountaintops. Rather, I want to bear witness to the multitude of prophetic acts by ordinary people striking a blow for freedom in the face of a world that insists we all become like sacks and stomachs in need of heroes to liberate us.” (47)

After reading Chapter Two, “On Heroism and Malcolm X,” I felt as if I had participated in an encounter group in which a member of the group courageously shared personal confessions and self-disclosures of his childhood pains and sufferings and how he attempted to make sense of and give relevance to those events. In this chapter, Glaude becomes extremely vulnerable to his readers. When he shares certain aspects of his life, he appears weighed down by a whirlwind of emotions: the mingled mysteries and wounds of yesterdays, an exercise in distressful polarity. Glaude’s journey is fixed with many meditations of highs and lows, feats and failures of faith, joy and pain, fulness and emptiness, experiencing genuine love from a demanding father coupled with the incredible pains of personally loving that father. Here, Glaude reveals that he was “beautifully broken.”^[13]

Glaude aligns himself with the equally broken father-son relationship suffered by James Baldwin, both of whom acknowledge their fathers who, through their disappointments, anger, and sadness, loved their sons the only way they knew how. Glaude articulates the demands and pressures placed on his African American father, who was challenged to raise four children in an atmosphere and culture of poverty, prejudices, and overt racism of Moss Point, Mississippi, through the malaise of the civil rights movement, the contentious admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi and the subsequent Ole Miss Riot of 1962, and the murders of Emmett Till, Medger Evers, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Performing the role expectations and demands of a father in Moss Point were difficult in 1968.

Below is an excerpt from an interview with Jamie Saxon^[14] of Princeton University, where Glaude recounts the salience of his childhood relationship with his father:

My dad was all up in me. He was in the Navy and served in Vietnam. He is a really intense guy. He yells, he gets angry, all of us were afraid of him. But everything I've done, who I am, is a reflection of the discipline of my father. He was an extraordinary influence on me.



For Glaude, Moss Point was an instrumental and necessary ecosystem for the development of his imagination. It was in these imaginations that he learned to see himself as a prophet, like Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Malcolm X, or King.

Prophets are not heroes. They are ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Heroes are necessary; not to worship, but to stimulate one's imagination to the idea "that all things are possible to him who believes."^[15] Hero worshipping is harmful because it impedes the development of one's imagination. In his discovery of Malcolm X, Glaude, like many African American youth, found an excellent example of a Black man who believed in the possibilities of transformation: "From orphan to international leader, from small-time hustler to one of the most important and influential political voices and leader of the twentieth century." (73) From life as ordinary to living in the extraordinary, Glaude found himself and his manhood inside the autobiography of Malcolm X.

How did Malcolm X accomplish his amazing transformation, moving from the secular to the spiritual? Glaude believes it was Malcolm's willingness to sacrifice his life every day in the pursuit of purpose; to wake up every day to fulfill that purpose in living, knowing that to achieve that purpose could cost him his life. Like King, Malcolm X developed the capacity to see beyond death, to see the prophetic realized in the pursuit of purpose. The hope of resurrection transcends the fear of dying.



The movie "Malcolm X," adapted from Alex Haley's 1965 book, "The Autobiography of Malcolm X,"^[16] has an ending scene in which the classroom instructor prophetically speaks to her class, "Malcolm X is you, and you are Malcolm X." Immediately, several of her Black students proudly stand up and declare, "I am Malcolm X!" In that

moment, the seeds of possibility were planted, producing a belief in a present not yet seen.

Charles M. Payne, director of the Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies and the Henry Rutgers Distinguished Professor of Africana Studies, noted that, based on his research on the role of women in the Mississippi Delta's civil rights struggle "men led, but women organized." One of those "behind-the-scenes organizers was Ella Josephine Baker. Miss Baker, who was affectionately called "Fundy,"^[17] rejected the celebration of charismatic leaders or support of leadership that was one dimensional, a top-down characteristic in Black organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Instead, Baker embraced and promoted a philosophy of generativity – the desire, allocation of resources, and actions to improve the well-being of the next generation.

