

BIRTHING BLACK POWER:
RELIGION, POSITIVE BLACK SELF-IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND
THE PECULIARITY OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY, 1878 – 1917

by

DARYL G. BLOODSAW

(Under the Direction of Sandy Dwayne Martin)

ABSTRACT

The Black Power Movement was a declarative and defining moment in positive Black self-identity, empowering Blacks to declare self-assuredly, “I’m Black and I’m proud!” This thesis examination identifies the post-Reconstruction era (1878 – 1917) as the incubator for positive Black self-identity that would birth the Black Power Movement a half-century later.

In the post-Reconstruction period, when the proverbial race furnace was turned up “seven times hotter,” and extermination was the order of the day, positive Black self-identity was forged. From “slave” to “colored,” to “Negro,” to “Afro-American,” to “Black” and “African American,” the identity crisis has ebbed and flowed with the untoward influences of the dominant white culture to label and define Blacks never as equal, but always as the “other” or “different” where different almost always connotes “less than.”

The burgeoning of Black Christianity buoyed Blacks and imbued them with a sense of self that refused to relent in the face of extreme racism and degradation. Given the history and centrality of faith in the Black community, this examination considers the impact of white

Christianity, or “Amerianity,” on Black identity development and its belief in a celestial hierarchy in which whiteness is next to godliness and blackness is insuperably inferior.

Examples are offered to show the impact and influence of white Christianity through the words, thoughts, actions, and ministries of two of the founding fathers of the Southern Baptist Convention, capturing the essence of an enduring paternalistic theology and practice that bred civil Southern religion that is now the national civil religion in the United States. Conversely, to counter the deleterious tenets of Southern civil religion, representative examples are offered in Blacks who through Black Christianity demonstrated positive, Black self-identity using the acronym BRASH (Belongingness, Resistance, Agency, Syncretism, and Hope), laying the groundwork that would, a half-century later, produce the self-assuredness evidenced in the Black Power movement.

INDEX WORDS: African American, Black Identity, Black Christianity, Black Church, Black Power, Evangelicalism, Post-Reconstruction, Slavery, Southern Baptist Convention

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DEDICATION

In Memoriam:

To my pastor, Reverend Doctor Calvin Otis Butts, III, who was the epitome of what it means to stand ably in the home, in the church, in the community, and in the academy. Thank you for your guidance and sage advice at every point of my formation in ministry and politics. I am grateful for who you were and, even in death, who you continue to be for me and for the direction you provided to get me thus far on my journey. That “fire” is still burning, and I will endeavor to do it just as you did: “Strugglin’ and fightin’.” (Psalm 27:4)

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a religio-cultural-historical examination of the buoyancy of Black religious thought in developing positive Black self-identity during a post-Reconstruction era dominated socially, culturally, and religiously by the peculiarity of American Christianity. In an era that challenged not merely Black life, but Black existence in totality under the auspices of a dominant culture and narrative of white supremacy, Black religious thought, across the spectrum, sustained Black people and provided an alternative view to an enduring, and uniquely nationalistic version of Christianity. From this dark and desolate existential reckoning for Blacks during post-Reconstruction, I contend that it was transformed from a dungeon of despair to an incubator for the positive Black self-identity formation realized in the Black Power Movement of the 1960s. So powerful was this identity that it simultaneously alienated some Blacks more comfortable with “the tranquilizing drug of gradualism”ⁱ while commandeering local, state, and federal investments to exterminate it. It is that steely determination to “be” that is born in the era when the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government collaborated to remove every inalienable right from Blacks.

According to the Pew Research Center, approximately ninety percent of Americans claimed to be Christian in 1990, yet today, that number hovers around sixty-six percent of the population, and the trend is not stabilizing; the trend is downward as fewer Americans claim Christianity as their faith, and fewer claim to attend church either regularly or at all. While America has the largest population of Christians, several sources, including Pew Research, report that Christianity is growing on the continents of Africa and Asia, in Latin America, and Eastern

Europe, and Pentecostalism is playing an outsized role. While many factors contribute to these dynamics, much can be discerned from a closer examination of America's peculiar brand of Christianity undergirded by white supremacy. Few will tend to agree with this assessment within white Christianity in America today, but it is impossible to draw clean water from a tainted well.

The importance of this for Black Christians is seen in one of the Nation of Islam's main appeals to Blacks during the 1940s, who mischaracterized Christianity as the "white man's religion." The truth in their pronouncement is not found in a sweeping generalization of Christianity as the "white man's religion," but Toni Morrison reminded us, "there is a kernel of truth in every lie." It was not Christianity, but it was America's version of Christianity that sent thousands to the Nation under the rubric of a half-truth. In *Message to the Blackman*, Elijah Muhammad wrote, "There is no hope for us in Christianity; it is a religion organized by the enemies (the white race) of the Black Nation to enslave us to the white race's rule."¹ The appeal of the Nation of Islam was that there was created a sense of belongingness in a God who embodied the people's struggles and gave them the confidence and assurance that they had worth and value. James Cone in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* would explain that in America, being Black and being Christian at once presents a deep and troubling conundrum for "even in the Black community, the public meaning of Christianity was white."²

Black religious thought, Black Christianity, and the Black church have played a central sustaining role in the hearts and minds of Black people since arriving in America in 1619. From Traditional African Religions that made the transatlantic voyage during the Middle Passage

¹ Elijah Muhammad, *Message To The Blackman In America* (Phoenix, Arizona: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 1973), 221.

