

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

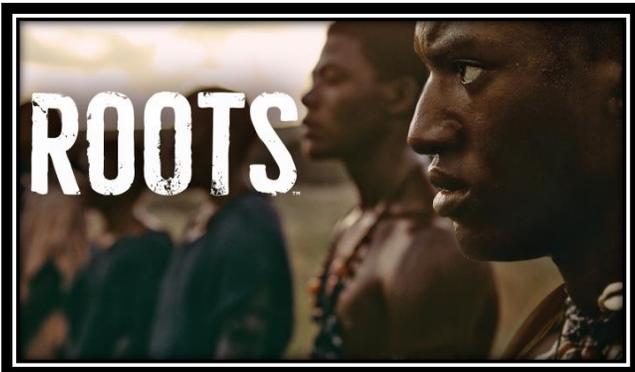
June 7, 2016

The world has remembered Muhammad Ali in many ways in this week of his death. You may be interested to know that he and I have at least one thing in common: there are streets in Louisville named for each of us.

As Louisville's favorite son, Ali does in fact have a street named for him. "My" street, Crittenden Drive, actually honors Senator John Crittenden, from whom I got my middle name. My great-grandfather was a fan of Senator Crittenden, a former Governor of Kentucky, and who is sadly best known for "the Crittenden Compromise," a misbegotten effort to protect the practice of slavery.¹ My grandfather got his middle name from his father's approval of that shameful project, and the name came to me, not for that reason, but because it was my grandfather's name (I doubt that my Mother would have chosen the name had she researched its origin).

In his prime, Ali was an extremely controversial figure, but in recent decades, as Parkinson's disease began to overwhelm his movement and speech, he became a focus of almost universal affection. *The New Yorker* magazine eulogized Ali as [in his heyday] "arguably the most famous person on the planet, known as a supreme athlete, an uncanny blend of power, improvisation, and velocity; a master of rhyming prediction and derision; an exemplar and symbol of racial pride; a fighter, a draft resister, an acolyte, a preacher, a separatist, an integrationist, a comedian, an actor, a dancer, a butterfly, a bee, a figure of immense courage."

Ali grew up in Jim Crow Louisville, and he was not unaware of the many racial overtones that accompanied his rise to wealth and fame: "We're just like two slaves in that ring. The masters get two of us big old black slaves and let us fight it out while they bet: 'My slave can whup your slave.' That's what I see when I see two black people fighting."²



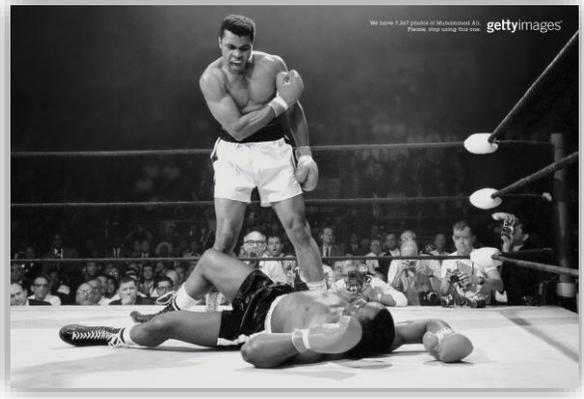
And in that respect, it was perhaps a fateful coincidence that "*Roots 2016*" was playing during the week Ali's life on earth came to an end. Portraying centuries of kidnapping, profiteering, cruelty, and slavery-in-service-of-white-capitalism, *Roots* continues to powerfully confront the ways in which we humans treat each other shamefully and reprehensibly.

Indeed, after the way white folk have treated black folk in this country, it's a wonder that black folk act with any kindness at all toward white folk, even today. And in that respect, it seems significant that the anniversary

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crittenden_Compromise

² David Remnick, "The Outsized Life of Muhammad Ali," *The New Yorker Today*, 6.4.16.

http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-outsized-life-of-muhammad-ali?mbid=nl_160604%20Daily%20v2&CNDID=40411982&spMailingID=9014393&spUserID=MTI4Mjk1O TA3NjgxS0&spJobID=940374369&spReportId=OTQwMzc0MzY5S0

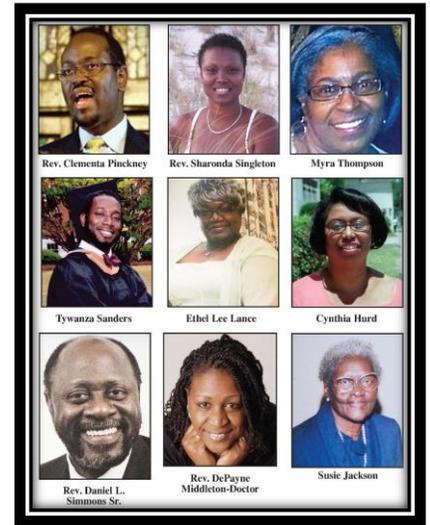


of the murders at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina came during this same week as well. The world continues to “sit up and take notice” of the grace, courage, forbearance and forgiveness evidenced by the families of “the Charleston Nine.” These things can only be described as “Amazing Grace.”

Charleston reminds us that racial animosity is not a thing of the past. Persons who are not white need no reminder of this, but we white folk need to be reminded of the work that is yet to be done if God’s Kingdom is to come on earth as it is in heaven.

Nor is slavery itself a thing of the past. Those who study such things tell us that there are more persons in slavery *at this very moment* than has ever been the case in the history of the world. Some official estimates are that almost 46,000,000 people are enslaved today.³

Slavery is now against the law of every country on the planet. Mauritania became the last to outlaw it, abolishing the practice in 1981, but only criminalizing it in 2007. But even though slavery is illegal everywhere, it continues to exist everywhere—in every country on the planet.



According to “the Global Slavery Index,” whose annual report was also released last week, nearly 60 percent of enslaved persons live in just five nations: **India**, the country with the highest number of slaves, followed by **China** (3.4 million), **Pakistan** (2.1 million), **Bangladesh** (1.5 million), and **Uzbekistan** (1.2 million). **North Korea** has the most people enslaved in proportion to population, with 4.4 percent of the country’s people living in conditions of slavery.

People who are forced into labor most often work in the agriculture, food production, fishing, manufacturing, and construction industries. Migrant workers and indigenous people are among the most vulnerable. Women and girls are forced into sex work and marriages in nearly every country on earth.

There are as many as 20,000 North Korean workers in Russia who are required to hand over nearly all of their wages to the North Korean government. Victims of trafficking in Europe often come from Eastern European countries, forced to work abroad in dangerous conditions for little pay. In Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and the Palestinian territories, children have been forced into armed conflicts, coerced into become informants and suicide bombers.



³ www.globalslaveryindex.org

The Global Slavery Index also ranks the responses of national governments to contemporary slavery inside their borders, based on laws, the availability of services for victims, labor standards, and other factors. Those nations *doing the best job* responding to modern slavery include the Netherlands, the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Australia. Those *doing the worst job* are North Korea, Iran, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, and Hong Kong.

If you'd like to know how many slaves currently work "for you," take this survey to get a rough idea: http://slaveryfootprint.org/#where_do_you_live. And if you'd like to join me in giving to make a difference in modern-day slavery, go to www.ijm.org to find out more about the **International Justice Mission**, the largest global Christian organization combatting slavery in the world today.

Dave