Chapter Three, "On Democracy and Ella Baker," details the heroism of one of the most important but least-known leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Ella Baker, born on Dec. 13, 1903, in Norfolk, Virginia, was raised in Littleton, North Carolina, where she learned early the strength of working in community. Baker, who initially worked for the NAACP, was instrumental in the organization of the SCLC, serving as the executive secretary and the founding of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee . She was also one of the organizers and advisers to the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party created to confront the all-white Democratic Party delegation.

Baker believed it was necessary to develop people who were less interested in being leaders and more interested in the development of leadership among all people. She was very suspicious of charismatic leaders. She had learned through lived experiences that charismatic leaders are often created by the media and the adoration of their followers. These leaders wasted a lot of energy attempting to live up to the image and identity expectations of others. Her philosophy encouraged inclusion and leadership through action. Baker advocated that community activists should not wait for the anointed leader to come and rescue or defend them, but to become the leaders needed in the moment. It was this belief that birthed SNCC.

Baker's political practice was aspirational, according to Glaude, designed to nurture individuals to imagine the kind of society they hoped to live in and to aspire to become the kind of people they wanted to be. Baker believed that change happens organically at the local level, by ordinary everyday people. Baker did not romanticize the struggle for individuals to become their best selves. She knew the challenge to reach for a higher self would require demanding work; a lesson learned from her maternal grandmother.

Glaude so beautifully and reverently sums up this chapter with the following description of Ella Baker:

Earned insurgency is an extraordinary consequence of a politics of tending, an effect of receptive practices characteristic of Ella Baker's approach in which trust, courage, commitment, and love, rooted in caring struggle, inform our willingness to risk everything in pursuit of justice and shape practices that cultivate the capacities of all involved.

Ella Baker's democratic perfectionism calls each of us to a higher self in which our unique talents are deployed in the service of justice. ... We all have the capacity: to imagine a world beyond the horrors of now and to implicate a future in the very way we earn our insurgency and stand up heroically to the darkness of the current hour.

We are the leaders we have been looking for.

In the closing chapter, "A Thicket of Thorns," Glaude's voice is clearly entwined in the many voices of his heroes, heroines, mentors, and his fathers. Behind the surplus of sources, citations, references, and philosophies, of traditional and contemporary critical thinkers, (Baldwin, Baker, West, and Dewey to name a few), Glaude uncovers the truth, that these were "everyday people" who were successful in discovering their truth and personal courage. These ordinary, everyday people helped Eddie Glaude to find his truth and a vibrant voice to tell that truth. Glaude has emerged from the long shadow of his fathers.

As Glaude has evolved with each completed book,^[18] he encourages us, empowered by our imaginations, to fly with him as he elevates, opening his wings to catch the thermals of "the messiness" of today's turbulent America. Like Ella Baker, Glaude speaks to the leader within each of us, beckoning us to move beyond the malaise^[19] and mundane and embrace the language of meliorism^[20] (114) as he thrusts himself into a "Brave New World" (Aldous Huxley) imagined.

This book is a masterpiece of literary excellence. Written with laser-focused precision, Glaude's writing will dazzle and impress the educated reader. However, therein lies my only criticism. I work and fellowship with an incredible group of Black entrepreneurs, property owners, and social justice activists, most of whom, unfortunately, committed felonies in their earlier lives. They often have a high school degree or GED. Glaude tells an important story that those "brothers" need to hear but will never read or hear: You are the leaders you are looking for and equally important, you are the leaders we are looking for!

As you read Glaude's book, from time to time some of you may hear in the background of your imagination, the voices of Sly and Family Stones singing, "I am everyday people!"

By the way, “What is the most important system or part of an automobile?” Hopefully, after you read, “We Are the Leaders We Have Been Looking For,” you will find the answer to the question from the tutelage of master teachers.

