"Imbunches" and "Xiconhocas": The Incessant Challenge of Racism in the Declining Years of the Reagan/Bush Imperial Order

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I. THANK YOU Dan, Elaine, Barbara and Betty AND WARM GREETINGS to all of you here at Wellington Ave United Church Of Christ. As noted by both Dan and Elaine, I have not been an infrequent visitor to this house.

I. A. INTRODUCTION
Toni Morrison said the following in a March 3, 1995 Charter Day speech at Howard University and despite its length, let us look at this passage for it describes for those of us living in this country so eloquently the racism and fascism ever pervasive in this historical period:
“Let us be reminded that before there is a final solution, there must be a first solution, a second one, even a third. The move toward a final solution is not a jump. It takes one step, then another, then another. Something, perhaps, like this:

1. Construct an internal enemy, as both focus and diversion.
2. Isolate and demonize that enemy by unleashing and protecting the utterance of overt and coded name-calling and verbal abuse. Employ ad hominem attacks as legitimate charges against that enemy.
3. Enlist and create sources and distributors of information who are willing to reinforce the demonizing process because it is profitable, because it grants power, and because it works.
4. Palisade all art forms; monitor, discredit or expel those that challenge or destabilize processes of demonization and deification.
5. Subvert and malign all representatives of and sympathizers with this constructed enemy.
6. Solicit, from among the enemy, collaborators who agree with and can sanitize the dispossess process.
7. Pathologize the enemy in scholarly and popular mediums; recycle, for example, scientific racism and the myths of racial superiority in order to naturalize the pathology.
8. Criminalize the enemy. Then prepare, budget for and rationalize the building of holding arenas for the enemy—especially its males and absolutely its children.
9. Reward mindlessness and apathy with monumentalized entertainments and with little pleasures, tiny seductions: a few minutes on television, a few lines in the press; a little pseudo-success; the illusion of power and influence; a little fun, a little style, a little consequence.
10. Maintain, at all costs, silence. In 1995 racism may wear a new dress, buy a new pair of boots, but neither it nor its succubus twin fascism is new or can make anything new. It can only reproduce the environment that supports its own health; fear, denial and an atmosphere in which its victims have lost the will to fight. The forces interested in fascist solutions to national problems are not to be found in one political party or another, or in one or another wing of any political party. Democrats have no unsullied history of egalitarianism. Nor are liberals free of domination agendas. Republicans have housed abolitionists and white supremacists. Conservative, moderate, liberal; right, left, hard left, far right; religious, secular, socialist—we must not be blindsided by these Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola labels because the genius of fascism is that any political structure can host the virus and virtually any developed country can become a suitable home.
Fascism talks ideology, but it is really just marketing—marketing for power.

It is recognizable by its need to purge, by the strategies it uses to purge and by its terror of truly democratic agendas. It is recognizable by its determination to convert all public services to private entrepreneurship; all nonprofit organizations to profit making ones—so that the narrow but protective chasm between governance and business disappears. It changes citizens into taxpayers—so individuals become angry at even the notion of the public good. It changes neighbors into consumers—so the measure of our value as humans is not our humanity or our compassion or our generosity but what we own. It changes parenting into panicking—so that we vote against the interests of our own children; against their health care, their education, their safety from weapons. And in effecting these changes it produces the perfect capitalist, one who is willing to kill a human being for a product—a pair of sneakers, a jacket, a car—or kill generations for control of products—oil, drugs, fruit, gold. When our fears have all been serialized, our creativity censured, our ideas “marketplaced,” our rights sold, our intelligence sloganized, our strength downsized, our privacy auctioned; when the theatricality, the entertainment value, the marketing of life is complete, we will find ourselves living not in a nation but in a consortium of industries, and wholly un-intelligible to ourselves except for what we see as through a screen darkly.

II. I want to begin this reflection this morning speaking of “xiconhocas” and “imbunches.” The term “Xiconhocas” comes out of the liberation struggle in Mozambique during 1962-1975. It refers to a particular type of person who was betraying the values of the liberation struggle. They were people who would do anything for some money. They were informers, thieves, rapists. In dark glasses, expensive suits (today they would have a lot of bling bling),
there was nothing that they wouldn’t do for money. They were the dope dealer of today who himself would “never touch the stuff.” They were amoral to the max and a particular product of the Portuguese colonial system. They were Toni Morrison’s “perfect capitalist!”