² James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2011), xvii.

under inhumane conditions in the belly of slave ships to the Black church formed under subhumanization conditions of chattel slavery, Black religious thought has continually found ways to transform the ugliness of humanity into meaning that has never resorted to returning death for death received, but instead returning life for death inflicted. While Black religious thought spans the religious spectrum of beliefs, my focus is specifically on the role of Black Christianity and the Black church in rebutting the unremitting degradation of blackness and developing and instilling positive Black self-identity in a people searching for the God of the oppressed. Positive Black self-identity is not a “given” in a nation where, for the dominant narrative, the denigration of blackness has been normalized. It is further complicated when it is ingested by Blacks who are conditioned to being the “other,” where “different” is almost always defined as “less than.” Overcoming the burden of a non-white birth in this country requires that one have a heightened self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-discovery; each one aids in centering one’s thoughts solely on one’s own being without respect to or regard for the shadowy, spectral figure of whiteness.

America’s Christian nationalism, under the guise of Christianity, has wrought collateral damage to the identity and well-being of Blacks. As will be seen in Chapter 4, the Southern Baptist Convention, whose very founding was rooted in the preservation of slavery as an accouterment of the Southern way of life, has never relinquished its hold on the hearts and minds of whites and Blacks as it is still the dominant voice of American Christianity today. As will be noted, current manifestations of white supremacy are not as blatant as they were in the past. Yet, the theology of white supremacy survives and thrives, even amongst some Blacks who want to hurry past the past for the euphoria of a heaven with a white God. Some of the leading men of the Southern Baptist Convention, indispensable in its founding, held and bequeathed to future

generations of pastors and leaders Calvinistic beliefs of God's sovereignty that extended to whites as keepers of Blacks – God kept whites, but whites kept Blacks.

To demonstrate continuity, founded in 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention reasserted slavery's religious dimensions in 1892. Heretically exploiting innocent biblical truth for personal, financial, and social gain, they operationalized scriptures, making themselves God's personal overseers. To justify slavery, they relied upon and misinterpreted texts and misappropriated meaning. Not surprisingly, few scriptures could be operationalized to support slavery, but proof did not matter; ultimately, it was about the preservation of the only worldview that made sense to the white heart and mind in America. The intentional spiritualizing of topics like justice, liberation, and salvation was handed down as legitimate biblical interpretations out of convenience and difficulty reconciling true Christian behavior with their normalized but un-Christian behaviors outside of the pulpit. Reasoning that "they were men of their own time" makes palatable continued beliefs and practices today that are inextricably tied to those practiced in centuries past. The visceral and dismissive defenses of current belief systems carry the same weight as they did with the convention's founders, who prioritized southern honor, which, when reproached, was met with swift rebuke. Charles Reagan Wilson's *The Lost Cause* supplies a prime example: "While urging reconciliation with the North post-emancipation, Baptist editor James B. Gambrell typically responded with anger when he heard Northern criticism of the Southern past: "If we are to be told that our fathers were barbarous in holding in servitude a people committed to them in a state of slavery, we are sufficiently human to resent it as unjust and untimely."³

³ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 103.

Beyond scripture, to bolster their claims of biblical inerrancy, they relied upon reasoning of if freed from where would recompense come to the enslaved for their toil, who would remunerate enslavers for their loss of wealth, and the impasse of the expected retribution of Blacks for the harsh treatment by whites. It is true that the occasional slave uprising occurred over the course of the length and breadth of American chattel slavery, but overwhelmingly, Blacks, then and now, demonstrated that forgiveness in Black Christianity does not seek revenge but instead, in many cases, has sought a separation due to white prejudice.

Why does the Southern Baptist Convention receive such direct focus regarding its impact on the development of a positive Black self-identity? Undoubtedly, the Southern Baptist Convention has represented the nation's social, educational, political, religious, and cultural heartbeat, both historically and in contemporary times. It was not merely “on” the pulse; it was the pulse itself. Although the Southern Baptist Convention has seen nearly a twenty percent decline in membership since the mid-2020s, it still maintains a robust membership of nearly thirteen million. In comparison, the National Baptist Convention USA, the largest Black convention in the United States, has a recorded membership of seven and a half million. As an organization, the Convention has been the greatest purveyor of American culture since the early nineteenth century, particularly when the northern states started to abolish slavery following the Second Great Awakening.

