

SBC to probe Land's remarks on Trayvon Martin

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [May 16, 2012](#) issue

Southern Baptist leaders will investigate whether their top ethicist and public policy director plagiarized racially charged remarks about the Trayvon Martin case that many say set back the denomination's efforts on racial reconciliation.

Richard Land, who leads the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission for the Southern Baptist Convention, was accused of lifting remarks for his radio show that accused Democrats and civil rights leaders of exploiting the case of the unarmed Florida teenager who was shot and killed by a volunteer neighborhood watchman.

Though Land has apologized for the remarks and for not citing their source, the commission's executive committee said it was obligated "to ensure no stone is left unturned." An investigatory committee will "recommend appropriate action" to church leaders.

"They need the Travyon Martins to continue perpetuating their central myth: America is a racist and an evil nation. For them it's always Selma, Alabama, circa 1965," Land said on his radio program, speaking of civil rights activists.

Those comments, included in a partial transcript published by Baptist blogger and Baylor University Ph.D. student Aaron Weaver, were previously written by *Washington Times* columnist Jeffrey Kuhner. While conceding that talk radio has different attribution policies than traditional journalism or academic scholarship, "we nevertheless agree with Dr. Land that he could, and should, do a better job in this area," the executive committee stated.

In a statement, Land said he serves "at the will of the trustees," and "I look forward to continuing to work with and under the oversight of my trustees." A commission spokeswoman said Land was not commenting beyond his statement. The commission trustees, along with other Southern Baptist leaders, noted Land's role in the passage of the 1995 resolution in which Southern Baptists apologized for their

past defense of slavery. They also credited him for “engaging the culture and our political leaders on matters of religious conviction.”

Fred Luter, the New Orleans pastor who’s expected to become the SBC’s first African-American president, called the remarks “unhelpful.” Ed Stetzer, a Southern Baptist researcher who blogged about Land’s comments without mentioning him by name, said the firestorm threatens to undo progress made by the overwhelmingly white denomination. “The Southern Baptist Convention still must earn a better reputation for racial inclusion and justice,” Stetzer wrote. —RNS