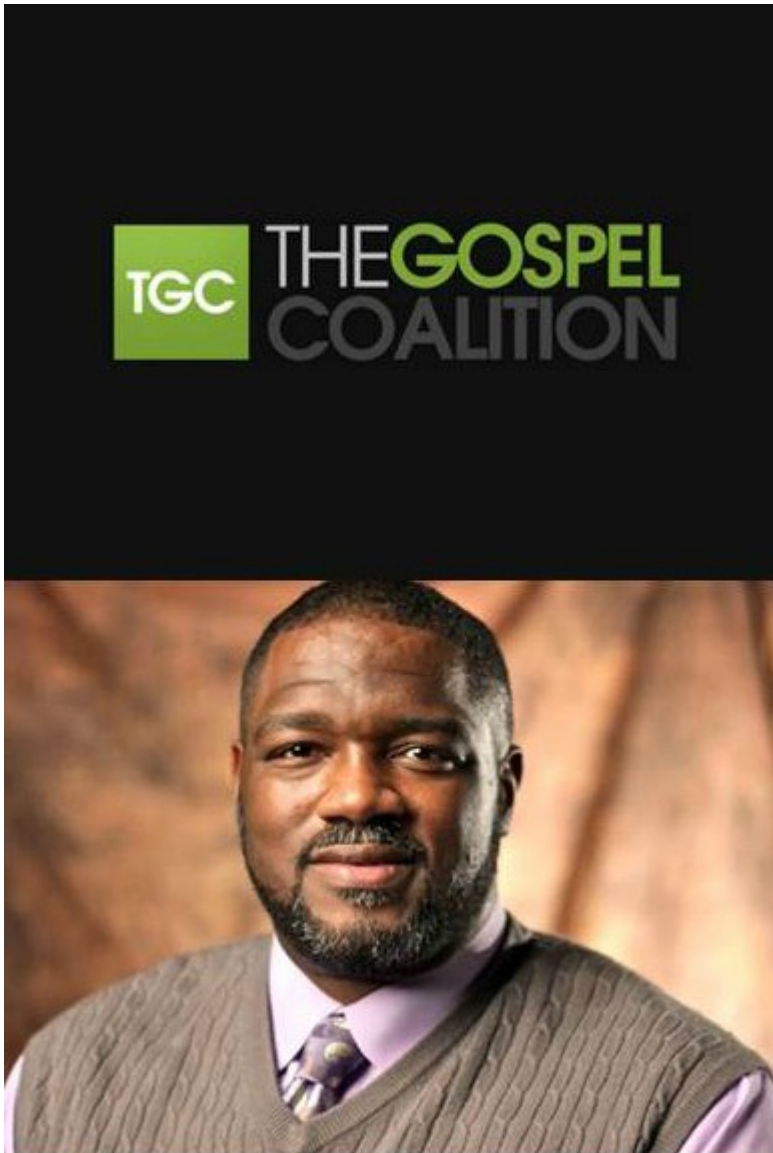


Black-on-black violence: Pastor Voddie Baucham's assault on black people

by [Austin Channing Brown](#), [Christena Cleveland](#), [Drew G. I. Hart](#), and [Efrem Smith](#)

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*So God created human beings in his own image. Genesis 1:27*

As black evangelical leaders, we believe it is important to respond to The Gospel Coalition's publishing of Pastor Voddie Baucham's [Thoughts on Ferguson](#), a perspective we deem to be extremely anti-black. First, we condemn The Gospel Coalition's editorial leadership for its moral and pastoral failure in publishing such an

anti-black viewpoint. No Christian organization should ever participate in dishonoring the image of God in black people, especially at a time when so many black Americans are in pain. Second, we lament the internalized anti-black racism that Pastor Voddie conveyed in his article and the fact that it has been used to further support White-on-Black violence among Christians. Here, we offer a different perspective, one that we believe honors the image of God in black people.

## **A Brief of History of White-on-Black Violence**

Racism is White-on-Black violence.

In 1619, the first twenty Africans were brought over as labor for the new colonies. Within one generation the white majority had defined black people as permanent slaves and non-human property. This created a social order in which black people were only valuable for their ability to support a white dominated society that was economically prospering off of the stolen land of Native Americans and the stolen labor of African Americans. Consequently, a system of White-on-Black violence was born.

This system of White-on-Black violence has defined the last 400 years of American history. For example:

- Millions of Africans died during the middle passage journey from Africa to the so-called 'new land', even before ever stepping foot in America.
- Slavery lasted for 246 years, beginning in 1619 and ending in 1865.
- From 1865 until 1945, well over one hundred thousand black people were re-enslaved through the convict-leasing system, in which whites arrested blacks for minor crimes such as changing employers without permission, vagrancy, engaging in sexual activity or loud talk with white women.
- Simultaneously, white (mostly Christian) Americans sought to retain white control through racial terrorism. About 5,000 African American men, women, and children were lynched by white mobs.
- Jesus, who was both the Son of God and a poor Galilean Jew living in solidarity with those under Roman occupation and those vulnerable to crucifixion, has been transformed into a powerful white man. This image is a form of idolatrous systemic white violence against black people and all people of color.[\[1\]](#)

Despite such White-on-Black violence and much more, black people have always resisted. For example, dissident voices like Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass

rejected 'the Christianity of this land' in its complicit endorsement of white domination over black bodies, proclaiming that it had nothing to do with the true peaceable Christ. Protests like these continued until the 1970s, always triggering systemic white backlash.