It should be noted emphatically that nothing here claims or insinuates that the Black church is perfect or without its own issues. The Black church is as fractured as the souls who pour into its sanctuaries on a regular and semi-regular basis. Problems that plague the church are many of the same issues that plague the white churches, as some of the oppressive practices migrated over as Blacks left white churches to start their own. None is more prevalent than the

staid non-biblical teachings about women's role in the pulpit as ministers and pastors. While many have come around in the aftermath of the HIV and AIDS epidemic that hit the Black community particularly hard, many refused to speak about it or do anything proactive in support of the stricken individuals and their families "because that's not in the Bible." There is the conservatism of the Black church stoking the flames of homophobia, limiting the roles and, therefore, the personhood of the LGBTQI community...except in many cases where the music of the church is concerned. Then, there are those churches that have grown completely disconnected from the issues and problems of the community in which the church sits; cathedrals are built in places where congregants must step over the homeless to enter for worship. These are but a few of the problems facing the Black church, but regardless of these things, it must never be forgotten or dismissed that the only thing Black people in this country own and control is the Black church. When everything else could be taken away, the Black church has been a symbol of Black progress and Black hope. Every right and every privilege Black people – and most other non-whites – have in this country emanated from the heart of the Black church, and the fact remains that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The best thing going for Black people is the Black church; beaten, battered, and out of shape, the further we move from the Black church as a community, the weaker we get as a people. There has never been a time when everybody from the Black community attended church or any other house of worship, but the strength and vitality of the church mirror the strength and vitality of its people.

To this end, the goal is to highlight the connection between the centrality of Black religious thought in the life of the Black community and Black self-identity. We explore the role of Black Christianity through the creation of the Black church as a necessary corrective to white Christianity, founded upon the principle of a celestial hierarchy of white superiority and Black

inferiority. The literature review is divided into three categories: Psychological, Sociological, and Religio-Cultural-Historical approaches. This approach is employed to demonstrate the richness of the field of analysis, research, and studies on Black identity, and as a testament to this examination, the field continues to be ripe for further study. While the psychological and sociological studies provide a broad context, this study falls squarely in the religio-cultural-historical approach. Herein is where this study finds its footing. It is differentiated from others in that it identifies and focuses on the monumental impact of white Christianity upon positive Black self-identity, specifically relating it to the impact of the Southern Baptist Convention and its impact socially, culturally, and religiously. As stated earlier, given the importance of faith in the Black community in this era (in the historical backdrop is an explosion of church growth, conventions, and associations), the presence and impact of white Christianity is pervasive in all aspects of Black communal life. Overcoming its deleterious effects on blackness would require not just a Herculean effort, but a supernatural one.

The third chapter provides the historical context of the negative manifestations that blackness has faced across three periods. It examines the denuding of blackness during slavery, the threat posed by blackness in Reconstruction, and the suppression and fortification of blackness in the post-Reconstruction era. Throughout each phase (or “era,” as it were), the presence of the Black church and Black religious thought bolstered the Black community and provided the impetus to move forward into an uncertain future with uncommon confidence and faith.

Chapter four looks at the challenge of shedding the baggage of an ascribed inferiority complex imputed by whiteness. Three dynamic white men are employed to exemplify period thinking about Blacks and blackness; one defying conventional wisdom and is consequently

written out of American history books, and two who set the tone for white Christianity in the mid-nineteenth century, which still endures a century and a half later.

The concluding chapter introduces the acronym “BRASH” (Belongingness, Resistance, Agency, Syncretism, and Hope) as an instrument that provides evidence and rationale behind positive Black self-identity development in an era meant to re-enslave Blacks in more inhumane ways than chattel slavery. Six Blacks from the post-Reconstruction era are raised as exemplars for each characteristic of “BRASH,” demonstrating the resilience of blackness under the extreme conditions of white Christianity and white supremacy. The acronym “BRASH” is a fitting description because the definition of the word “brash” accurately describes the response of whiteness to Black uplift and progress. The Reconstruction era is a perfect example. Given the many positive developments for Blacks during Reconstruction, the era has long been taught as an abject failure. The only way to reconcile the two is to accept the assessment of whites of the era who were confronted with the reality of Black achievement, which conflicted with their worldview that Blacks were incapable of doing anything without white supervision and direction. In fact, the achievements during the period were accomplished over and above the many white disruptions. How is failure the history? Because those who were threatened by Black success had the power to record the history.

This examination thesis seeks to lift the proverbial hood of the development of Black self-identity to diagnose the origins of attempts to implant permanent negative Black self-identity that had to be overcome time and time again, particularly during post-Reconstruction, a period of intense and intentional denuding and deracination experienced by Blacks at the hands of white supremacy. I contend that this period, while dark, was a period of demonizing blackness and, inadvertently, “diamonizing” Black identity. Diamond growth happens under intense pressure

and intense heat over long periods, which exemplifies the resilience of positive Black self-identity. It is no wonder that the period that immediately followed post-Reconstruction is marked historically and culturally as the “New Negro” era or fashioned through the arts in the explosion of blackness consumed by the world in the Harlem Renaissance. It is this evolution from post-Reconstruction through the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Civil Rights Movement that brings us to the pinnacle of positive Black self-identity, the Black Power Movement.

CHAPTER 1:

Black Religious Thought and Positive Black Self-Identity –

“When the Foundations are Destroyed”

“Notions of God’s providence at work in hellish situations are dangerous inasmuch as they serve to legitimate untold abuses in order to reconcile God’s justice, love, and power with the worst instances of oppression. Yet they provide requisite hope that God still cares for people in pandemonium, letting them know there is eschatological merit to their suffering. At the end of the day, their suffering will serve a higher purpose in a plan they are at a loss to explain. In this regard, the Joseph novella provides the basis of a theology of hope for those desperately groping for God’s hand in the midst of the overwhelming darkness of human inhumanity.”⁴

- Rodney S. Sadler, Jr.

