

Critical race theory conversation ‘should have happened’ earlier

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While characterizing their conversation as “honest and open,” Southern Baptist Convention leaders acknowledged their Jan. 6 discussion with Black Southern Baptists “should have happened ahead of time” rather than after seminary presidents issued a statement denouncing critical race theory.

SBC Executive Committee President Ronnie Floyd organized the virtual meeting involving the six Southern Baptist seminary presidents, SBC President J.D. Greear and National African American Fellowship officers.

A joint statement issued after the Jan. 6 virtual meeting indicated participants’ commitment “to condemn racism in every form, personal and structural.”

However, it offered no indication the seminary presidents backed away from their opposition to critical race theory—an omission some Black Baptist ministers noted on social media.

Leaders of the SBC seminaries—all of them white males—issued a [statement in November](#) declaring critical race theory and intersectionality incompatible with the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

Marshal Ausberry, president of the National African American Fellowship and first vice president of the SBC, subsequently [released a statement](#) on behalf of fellowship officers saying “there are theories and constructs that help us to see and discover otherwise undetected, systemic racism in institutions and in ourselves.”

Some prominent Black Baptist pastors announced their churches would leave the SBC due to the seminary presidents' stand, and another group of Southern Baptists issued a [statement](#) decrying any movement that denies "the reality of systemic injustice" or historic links between the SBC and racism.

Regret for 'pain and confusion'

Baptist Press, news and information service of the SBC Executive Committee, on Jan. 8 released the following [statement](#) from participants at the Jan. 6 meeting:

"The National African American Fellowship and the Council of Seminary Presidents had an honest and open conversation, hearts to hearts, and we spoke candidly and respectfully about our perspectives and concerns related to CRT/Intersectionality. We expressed our love and care for each other, our common commitments to Christ, and also prayed for our nation in this incredibly difficult moment. We were able to discuss our shared commitments and discuss our various perspectives on all these issues.

"All of us acknowledge that conversations of this nature should have happened ahead of time. The Council of Seminary Presidents regrets the pain and confusion that resulted from a lack of prior dialogue. Together, all of us are committed to condemn and fight racism in every form, personal and structural, in consistency with the 1995 SBC Resolution on Racial Reconciliation and the Baptist Faith and Message.

"We commit to work together to serve the cause of and to further the work of the Southern Baptist Convention. We will continue these conversations. We are committed to listen to one another, speak honestly and to honor our common commitment to the inerrant Word of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

[Greear told Baptist Press](#) “brothers and sisters of color absolutely should have been at the table from the beginning” and apologized for “how this situation has made many of our brothers and sisters feel.”

“We all realized these are conversations that need nuance, grace and better efforts at mutual understanding,” Greear said.

‘Make a better future together’

In an email to the *Baptist Standard*, Ausberry called the Jan. 6 meeting a “very cordial” conversation between Christians who “truly spoke as brothers.” The seminary presidents “earnestly wanted to hear from us and we from them,” he wrote.



Michael Ausberry is president of the National African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention, pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Fairfax Station, Va., and first vice president of the SBC. (BP Photo)

“The bottom line is that we are brothers in Christ, we are fellow Southern Baptists. We do have more that we agree on than that which we differ on.

We just happen to see, as a host of others have shared and have experienced, that there are some beneficial aspects to CRT, not as a worldview, but as a vehicle to identify systemic racism in institutions and organizations. Most of the time institutional and organizational racism is not willful, but unidentified and therefore unaddressed,” Ausberry wrote.

He acknowledged critical race theory as a “hot-button topic,” particularly among Southern Baptists.

“Some of the confusion comes from a lack of understanding, charged ‘red-meat’ words associated with CRT, and false allegations that there is a liberal shift in our seminaries. I do not know of anyone in Southern Baptist life that fully embraces all aspects of CRT,” Ausberry stated.

He expressed appreciation to the seminary presidents for meeting with leaders of the National African American Fellowship and said “we look forward to working with the presidents in the future” as the fellowship offers them “a series of recommendations for their consideration.”

“I think all parties have been sensitized to our differing worlds in which we serve. A little bit of understating and appreciation goes a long way to make a better future together,” Ausberry wrote.

Social media blowback

However, some Black Baptists expressed their disappointment in the immediate results of the meeting between the fellowship officers and SBC seminary presidents.

Pastor Terry M. Turner of Mesquite Friendship Baptist Church, a congregation in suburban Dallas affiliated with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, [tweeted](#): “It sounds like the meeting between NAAF and the Council of Seminary Presidents had no teeth that produced anything

constructive but a good talk?”

Pastor Dwight McKissic of Cornerstone Baptist Church, an Arlington congregation also affiliated with the SBTC, [replied to Turner](#): “Not only are you correct, hundreds of AA [African American] pastors are demoralized & embarrassed by the outcome. Radically different than what we’d expected & agreed on.”

In a series of posts on Twitter, McKissic stated the seminary presidents—by declaring critical race theory and intersectionality incompatible with the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message—have created “an unwelcoming environment” for African Americans.



“The SBC is not a healthy place for AA professors,” he [tweeted](#). “On the subject of race, they will not be given the freedom to speak their convictions, quote certain sources, or assign certain readings, without Anglo approval.”

Racism and Christian Nationalism

He particularly noted the irony of SBC seminary presidents condemning critical race theory because it was embraced early by some Marxists, while at the same time Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Al Mohler compels professors to affirm the Abstract of Principles drafted by Basil Manley Jr., the son of a slaveholder and apologist for the Confederacy.

“Wow! Al Mohler forces his faculty to sign a document written by a blatant racist, while restricting his faculty from teaching CRT within the framework of The Bible and BFM2K,” McKissic [tweeted](#). “I’ve given up hope that the

SBC will attract AA professors. It's academically toxic if you teach on race."

Joel A. Bowman, pastor of Temple of Faith Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., drew a comparison between the seminary presidents' response to critical race theory and their reaction to Christian Nationalism—particularly in light of the prominent presence of Christian Nationalists in the riots at the U.S. Capitol.

"I wonder if the 6 Southern Baptist seminary presidents will come out with a statement about how Christian Nationalism, Trumpism, and white supremacy are not compatible with the Baptist Faith & Message ... Oh, never mind," Bowman [tweeted](#).

Rasool Berry, teaching pastor at The Bridge Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., succinctly [asked on Twitter](#), "Tell me again, which is the greatest threat to the #USA: #WhiteChristianNationalism or #CriticalRaceTheory?"