“Imbunches” is a term that comes out of the folklore of Chile. I heard it used in a lecture by Ariel Dorfman, that wonderful Chilean writer first made famous in this Country by his wonderful cartoon book, ‘How to Read Donald Duck.’ Imbunches are sorta replete “yuppies.” They feel nothing, see nothing, hear nothing, smell nothing. All they care about is their morning lattes and that their Hummers parked outside are not scratched.

Though they would vehemently deny it, xiconhucas and Imbunches are cousins, not ‘yard kin,’ first cousins.

III. We have been informed that THIS IS THE COLOR-BLIND ERA. In the COLOR BLIND ERA WHITE PEOPLE (AND SOME OTHERS) SHUT DOWN WHEN DISCUSSIONS COME UP ABOUT RACE, RACISM INSTITUTIONAL RACISM, WHITENESS, WHITE PRIVILEGE (granted, it is not easy stuff, race, while a social construct, is a powerful, complex and, at times, mystifying and paralyzing phenomenon. It is also so inter-related with so much other stuff like gender, class, and sexual orientation)

MY THOUGHT AND MY EXPERIENCE IS THAT MANY WHITE PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY WHITE PEOPLE WITH MEANS AND ACCESS, LIVE DENIAL LIVES OR ELSE ‘BLAME THE VICTIMS’ FOR THE REPRESSION AND VIOLENCE THAT IS IN SO MANY PEOPLE OF COLOR’S LIVES.

THUS DO PEOPLE BECOME IMBUNCHES

AS THE May 18 UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST PASTORAL LETTER ON RACISM PUTS IT:

“Perhaps as disturbing as the glaring economic and social inequities between the races is the increasing disparity of perception about the continuing reality of racism. For people of color in our nation, racism is an ever present reality that white people too often deny. When the prophets of our day name injustice and seek redress, the urgency of their appeals is too frequently met by the trivializing charge that they are ‘simply playing the race card’. If the wound of our people is to be treated with care, our sacred conversations must address this callous and dismissive spirit.”

TWO STORIES

IV. The first is about my failure “to do” Jackie Robinson. I went to a wedding recently. I was the only person of color in the 300+ crowd. It was held in an
expensive suburb and we were bused to the church. As I stood in the line boarding the bus, concerned about my too bright tie and a too light suit, a Mississippi Madam said loudly so that all could hear her, “My, my, judging by what I see, I must be gettin’ on the wrong bus!” It was a lonely, not a lovely wedding for me. Throughout, I sat in the pew marveling about how Jackie endured the insults and the spit.

BUT WE LIVE IN A COLOR BLIND ERA NOW.

The second story is about a modern lynching party. In a relatively well-publicized incident of 2 years ago a group of east coast sixth grade, private school, white boys decided they wanted to stage a lynching in their school yard. They brought the ropes from home, chose the trees branch, the victim, and were caring out the act during recess. But the victim ran away. No problem. They chose another, this time, an African American girl. A white playmate of the girl intervened. She went running to the teachers hard at work caucusing with Starbucks in another part of the schoolyard. In the end the teachers prevailed. The lynching party was stopped. The administration expelled the student lynchers and the parents of the students sued the administration, asserting that ‘boys will be boys!’

BUT WE LIVE IN A COLOR BLIND ERA NOW.

We do indeed and as pointed out in a new book about race and schooling In America, schools are major sites of racial currents, racial patterns and racial ordering. The authors go on to point out, however, that in most of these schools, “race” and “racism” are rarely discussed and analyzed. Rather, the authors point out, the teachers, principals and staff just keep on “doing their best” and following their hearts: “...talk about race was dangerous: they could be judged as failing, could be accused of racism, could be forced to confront realities that contradicted the racially liberal narrative that framed their professional identities. For all these reasons and more, racial talk was generally avoided and often met with defensiveness when it did occur.”

(RACE IN THE SCHOOLYARD by Amanda Lewis page 60)

V. WE ARE AT A POINT IN THIS COUNTRY’S HISTORY WHERE WHAT IS AT STAKE IS MUCH, MUCH DEEPER THAN INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF PREJUDICE, EVEN DEEPER THAN INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

IT IS A POINT THAT PARALLELS THAT MOMENTOUS HISTORICAL MOMENT OF REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING’S FAMOUS APRIL 1968 RIVERSIDE DRIVE CALC TALK, AND THE EXTRA-ORDINARY MESSAGE OF THAT TALK, SPECIALLY THE PART WHERE KING SAID:
"The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit, and if we ignore this sobering reality [applause], and if we ignore this sobering reality, we will find ourselves organizing "clergy and laymen concerned" committees for the next generation. They will be concerned about Guatemala and Peru. They will be concerned about Thailand and Cambodia. They will be concerned about Mozambique and South Africa. We will be marching for these and a dozen other names and attending rallies without end unless there is a significant and profound change in American life and policy."