“Through many dangers, toils, and snares” the buoyancy of Black religious thought in nurturing and developing positive Black self-identity during a post-Reconstruction era dominated by the peculiarity of American Christianity has played a sustaining role in preventing communal regression, stagnancy, and collapse while imbuing the people with a faith that is *the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen*. The goal of this thesis examination is a religio-cultural-historical approach to demonstrating the power, the presence, the promise, and the possibilities inherent in Black religious thought, particularly the Christianity of the Black church, in the development of positive Black self-identity as demonstrated in the nadir of race relations in America during the post-Reconstruction era of 1878 – 1917. It is this period that highlights the sustaining resilience of Black faith, hope, and charity, encouraging and inspiring present and future generations that there is intrinsic and inherent value in their blackness; *faith* that despite the evil in the circumstances, God still “stands in the shadows keeping watch over

⁴ Page, Jr., Hugh R. *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel’s Scriptures From Africa And The African Diaspora* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010) 78.

His own;”⁵ *hope* that there is meaning and wholeness to be gained from enduring horrors unrequited, and *charity* in not returning hate for hate undermining a palpable fear that still centuries later undergirds whiteness. It is impossible to overestimate the seriousness of a strong, stable personal outlook situated in Black excellence in an environment where strength in blackness is feared and discouraged. The lack of strong, positive Black self-identity in a society that subjugates, objectifies, and undermines blackness is to become witness to the inseparable and progressive relationship between death and rigor mortis.

Steeped in Black religious thought and practice, Black Christianity and the Black church are not *products* of American religion...they were birthed *because* of America’s peculiar version of Christianity. It was an immaculate conception...the Black church is *of* the Holy Spirit!!! Like Christianity itself, the Black church was born as a movement of resistance against inherent dehumanizing imperial demands, not of first-century Roman oppression of Jews in Palestine, but America’s brand of whiteness adorned with Christianity. In the first line of the first paragraph of the first chapter of Raphael Warnock’s *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety & Public Witness*, he declares thunderously that “The Black church was born fighting for freedom.”⁶ The Black church, in all its manifestations, was birthed because of America’s peculiar brand of Christianity, or what I identify as “Amerianity”. It emerged in response to "Amerianity" as circumstances became so dire that the oppressive and exclusionary practices within the white church compromised the dignity and humanity of Blacks. Like the segregated public busing rules of the Civil Rights era, when allowed to worship, Blacks were relegated to

⁵ James Russell Lowell, <https://poets.org/poem/present-crisis#:~:text=Standeth%20God%20within%20the%20shadow,mastered%20by%20their%20faith%20divine%2C>, accessed on November 3, 2024.

⁶ Raphael Warnock. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety & Public Witness* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 13.

assigned sections of the back pews, balconies, or standing room only, and when “necessary,” forcing Blacks in prayer to move when and if whites wanted to sit down. The Black church was birthed because the theology of America’s version of Christianity was predicated upon the supremacy of whiteness and Western European exceptionalism. Robert Jones highlights the endurance of the benevolent indifference white Christians showed toward Blacks in *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, where he shows statistically that “White Christians think of themselves as people who hold warm feelings toward African Americans while simultaneously embracing a host of racist and racially resentful attitudes inconsistent with those warm feelings.”⁷ Though more brazen and conspicuous in the early days of colonial America, when the door of white Christianity was eventually opened to enslaved Africans, one of the potential effects was to create in them a permanent hermeneutic of inferiority and complacency, making the Africans docile. Amerianity, America’s peculiar brand of Christianity, has grown more subtle in its various manifestations over time. Still, its potency remains fatal to blackness, including for those seemingly impervious to its sedating effects. To be sure, the language has shifted, but the core of the theology tinged with paternalism remains the same. The outright racial insensibilities of colonial American Christianity have been ameliorated and diluted in some ways but not erased. This same theology has been integrated into more mainstream acceptability, but its impact is just as disruptive, if not more, due to its morphine drip-numbing effect on positive Black identity. Found within is the illusion of acceptability “in Christ,” but only as long as social conventions remain intact with whiteness as exceptional and blackness as secondary or tertiary where and when other races enter the

⁷ Robert P. Jones. *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 183.

equation. This accepted social convention underlies the principles that led to the overturning of the legal ruling issued in the 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* when, in 1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education* opinion rendered by Chief Justice Earl Warren admonished: “To separate [blacks] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.”⁸

