

# NOT SOMEWHERE ELSE, BUT HERE

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker

Excerpt:

This is my country. Love calls me beyond denial and disassociation. It is not enough to think of racism as a problem of "human relations," to be cured by me and others like me treating everyone fairly, with respect and without prejudice. Racism is more: It is a problem of segregated knowledge, mystification of facts, anesthetization of feeling, exploitation of people, and violence against the communion/community of our humanity.

My commitment to racial justice is both on behalf of the other—my neighbor, whose well-being I desire—and for myself, to whom the gift of life has been given but not yet fully claimed. I struggle neither as a benevolent act of social concern nor as a repentant act of shame and guilt, but as an act of desire for life, of passion for life, of insistence on life—fueled by both love for life and anger in face of the violence that divides human flesh.

The habit of living somewhere else rather than here, in a constructed "reality" that minimizes my country's history of both violence and beauty and ignores the present facts, keeps me from effectively engaging in the actual world. I have the sensation of being a disembodied spectator as structures of racism are recreated before my eyes. But involvement in the steps of conversion—theological reflection, remedial education, soul work, and engaged action—moves me from enclosure to openness.

I step out of an insular shell and come into immediate contact with the full texture of our present reality. I feel the rain on my face and breathe the fresh air. I wade in the waters that spirit has troubled and stirred. The water drenching me baptizes me into a new life. I become a citizen *not of somewhere else*, but of here.

The struggle for racial justice in America calls those of us who are white to make this journey. Our presence is needed. We have been absent too long.

*Excerpted from an excerpt from an essay originally published in Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue, eds. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones, 171-98. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2003. The longer excerpt can be found on the Unitarian Universalist website as a hand-out in their Tapestry of Faith Curricula, Adult Program, "Building the World We Dream About." See:*

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/btwwda/workshop7/handout2>

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