YOU KNOW IT... IT'S THE SPEECH THAT'S TOO MUCH OF A 'DREAM' FOR MACDONALD'S TO EVER TOUCH, LET ALONE PROMOTE!!!

RENOVLED HISTORIAN AND POLITICAL SCIENTIST, MANNING MARABLE — ANOTHER PROPHETIC BROTHER IN SO, SO MANY WAYS—RECENTLY SAID IN AN INTERVIEW IN THE BLACK COLLEGIAN:

I just finished writing a book entitled Living Black History. Chapter Five addresses the challenge to the generation of students in the 21st century. Their challenge is unlike the Civil Rights era and the Black Power period of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. The generation beyond the hip-hop generation is now confronted with not Jim Crow segregation, but with a new deadly triangle. If one thinks historically, 400 years ago, the evil triangle of racism was the triangle slave trade that transported against their will millions of Africans to the Americas. The new deadly triangle of racism in the 21st century is the triangle between mass unemployment, mass incarceration, and mass disenfranchisement. In Harlem about 50% of all males over the age of 21 are outside of the paid labor force. (emphasis added)

WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT THIS SYSTEMMATIC WASTE LAND THAT DRIVES US ALL INTO BEING XICONHOCAS OR IMBUNCHES? INTO THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DRUGS. INTO SELF HATE, DEPRESSION AND VIOLENCE

EVEN INTO HATING THOSE THAT LOOK LIKE US. THAT ARE US.WHO HAVE ALSO COME TO THE WELL.

My friend, Patricia Williams, the Columbia University law professor And Nation magazine columnist pointed out in the May 19, 2008 issue of the magazine: "We are at a crossroads that implicates us all. "With our imploding housing market, rising unemployment, falling dollar and dismally noncompetitive educational achievement, we are all in the ghetto now. While some of us retire to the prison of gated communities, far too many are condemned to the disenfranchisement of real prisons. There are 2.3 million prisoners in the United States today, almost one and a half times the number in China, whose population is four times greater. Our incarceration rate is six times the median of all nations, and we imprison people for a
much wider range of offenses and for longer sentences. Of our prisoners, the vast majority are black and Latino. Yet the degree to which these grave disparities are in some measure the product of our “perceptions” seems to have little traction.”

YOUTH, VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN LITTLE VILLAGE AND LAWNDALE ON CHICAGO’S WEST AND SOUTH SIDES

My heart is heavy appearing before you this morning. Rather than reciting a lot of statistics about violence and death on the West Side, let me say that a couple weekends ago, families in this city buried 41 young people, killed over a single weekend. Is it not time for churches like Wellington to join their neighbors in affirming life in these communities? Can not churches join organizations like CEASE FIRE in trying to provide “safe passage”? Join in exposing and ending the gun runners and gun dealers and gun manufacturers who are profiting from all this death and suffering? Is it not time for the white churches located around the well to do more to protest the police brutality and harassment that so many are daily experiencing? How long will our earnings keep maintaining the Commander Jon Burges and the Blackwaters in this world? These situations beg for clear ‘witness’ and decisive action.

VI. YOUR PASTORAL LETTER FOR TODAY’S SACRED CONVERSATION IMPLORES YOU TO “UNDERSTAND THAT THIS CONVERSATION IS NOT A ONE-TIME EVENT, BUT A CONTINUING JOURNEY.”

It necessitates LONG DISTANCE RUNNERS, NOT SPRINTERS

This journey begs for activists and churches and activist churches, of which this church is a luminary, a pace setter,

I appeal to you here at Wellington who are leaders and visionaries in the peace struggle, in the battle for gay and lesbian rights and dignity, in the struggle against homelessness, hunger, brutalization and exploitation, I implore

That in the struggle ahead THAT YOU LEAD MORE IN THE BATTLE AGAINST RACISM
AND THAT YOU DO THIS AS A SACRED, INVIOLATE, PRINCIPLED LIFELONG PERSPECTIVE.

Talk the talk and Walk the walk in a struggle in which we must, we must ‘Lift every voice and sing.’ Our failure to come to a new dispensation with each other around race and racism issues will mean an eternally divided and embittered house with ceaseless and ugly conflict
And neither justice nor peace.

Thank you for our time together today.