Amerianity has a soft, vulnerable underside that is equipped with a hard outer shell of white supremacy. Amerianity is a Christian nationalism undergirded by white supremacy that holds steadfastly to a Jesus draped in a tunic made of the Rebel (né American) flag, without which this Jesus stands naked, feeble, and, most importantly, undesirable. To illustrate the pervasiveness of Amerianity, I point to an interaction I had one Tuesday morning after teaching my 8:00 AM class. A gentleman who happens to have lived in my hometown of Monroe, Georgia, with whom I had a cordial passing relationship in the Religion Department at the University of Georgia, approached me. As we talked, he teased me, a senior pastor of a leading Black church in the city, to attend his church one Sunday morning. He explained that they have a powerful worship every Sunday, and he sweetened it by adding that his church has “a diverse congregation,” which piqued my interest. He said they have Blacks (like me), Latinos, and whites (like him). As we slowly walked the short distance from Peabody Hall towards the main library, I was struck by the irony that in that very moment (and nearly every other moment of his life), we walked beneath the shady grove of White Oak trees and simultaneously beneath the shady grove of his subconscious white privilege which I took as a teachable moment...not

⁸ “To the Montgomery County Board of Education,” The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, accessed August 12, 2024, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/montgomery-county-board-education>.

because he was a bad guy by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, he is a really good guy, and this was an opportunity that, if missed, would deprive him of a greater awareness of his unquestioned white privilege.

Because we were nearing the ascending steps to the main library, and he was a genuine fellow whom I really liked, I took the opportunity to ask him a couple of probing questions about their “diverse” congregation. I asked him, “What color is your pastor?” He responded, “white.” I followed up with, “Who’s in charge of counting the money, and what color is *he* (italicized because I was certain of his answer in race and gender...understanding that *isms* are consistent, if nothing else). He responded on cue that the person was white...*and* male. So, as not to “beat a dead horse” and to make my point before entering the library, I asked him, “What color is the minister of music?” A “wrong” answer here would not foil my summational intent, although a “right” answer would be a proverbial and emphatic, posterizing slam dunk. He answered confidently on cue and with a smile that the minister of music was “Black.” What neither he nor Amerianity recognizes is that these relationships reinforce racial social conventions of permissive participation by Blacks in white settings, always with restrictions and without ultimate authority. And where the appearance of authority arises, it, too, is saddled with limitations either from within the individual or from without inside the organization.ⁱⁱ

Put frankly, given its potency and centrality in a long-held “Christian nation,” it can be argued that one of the unspoken, inherent aims of Amerianity is to maintain a four-hundred-plus-year-old power structure in America that it refuses to recognize nor does it have the desire to disturb what it inherently sees and believes is the natural order of things. The refusal to acknowledge this aim as tied inextricably to its version of Christianity is to accept as God-ordained the hierarchy of white supremacy supported by the internal structures and organization

of the white church. In other words, the problem is with “them” (Blacks) or how do we fix “them” so that they feel more comfortable in white church environments that have never disavowed the white power structure that continues to sustain its life. It is a proverbial “Make America Great *AGAIN*” syndrome that has been raised back to the surface of socio-religious America. This was never more evident than when having lunch with a prominent local white pastor who called for a meeting with other local pastors at the onset of the protests during the George Floyd unrest, primarily led by young Blacks. I told him that I could not (and conscientiously would not) attend, but if he were available to have lunch, I would gladly meet with him as I was confident that our conversation would be imminently more beneficial than my presence at that meeting.

The reasons for declining his pastor’s invitation were multivalent. First, as I had mentioned to him, I had another previously planned engagement at that time. Second, I was not simply going to “run” to a meeting called by a white minister when they seldom showed up at meetings called by Black ministers. Third, I explained to him that I shy away from photo ops, which this invitation had all of the optics of becoming: “Local Ministers Come Together In Show of Unity.” The purpose of sharing this encounter is to demonstrate the who and what of Amerianity. It must be noted that the egregious nature of the murder of George Floyd at once shocked the white church and its leaders and simultaneously exposed for them the callousness with which Black lives and Black livelihoods are treated in America. This indignation was short-lived because Amerianity, as a product of whiteness, limits criminality and criminal behavior to the individual perpetrator when white, like Police Officer Derek Chauvin, but similar misconduct and criminal behavior of an individual perpetrator when Black is internalized as a condition of the Black community. During lunch, two things set the tone for the importance of this work.

First, he shared how he had admonished his Black members for never having said anything about how they had been made to feel, whether in the church or their lives in general. While I must confess that I do not remember the exact course of the discussion (as I attempted to help him to realize that his willful blindness equally matched their reticence), the point suffices that at the mention of James Cone and Black Liberation Theology, his immediate response was “is there God in that?” Of course, later in the conversation, he would follow protocol in doing what white privilege always does to engender rapport with Blacks...he spoke of an “unnamed” Black man he had met in Atlanta who helped him see from a Black perspective what he had heretofore never considered as a potential reality in Black life. Though it may seem an incontrovertible blanket condemnation of white Christians, it is not and should not be deemed so. It is the product of a system that whites, and therefore Blacks, have been handed within the confines of a particular and peculiar system of a racial hierarchy filtered and refracted towards whiteness as inherently good, right, and godlier. How, if one has never ventured beyond the confining constraints of a particular belief system, can the possibility of an alternative view be openly and objectively examined? Put plainly, it is a complex undertaking. Robert P. Jones, born Southern Baptist in Georgia and then raised Southern Baptist in Mississippi, explains it this way: “...higher levels of racism are associated with higher probabilities of identifying as a white Christian; and, conversely, adding Christianity to the average white person’s identity moves him or her toward more, not less, affinity for white supremacy.”⁹ Jones continues by saying that white supremacy does not just live in the spaces that are socially visible and attitudinal towards Blacks but “it has become deeply integrated into the DNA of white Christianity itself.”¹⁰ In short, being careful not

⁹ Jones, 187.