Editor’s note: Essays by Jefferson scholars are the products of their own research and views.

References

- [1] Brown-Glaude, Winnifred. Professor and former Chair of African American Studies and Sociology, Department of African American Studies at The College of New Jersey. In 2024 Dr. Brown-Glaude was named to *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education’s* list of 40 Outstanding Women in Higher Education.
- [2] Hurston, Zora Neale and Kaplan, Carla (2002). Every tongue got to confess: Negro folktales from the Gulf States. New York: Perennial.
- [3] Cone, James,[2] the Charles A. Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology, considered one of the fathers of Black Liberation Theology, wrote extensively about this concept in *For my people: black theology and the black church*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. (1984).
- [4] Jackson, Jesse, a civil rights activist and disciple of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a 1984 and 1988 presidential candidate, and founder of Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) and the Rainbow Coalition, recently visited Erie, PA in support of Vice President Kamala Harris’ Presidential campaign.
- [5] The Valley Gate and the Dung Gate. Two of the twelve gates surrounding Jerusalem. These two gates symbolize God’s cleansing after one’s lived valley experiences, the place where one empties self and sin through acts of contrition and repentance. Dung is another name for refuse.
- [6] Black democratic perfectionism is defined as ordinary people, full of self-trust, who can perceive themselves as the leaders they have been looking for. (8)
- [7] Ephesians 4: 11- 13 (King James Version).
- [8] Lonergan, B. (1988a). *Existenz and aggiornamento*. In F. C. Crowe & R. M. Doran (Eds.), *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Vol. 4, pp. 222-231). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- [9] Glaude writes extensively at the Obama presidency in his book *Democracy in black: how race still enslaves the American soul*. New York: Crown Publishing Group. 2016.
- [10] Eddie Glaude refers to James Baldwin as "Jimmy" because he feels they are personal friends. Glaude has been reading and reflecting on Baldwin's work for about 30 years. He believes Baldwin's “lived experiences” are extraordinary and embodies an insight into the struggles of black Americans and the resistance of white Americans to grow up.
- [11] Given that Glaude is an ordained minister, I wondered why he did not reference the goal of the prophet was changing hearts (*as a man thinks in his heart, so is he*, Proverbs 23:7 New King James Version).
- [12] Brown, Austin Channing. *I’m still here: Black dignity in a world made for whiteness*. New York: Convergent. 2018.
- [13] Beautifully broken was a phrase coined by Ray Slater in an impromptu conversation about father-child relationships.

- [14] Saxon, Jamie, Office of Communications, University of Princeton, January 4, 2016. Retrieved on October 14, 2024. [Here](#)
- [15] Mark 9: 23. Jesus said unto him, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believes." (King James Version).
- [16] Lee, Spike & Perl, Arnold. 1992. *Malcolm X*. United States: Warner Bros.
- [17] Fundi is a Swahili word meaning a person who teaches a craft to the next generation, was appropriately given to Ella Baker by Bob Moses during a gathering celebrating her seventy-fifth birthday.
- [18] Eddie Glaude has authored eleven books. His writings, including "Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul", "In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America", and his most recent, the New York Times bestseller, "Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for our Own", takes an exhaustive look at Black communities, the difficulties of race in the United States and the challenges we face as a democracy.. [Here](#)
- [19] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "malaise," accessed October 16, 2024, [Here](#). Malaise is a vague sense of mental or moral ill-being.
- [20] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "meliorism," accessed October 16, 2024, [Here](#). Meliorism is the belief that the world tends to improve and that humans can aid its betterment.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Parris J. Baker is an Associate Professor at Gannon University, where he is the Social Work, Mortuary Science and Gerontology Program Director. An alumnus of Gannon, Baker received his graduate degree from Case Western Reserve University, Jack, Joseph, & Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences and his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work. Presently, Baker serves as the Senior Pastor of Believers International Worship Center, Inc. He is married and has five children.



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