

Twitter Thread by Danté Stewart (Stew)



Danté Stewart (Stew)

[@stewarddantec](#)



As many of you know, I was apart of the white evangelical tradition. I have talked about things I learned about being Black in white spaces. Now I want to say some things about what I learned about once being a Black evangelical returning back to the Black church.

A thread.

Spending years in white evangelical churches and schools, specifically from 2012-2018, shapes Black people in more ways than we would like to admit. It shapes us to diminish Blackness, devalue our people's story, and always test what we have against the white logic and litmus.

This is particular reality for us Black men in that space. White Christians exploit our vulnerabilities, give us the room to speak, while simultaneously subverting and devaluing Black women and their struggles and their grievances. Opportunities abound for us and we take them.

We are invited into the meetings, we are given the mic, we are asked to lead groups on race, the Black church, etc. We are asked though often we actually haven't read or thought deeply about each. We become a weapon. Profiting and policing/punishing those who get out of line.

All the while, white Christians feel good about themselves and other Black people are left to clean up the mess we've made, the ways we've made fools of Black folk, and the harmful ways we've learned to think, and to preach, and to be around us. It is profoundly depressing.

Now when things like this happen, along with other public events of racial terror, and white folks not being accountable for the terrible things that say and do, Black folk do either 4 things:

1. Stay contentedly
2. Sit angrily
3. Leave quietly
4. Exit loudly

I was 3 and 4.

I can't go through all of the pain and therapy I had to go through because of who I became. That's just far too exhausting and too long. I will say, when I left, I wanted to go back to the Black church. I did that because I knew couldn't be arguing for us and not around us.

When we went back, it was hard for my wife and I. She missed a lot of the people. I missed some of the people. We both had been around white evangelicals for a while. While people became our most meaningful and time-consuming social, political, and theological communities.

Specifically, I didn't realize how deeply formed I had been by whiteness. Meaning, I didn't realize I took for granted how powerfully white people, through church, school, and social networks, shaped how I named, saw, and acted within the world. It shaped God, race, politics, etc

Being trained in white evangelical churches and seminaries, I was trained to divinize white folk and the things they put in the world, not really questioning its assumptions and politics and how it either opened up reality or obscured it. I knew theology, church, life, etc.

It's just the theology, church, and life I knew always seemed to be judged fully and finally as good based on what white folk thought or had said. This means when talking about many things, somehow the final authority in so many ways was a white person.

Going back changed so much. I realized that there was so much that I didn't know. I was raised Pentecostal, yes. But the most formative years of my training was in white spaces. I was Black and Christian, yes. But I wasn't necessarily formed and shaped in the Black Church.

This challenged so many of the ways I thought about the world and about Black folk and about Black Christianity. Though white people thought of me and so many as "The Black Church", I had to admit to myself: I was not. I was becoming more and more each day, but I just was not.

I had realized that I had been trained to see life as an academic endeavor, people reduced to theological concepts. When I went back, none of that training or language matched the lives I was around. People might have said the same words, but the meanings were worlds apart.

This began a learning process. I had come to see that Black folk had our own categories of knowledge, histories, and traditions, and frameworks that are worth being the starting part of how we interpreted the faith and the world. People around me were extremely educated.

I had just become another member. And that was the tough part. Being a Black man in evangelical spaces makes us believe we are exceptional, and authorities, and more than we actually are. When I went back, there was lost. I was a normal Black dude. And that felt good. Real good.

The more I went the more I learned of the Black church's history and diverse traditions and competing stories and many failures. I knew that I couldn't be who people pointed to as authority. I had much to learn. To read. To write on. To become. I was to be a learner, not teacher.

Sadly, I was trained in white spaces not to be a learner but a teacher of all, not to see people are authorities of their own stories but as battles need to be won, not to see white Christianity as just one story but the all-encompassing past and hope of the future. It was hard.

I knew I needed to heal and my church became that place. It was a refuge, a place where I didn't have to perform Blackness for white folk or subvert other Black people just to feel like I mattered or to act like I am more than I am or never give up the lies about my ignorance.

I could say more but this is the beginnings of what I learned, what I'm still trying to learn. This is but one story. But this is what I'm seeing. There is a difference in our experiences as Black folk and we got to be honest. Our stories are complex and need to be told.