¹⁰ Ibid.

to make a sweeping generalization or condemnation of all white churches, the incontrovertible truth of Amerianity is that as it is practiced it is “a white man’s Church...It does not call [Blacks] to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor.”¹¹

This is Amerianity, America’s peculiar version of Christianity, imbued at once with a hermeneutic of white superiority and, simultaneously, black inferiority and subjectivity. In a sense, it is a benevolent indifference towards anything nonwhite, and particularly blackness in this country, that silently infects the heart and the mind in many cases without the arbiter ever being aware. It is in the air *we* breathe. Yes, *we* because Blacks are not immune to the self-deleterious effects of Amerianity; whether it emanates internally and/or is reinforced externally...it is inescapable. What remains is a near-innate, subconscious desire to emulate that which oppresses and suppresses. The greater the indignity expressed at this realization, the deeper the injury caused by Amerianity.

How do once proud people rediscover their “song,” or how do these people recover the self that God created fearfully and wonderfully to be able to, with confidence and excellence, “*sing the Lord’s songs in a strange land?*”

Black power is pro-Black and anti-nothing. Black power seeks to strengthen and imbue Blacks with belongingness and positive self-esteem that buoys self-confidence and self-assurance in the presence of persistent and intentional degradation and dehumanization. Black power riles the insecure and inures angst in the cautious; it is hope for the hopeless and strength for the weak; it infuses those of African descent with a self-confidence that enables them to walk erect, speak confidently, and live prosperously. Black Power is not nationalism that seeks to

¹¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 7.

separate and subjugate others, and neither is it integrationist, which results in diminishing its blackness. It was Adam Clayton Power Jr. who said in his *Black Position Paper* about Black power:

“Blacks must distinguish between desegregation and integration. Desegregation removes all barriers and facilitates access to an open society. Integration accomplishes the same thing but has the tendency to *denude the Negro of pride in himself*. Blacks must seek desegregation, thereby retaining pride and participation in their own institutions, just as other groups, the Jews, Irish, Italians, and Poles have done. Negroes are the only group in America that has utilized the word “integration in pursuing equality.”¹² (italics added by me for emphasis)

It is this denuding “the Negro of pride in himself” in America that Powell alludes to that establishes both the grounds and the dire necessity for a study on developing positive Black self-identity. What Powell prognosticated over fifty years ago has blossomed into what Martin Luther King three years earlier described in Black leaders who change from “the representative of the Negro to the white man into the white man’s representative to the Negro. *The tragedy is that too often he does not recognize what has happened to him.*”¹³ (italics added by me) As leaders go, so go their followers. King’s summarizing statement above is a tragic reminder of what happens when a person, regardless of his race or creed, gets lost in the pursuit of “integration” because this fertilizes the ground for complicitous participation in one’s own degradation. Contrary to what many may think or believe about King, as he grew and matured, his thoughts on integration also grew and matured. While it can never be argued that King grew to be a separatist, it was reasoned by James Cone in *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or A Nightmare* that “To say, then, that King was moving toward black separatism is to say that he

¹² Adam Clayton Powell Jr. *Adam By Adam: The Autobiography of Adam Clayton Powell Jr.* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1971), 249.

¹³ Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 160.

displayed a new affirmation of black self-esteem and self-determination.”¹⁴ As he grappled with and navigated the distinctive lines that separate integration and desegregation in a Black and white society, in a speech at the 1968 annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly, King said, “There are times when we must see segregation as a temporary way-station to a truly integrated society.”¹⁵ This gripping statement captured at once King’s wrestling with the stigma of separatism and one of his ultimate communal concerns of “being integrated out of power.”¹⁶

In *Martin & Malcolm and America*, Cone juxtaposes King with Malcolm X, whom I argue is a father figure and the embodiment of the Black Power Movement of the 1960s. Cone positions Malcolm as the one who “almost singlehandedly transformed the way Black people thought of themselves”¹⁷ in that he was unquestionably the progenitor of Black consciousness in post-colonial America. Malcolm, Cone says, “created space for [Blacks] to affirm their blackness. More than anyone else, he taught Blacks that there can be no freedom...without self-esteem, a high regard for themselves as a Black people.”¹⁸ It took King leaving the confines of the racist South to spend time in the ghettos of the North for him to begin to understand the sense of urgency that fueled and propelled Malcolm X’s messages that inspired and motivated Black people to exclaim in confidence, “I’m Black and I’m proud.” Noted scholar and psychologist Kenneth Clark, who was close relationally to both King and Malcolm, would interject his professional opinion on King’s nonviolent stance that taught the oppressed to love their

¹⁴ James H. Cone. *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or A Nightmare* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 226.