In the 1960s black consciousness arrived in mainstream public discourse, affirming the value of black people in the face of historical and ongoing White-on-Black violence. Not surprisingly, the system in which Whites were always on top, responded. Taking a cue from the convict-leasing system, White law enforcement began arresting black men en masse for nonviolent drug crimes. Since the 1970s, the prison population has boomed from about 300,000 inmates to beyond 2 million people caged like animals, a disproportionately large number of them black men. Black bodies continue to be controlled by this system of White-on-Black violence.[\[ii\]](#)

Now in the present, black people in Ferguson and around the country are fed up. We are fed up that 1 out of 3 African American males will be arrested and go through the American *injustice* system at some point in their lives[\[iii\]](#), primarily for nonviolent drug charges, despite studies revealing that black youth and white youth use drugs at comparable rates. Research also tells us that black males are 21 times more likely to be killed during an encounter with the police than their white counterparts.[\[iv\]](#) Just as critical, schools are being defunded all around the country in many black neighborhoods while prisons are being expanded -- another example of systemic White-on-Black violence.

### **Black-on-Black Violence is an Extension of White-on-Black Violence**

The historical and current system of White-on-Black violence sends messages that are so powerful that many black people succumb to them, ultimately becoming defined by them. Internalized racism, a term first coined by black scholar W.E.B. DuBois in 1903,[\[v\]](#) involves accepting a white supremacist social world that places black people at the bottom, and adopting society's negative stereotypes about African Americans concerning their abilities and intrinsic worth.[\[vi\]](#)

An example of internalized racism: as a result of growing up in an anti-black society in which violence inflicted on African Americans has been historically judged less harshly than violence against Whites, regardless of the perpetrator – black people begin to believe that their own life and the lives of other black people are worth very little. Due to internalized racism, they become more willing to engage in violence against other black men, women, and children – so-called “Black-on-Black violence.”

Indeed, a research study conducted in 2011 found that internalized racism significantly predicted black male teenagers' propensity for violence. In other words, the more internalized racism a black male teen possessed, the greater his aggressive behavior, the more positive his attitudes toward guns and violence, and the more at-risk he was for engaging in violent behavior.<sup>[vii]</sup> Based on these findings, the researcher concluded that a lack of self-respect and/or negative views toward their own race (e.g., internalized racism) result in black male teens' greater propensity to engage in violence. In essence, "Black-on-Black violence" is simply an extension of systemic White-on-Black violence.

### **Pastor Voddie's Internalized Racism is Black-on-Black Violence**

Black-on-Black violence takes many forms. Propped up by the mighty platform of The Gospel Coalition and the many white people who frequent the organization's online space, Pastor Voddie was quick to point out the physical Black-on-Black violence that exists in America. However, despite the fact that he is black, Pastor Voddie failed to see the ways in which he engaged in a form of verbal Black-on-Black violence that mirrors White-on-Black violence. By conveniently omitting any discussion of the ways in which the long-standing system of white domination contributes to fatherlessness in the black community, police brutality of black people, negative societal perceptions of black people, the systemic disempowerment of black people, the internalized racism of black people and even Black-on-Black violence, he assaulted the character and worth of black people, suggesting that black people like Michael Brown *deserve* to be killed. In doing so, he made a statement in support of White-on-Black violence, an argument that many whites have used throughout history.

Just as we are presenting a historic look at the system of White-on-Black violence, the Bible also shows us -- from Exodus to the Gospels to the 1st Century Church -- the forms of systemic violence perpetrated upon the people of God by those in power. In this light, all Christians today should grieve with a people group that has been and continues to be victimized by such systemic violence. Blaming one Black young man for the sowing of such sin is a great disservice to the very people to oppressed people of the world, to whom Jesus consistently showed mercy.

We encourage you to read Dr. Alan Noble's point-by-point [response](#) to Pastor Voddie's article. Given the long history of anti-black violence in this country, all followers of Jesus must be committed to engaging in the transformative and liberative work of Jesus, which means affirming the image of God in black people and

resisting all White-on-Black violence in word or deed.

*No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you:*

*to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*

*Micah 6:8*

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[i] Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

[ii] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, N.Y.; Jackson, Tenn.: New Press ; Distributed by Perseus Distribution, 2012).

[iii] *Ibid.*, 9.

[iv] Ryan Gabrielson et al., "Deadly Force, in Black and White," *ProPublica*, accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.propublica.org/article/deadly-force-in-black-and-white>.

[v] Du Bois, W.E. B. 1989 [1903]. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Penguin

[vi] Jones, C. P. (2000). Levels of racism: A theoretical framework and a gardener's tale.

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[vii] Bryant, W.W.. (2011). Internalized racism's association with African American male youth's propensity for

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