**Going through, not around race**

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Posted Oct. 16, 2015 at 10:00 PM

A former Chicago Police officer who promotes the idea that people should learn the history of the establishment of race in the United States in order to adequately address racial inequality will be the speaker at Faith Coalition for the Common Good’s Race and Unity banquet on Saturday, Oct. 17.

Jacqueline Battalora, currently a lawyer and sociology and criminal justice professor at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, will speak at the coalition’s annual fall banquet to be held from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Union Baptist Church, 1405 E. Monroe St.

Faith congregations and other community organizations come together through Faith Coalition to identify common issues in central Illinois, provide education about these issues and work for systemic change, according to [faithcoalition-il.org](http://www.sj-r.com/editor/editportal/faithcoalition-il.org).

Author of the book “Birth of a White Nation,” Battalora said that people need to “go through” and not around the issue of race and that the best place to start that process is to learn the true history of race in the United States. Battalora’s book, for example, is the story of legal history that shows the ways in which the group of humanity named “white people” came into being in the United States and why.

**‘Whites’ birth**

Laborers from such places as Africa and Europe coming to work in the mid-1600s on large landholdings in colonies in the New World all lived the same lives, Battalora said.

“That means that as a matter of law persons of African descent who were free in terms of labor could vote, and they did, could own property, and they did, could own African slaves…” Battalora said. “Something obviously happened that radically transformed colonial society.”

After Bacon’s Rebellion (1670s) in the colony of Virginia, laws were crafted that made “human difference where it didn’t exist before,” Battalora said.

“It is in these laws that you see ‘white people’ referenced for the very first time on planet earth in law,” said Battalora, who described herself in “Birth of a White Nation” as being “born female and made a white girl.” “These laws created a difference now between laborers, who prior to this moment were treated the same, had the same opportunities relative to their class and now that all changed.

“What laws did was invent this human category called ‘white people,’ infused it with a assumption of superiority and gave very different meaning to those who were of African descent and members of native tribes.”

Battalora said ideas about white people being superior are embedded in the United States’ foundational laws and policies. But the answer isn’t in getting around the problem of race inequality (such as trying to promote color blindness) but in getting through it, Battalora said.

“What do I mean by ‘going through’? I mean, number one, this country has to learn the real history,” Battalora said.

Battalora typically asks her students to be a mirror of society when she has them do an exercise in which in 15 seconds they tell what their culture has taught them about young black men: drug dealers, gangbangers, fathers by biology only not by engagement.

“We have a whole list of these assumptions about black men that our culture feeds us regularly,” Battalora said. “All of us are shaped by these dominant messages, these dominant ideas.”

“Image you’re in the role of a police officer, and that is your information about young black men. Making that connect, helps us, I believe to see that the violence that is perpetrated upon black and brown men by law enforcement is an inevitable extension of this deeply embedded, structural white superiority …”

Battalora, who was a Chicago Police officer from 1999 through the early 2000s, said the problem isn’t necessarily with police officers.

“The problem is with our whole society, and it just gets manifested in the more violent, most extreme ways when people have the authority to use lethal force as part of their job,” Battalora said. “I am shaped all the time by that dominant message. … What I’ve learned it truly takes a concerted effort that is really intentional, literally waking up each day and saying, ‘OK. I am going to really try not to allow the dominant messages to impact me as I move about my world today.’ ”

Battalora said Faith Coalition for the Common Good “gets it” that people have to go through the issue of race relations.

“They’re doing it, and they’re inviting the broader Springfield community to go through with them,” Battalora said. “They’re holding onto this vision of what this country could be when we have finally eradicated systemic white superiority.

“They’re part of that hope. They’re learning the history that we didn’t learn in K through 12.”

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