¹⁵ Ibid, 234

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 290

¹⁸ Ibid, 291-292

oppressor. Clark concluded, "A deeper analysis, however, might reveal that there is also an unrealistic, if not pathological, basis in King's doctrine."¹⁹ Across a one-hundred-year span from the end of the Civil War to Civil Rights, there are echoes of the protest voices of those like Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey; voices like Anna Julia Cooper, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Ida B. Wells, to name a few. Positive Black identity was wrought and developed against the white-hot fires of racism that sought not only to extinguish black somebodiness, but it graduated to the point of grave disdain and extermination. Kay Wright Lewis, in *A Curse Upon the Nation: Race, Freedom, and Extermination in America and the Atlantic World*, shares that "Fears about Black extermination remained rife within the Black community, and the two thousand African Americans who were lynched from 1890 to 1909 testifies to the fact that the threats of deadly violence were real."²⁰ Somehow, however, blackness not only survived extermination but, rooted in Black religious thought, it found reason to *be*. This perilous period laid the foundation upon which future generations could build. Here, in the fertile middle ground between two giants of the mid-twentieth century, this examination plants its flag and makes its case...the Christianity of Martin Luther King Jr. and the black nationalism of Malcolm. Sitting at the crux of Black power are Black religious thought and positive Black self-identity.

Given the pivotal role religion plays in the communal life of Blacks, particularly in America, protecting the sanctity of what is true and of God grows in importance. It is also necessary to say that the role religion plays does not lean totally on Christianity, as many may initially be led to believe or think. Without question, Christianity in America plays an outsized

¹⁹ Ibid, 262.

²⁰ Kay Wright Lewis, *A Curse Upon The Nation: Race, Freedom, and Extermination in America and the Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 199.

role, but to ignore Black religious thought manifested through Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and the pervasive and staid presence of African Traditional Religions would be to limit Black religious thought, its impact, and its relevance to positive Black self-identity. Neither Black religion nor Black religious thought is a product of America. Indeed, it can be argued that it was Black religion and Black religious thought that became the excuse for the grievous attention of Europeans who would inhumanely and insidiously physically enslaved Africans (while mentally and spiritually enslaving whites) for what they deduced as practicing “idolatry” or “heathen worship.”

To be sure, it is the religious foundation of African people that has not only withstood the test of time but has proven to be a lifeline that aided in their survival from the blunt force trauma exacted upon their bodies, minds, and spirits. Thus, this religious foundation laid the groundwork for livelihoods that defy inhumane treatment while demonstrating the innate power of faith and belief beyond the things of this world. Few things can compare to or compete with the enormous impact religion has had upon the heart, mind, and soul of a believer whose very existence is predicated upon a belief system that supplies an alternative view of the self and the world to the one impressed and imposed by the imperialistic objectives of an oppressor. Imbued with a seemingly inborn knowledge that present circumstances, though excruciatingly demeaning, would not hold the final determination upon the individual. It was (and continues to be) a critical tool to maintain one’s whole sense of being and belonging. Across the continent, African people’s lives were believed to be governed by the presence of a Supreme Being emanating to all parts of the community and world. John Mbiti wrote:

“Traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but for his community of which he is part...To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself

from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence... Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion.”²¹

Mbiti’s explication reaches beyond the continent itself for he argues further that “Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being. It is this that makes the Africans so religious: religion is in their whole system of being.”²² Mbiti’s analysis establishes the inseparable relationship between the essence of an African’s being and his physical existence on the earth regardless of where he may be or in what condition he may be found. The African manifestations of religion do not fit the rigid Western prerequisites for beliefs and understandings that contribute to what is operationalized to ‘define’ religion. Contrary to the African concept of religion, which is broad and includes, as Mbiti explains, “their whole system of being,” it consists of the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown. The Western concept of religion limits the definition to organized beliefs and rituals centered around a supernatural being of the dominant culture. This alone is sufficient to disqualify and overturn the shallow, ethnocentric views of Eurocentric observations of other cultures and religious practices, particularly those of Africa, that have been rendered “primitive”, “savage”, “unsophisticated”, “uncivilized”, “barbaric”, or, even worse, “third world.”

The shift in America was from the practice of religion connected to Africans and African worldviews towards religious thought that celebrated Eurocentricity while debasing Africanity. The shift was to operationalize religious thought that was to accommodate a pre-capitalistic mantra of “might equals right” over and above that which promotes communal uplift and

²¹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 2.

²² Ibid, 3.

cohesion. Unchecked, it is this type of co-opting of religious thought and bending it towards the dominant culture, America's peculiar version of Christianity birthed in colonialism and resting upon white supremacy, that grows to become what in the twenty-first century is called in its most egregious form "evangelicalism." Obery Hendricks suggests in *Christians Against Christianity: How Right-Wing Evangelicals Are Destroying Our Nation And Our Faith* that "It seems reasonable to assume that when Americans self-identify as evangelicals today, many are identifying with the movement as it has taken shape in recent decades – a conservative politicized movement – and not with a static conception rooted in centuries-old history."²³ This "conservative politicized movement" is marked by and rooted in white Christian nationalism on parade as Christianity by permission from whiteness. This means that it is a Christianity that does not have as its determinant core the Gospel of Jesus Christ, until or unless it is draped by what it deems as patriotic through a particular view of white exceptionalism, or in this case, what the dominant narrative in America would describe as "patriotism." Extending the potency of Amerianity's patriotism amongst Blacks, John-Paul Sartre, in Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, aptly posits a clarifying statement that applies to those who justify the belongingness in liminal spaces of whiteness: "Colonialism creates the patriotism of the colonized."²⁴ Conversely, a gospel from below, e.g., the Black church, becomes a counternarrative, or as described by Warren Carter in *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, it becomes a "work of resistance...It stands and/or speaks against the status quo dominated by Roman imperial power and synagogal control. It *resists* these cultural

²³ Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. *Christians Against Christianity: How Right-Wing Evangelicals Are Destroying Our Nation And Our Faith* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021), 3.

