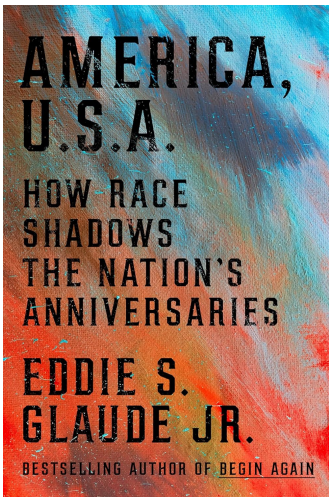
Excerpt Page from Eddie Glaude, Jr.
Proper 9A — July 5, 2026

Excerpt from Eddie Glaude, Jr.'s America, U.S.A.: How Race Shadows the Nation's Anniversaries *(Crown Publishing, 2026), pages 3-4, 16-17, 19. As a person of color living in America, he describes his relationship with America in terms of a "doubleness," or "double consciousness."*



I have set out in this book to assert a certain view of this country, one that I hope will help us make sense of our current malaise as we celebrate 250 years since the founding. America is at once a nation of laws that reflect, ideally, the equal standing of each individual *and* a white Republic. Freedom animates our way of life *and* it is the possession of white people to give to others and to take away. These values are irreconcilable and show that a paradox rests at the heart of the nation. When the tension between these two features of the country becomes unbearably felt and known, white America risks everything, including the well-being of the country, to resolve it. The Civil War is just one deadly example of an unsettling truth. Donald Trump's ascendance is another: some white people would rather destroy the country than face the doubleness that makes it what it is.

I mean by this doubleness something akin to what W. E. B. Du Bois wrote about in his 1903 classic, *The Souls of Black Folk*, when he declared that the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line. It remains our problem, too. Du Bois used the metaphor of the veil to describe the separation between the worlds of Black and white folk, and he detailed the effects of that duality on the way Black people saw themselves:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness — an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring souls in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

But, to my mind, this peculiar sensation of "twoness" is not limited to Black folk alone. It is the condition, truly the inheritance, of all Americans. Its beginnings are found in America itself.

American double consciousness is the consequence of a nation that defines itself with the foundational principle of the equality of men and, yet, holds others as chattel or resigns them to second-class status. The principle and the practice cannot coexist without contradictions, and to hold them together, as if they can, is a form of madness. American double consciousness is the outcome of a nation that represents itself as "the shining city on the hill" and, yet, sees itself darkly through the eyes of those who have borne the whip's lash, who look upon the nation with contempt and pity, who inevitably judge and find the country wanting — a ruthless mirror that lives and breathes. It is the split that comes with the American promise and contempt for that promise — warring ideals, from the beginning, that have threatened and continue to threaten to tear the nation apart.

This double consciousness can also have a religious fervor behind it which tends to obscure the darker side. Citing sociologist Robert Bellah's work on what he calls America's "civil religion," Glaude writes:

The religious underpinnings of American civic and political culture offered resources for the ongoing

reform and renewal of the American idea — they offered the terms with which to judge the nation. But Bellah was clear that civil religion could be used to justify nefarious ends or "as a cloak for petty interests and ugly passions," like the greed of corporations or the hatreds of racists. When those interests and passions undermined the nation's ideals — whether in its treatment of Native peoples, slavery and Jim Crow, subordination of women, exploitation of workers, child labor, or exercise of military power around the globe — the country failed to live up to its covenant. In that sense, Americans were backsliding, and invocations of those ethical principles amounted to calls to repent, setting the stage for reform. Even when Americans argued about slavery or the equal rights of women, those arguments assumed the ideals of the country (e.g., ideals of liberty and the equality of men rooted in Anglo-Protestant Christianity) and, as such, reinforced the stated values of the nation even if the actual practices of its people contradicted them. Our goodness remained unquestioned. Americans were a chosen people and the country, the New Jerusalem.

America's civil religion presupposed that we know who we are and that we jointly share this vision. This religious scaffolding provided the basis for a background consensus that could hold off the chaos, which resulted from the doubleness that rested at the nation's heart. When understood in this way, America's civil religion ironically short-circuits the kind of self-examination required to resolve the split, because the nation's virtue is secured in the belief system that makes it possible in the first place. The transcendent faith in the American idea expressed within the nation's rites and rituals confirmed the special status of the American project and the American people: *We are a divinely ordained nation with a redemptive role in the world, no matter what we do.* With its founding fathers and yearly celebrations (the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, etc.), with its invocation of the sacred documents of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, with its story of the unbounded freedom of its people — with this faith, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said in 1963, "the jangling discord of our nation" could be transformed "into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood."

Finally, after referring to the work of what many consider the most insightful examination of American democracy — the 1840 work of Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America *— Glaude comments:*

But Tocqueville failed to see the double consciousness that defined the young nation and continues to shape it today. That the white people who talked incessantly about equality and freedom lived amid abundant cruelty. Many of them engaged in it. Imagine those people they held as slaves who bore the brunt of it all, and who lived in the shadows of America's dream: they knew intimately what could not be attained, of the illusiveness of a certain equality of condition, of the ways these so-called freedom-loving people moved about them, even sold them and their children. The life those particular white people lived, with all its charm within arm's reach, in a nation supposedly chosen by God, ironically depended upon these darker souls. From that double life, Du Bois wrote, the "life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth century while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century — from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality."

As we move from Romans 6 to Romans 7, is what Du Bois describes as a "morbid sense of personality" similar to what Paul is describing in Romans 7 when he exclaims, "I am utterly miserable!" New Testament scholar Beverly Gaventa characterizes a doubleness: "Paul patiently explores the incompatibility between life in Jesus Christ and death in the territory occupied by Sin and Death. It is impossible to live simultaneously in two places, both among the living and among the dead." Can we as Christians live under the conditions of such a "doubleness"? Does Paul in these chapters describe what it must be like for followers of Jesus to live in the doubleness of this nation? A nation with such laudable ideals that it has never quite lived up to? Can we be part of healing the doubleness?