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“Douglas...connects politics, theology and history in arresting ways in this meditative analysis on American cultural attitudes toward black bodies....Names that have been in the news, including Michael Brown, combine with her own personal perspective as a mother to give the narrative poignancy and timeliness.....the book...raises important spiritual and social questions.”—Publishers Weekly

New Book: *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*
African-American Theologian Kelly Brown Douglas Exposes the Racist Roots
of Stand Your Ground Culture and Explores the Response of Black Faith

Murders of unarmed black people—including children and teens such as Tamir Rice, 12, and Trayvon Martin, 17—and the frequency of the killers getting away with it, are the ugly fruit of America’s Stand-Your-Ground culture. A climate that makes killing inevitable and even permissible, it has roots in the myth of Anglo-Saxon superiority and American exceptionalism, writes theologian Kelly Brown Douglas in her new book, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Orbis Books, \$24.00 paper, May 2015).

An Episcopal priest and professor of religion at Goucher College, Douglas looks at the meaning of God for these times, and the paradox of black faith in the face of violence, showing how Stand-Your-Ground culture is an affront to a God “whose resurrecting power is nonviolence.”

Similar laws such as “Conceal and Carry” and “Stop and Frisk” are a response to the black male body, creating a dangerous time for black males, says Douglas, the mother of a young black man. She knows that her 22-year-old son is old enough to be perceived as a threat. The catalyst for the book was the murder of Trayvon Martin, “yet another young black male killed for no other reason than the fact of his blackness being perceived as threatening.” In the three years since Trayvon’s death, there have been many other stories like his. Douglas’s exploration of the historical, cultural, and religious underpinnings of this culture is a mother’s attempt to answer urgent questions: Why is it becoming increasingly acceptable to kill unarmed black people? Why are black people so easily perceived as a threat? How can black parents keep black children safe?

Douglas traces the social-cultural narratives, deeply woven into the fabric of the country, that have given birth to such a culture—one that produced and sustained slavery, black codes, Jim Crow, lynching, and other forms of violence—and the religious canopies that provided it with legitimacy. She shows how:

- The idea of the black body as chattel laid the groundwork for viewing the black body as irrevocably guilty. Black murder victims are often the ones put on trial and believed to be guilty of something that warranted the violence perpetrated against them.
- Stand-Your-Ground culture fosters unabashed lies about the reality of white racism in America. Media-supported rhetoric of a post-racial America obscures the reality of the myth of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism that shapes race relations in this country.

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- America's founding fathers, including Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, embraced the myth that morality and freedom flowed through Anglo-Saxon veins.
- President Barack Obama is perceived as a threat to the belief in white exceptionalism. A black man living in the White House "is a complete encroachment upon the space reserved for cherished white property."

Examining the role of black faith in responding to Stand-Your-Ground culture, Douglas notes that it is a paradoxical faith that "speaks of freedom in the midst of bondage; it speaks of life in the midst of death." Only by recognizing Jesus' crucifixion as a lynching, can we appreciate its significance: "On the cross, Jesus fully divests himself of all pretensions to power, privilege and exceptionalism. What is clear is Jesus' free and steadfast identification with crucified bodies."

"If black people are to respond to Stand-Your-Ground culture with the strength of black faith then we must work to put an end to the laws of a culture that robs black bodies of freedom and life," Douglas writes. "This culture alienates people from the very goodness of their own creation. It sets people against one another, promoting the notion that one life has more value than another," Douglas says. Such a culture "does not value dialogue, mutuality, respect, or compassion."

"The church is compelled as a bearer of the memory of Jesus to step into the space of the Trayvons and Jordans, who don't know whether to walk slow or walk fast in order to stay alive, to bring Jesus into the present crucifying realities of this culture."

About the Author

Kelly Brown Douglas is an Episcopal priest and professor of religion at Goucher College, Baltimore, MD. Her books include *The Black Christ* and *What's Faith Got to Do with It?*

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Black Bodies and the Justice of God*
by Kelly Brown Douglas
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