²⁴ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), xxviii.

structures.”²⁵ Central to the argument put forth here is that white Christian nationalism seeks to perpetuate a false post-colonial hermeneutic of inferiority in Blacks while simultaneously seeking to concretize an equally false hermeneutic of superiority in whites.

Black Christianity and Black religious thought are central to the Black experience in America. Indeed, this reality would come full circle in the period following the close of the Civil Rights Movement where Eddie Glaude Jr. and Cornel West affirmed that “Black theology emerged in the context of the Black freedom struggle as a series of intense (academic) reflections about the relation between the historical experiences of Black people in the United States and their faith in God.”²⁶ It is an essential ingredient in the fabric of the makeup of the Black community from which Black Christianity and Black religious thought are indivisible. This thought is exemplified in the remarks of the late Rev. Dr. Charles Gilchrist Adams, known as the “Harvard Whooper,” who said of the venerable Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, that “everybody in the community may not belong to Abyssinian, but Abyssinian belongs to everybody in the community.” It is critical to note before moving further that there is nothing monolithic about “Black Christianity” nor “Black religious thought.” Without question, both are mutually variable, and to make a sweeping generalization about either or to attempt to lump the two together is to render both or either moot.

Glaude and West discuss five significant historical moments that define what I refer to as Black religious thought: 1) African American (Black) Religion as the Problem of Slavery, which lasted from the mid-eighteenth century to the Emancipation Proclamation, effectively dissolving

²⁵ Warren Carter. *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 1.

²⁶ Eddie S. Glaude Jr. and Cornel West, *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), xvi.

the physicality of American chattel slavery. During this period of chattel slavery, we observe the Christianization of African Traditional Religion in the hearts and minds of Blacks; 2) African American Religion and the Problem(s) of Emancipation, which spanned from Reconstruction through post-Reconstruction. It is in this post- Reconstruction era that Rayford Logan designates as the “nadir”: “The last decade of the nineteenth century and the opening of the twentieth century marked the nadir of the Negro' s status in American society.” Appropriately, Glaude and West suggest that “This time was one of intense institutional terror against Blacks, in which the racist institutions of the United States rendered the vast majority of African Americans politically powerless, economically vulnerable, and socially degraded.” The third significant historical moment occurs from 1903 to 1954, punctuated by “the Great Migration, international migration, and the urbanization of a large segment of the Black population, transforming Black communities in cities throughout the North...[signaling] a plurality of Black religious expression that would affect the form and content of Black political discourse.” The fourth moment is “African American Religion and the Black Freedom Struggle” from 1954 to 1969, defined by Brown v. Board of Education and James Cone's Black Theology and Black Power. During this time, we witness not only the rise of the institutional strength of Black churches formalizing and exemplifying the social gospel through powerful and prophetic leadership in Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. in the United States Congress, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on southern streets, and Malcolm X marching to Black nationalist beats. Finally, the fifth period, beginning in 1969 and continuing to the present, is designated as “The Golden Age of African American Religious Studies,” marked by contributions from figures such as “Albert Raboteau, John Blassingame, Sterling Stuckey, Eugene Genovese, Lawrence Levine, Joseph R. Washington, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Jacquelyn Grant, Delores Williams, Katie Canon, and others.”

These historical moments are notable because they are in many ways congruent to and tributary to the four periods I emphasize in the development of positive Black self-identity. In designating Reconstruction as the first period of positive Black self-identity in this study, there is no suggestion that positive Black self-identity was non-existent before that first period. Black agency during the Middle Passage of the Atlantic Slave Trade revealed a somebodiness in many Africans who voluntarily chose not to be a part of such commerce of people by casting themselves into the chilly waters of the Atlantic. Black agency was apparent during the period of enslavement, sustaining Africans even under the cruel subhuman circumstances of the marketplace. This Black agency during enslavement is affirmed by Walter Johnson in *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* where he recounts the active participation of the enslaved: “In the slave market, slaveholders and slaves were fused into an unstable mutuality which made it hard to tell where one’s history ended and the other’s began.”²⁷ As is the case with the Christianization of Black religion and Black religious thought, positive Black self-identity was part and parcel to what sustained Blacks through the dark night of chattel slavery in America. Agency, defined here as “the capacity for intentional, willful behavior, sometimes despite social structural obstacles,”²⁸ emanated from unlikely sources of what can only be determined to be healthy self-esteem. “Unlikely” because under the conditions from which Africans had to carve an existence, Mathews adds, “The strengthening of one’s self-esteem, battered and damaged by the psychic and physical brutalities of slavery, became one of the most important psychological supports which Christianity could offer slaves.”²⁹ I argue that even

²⁷ Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside The Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 214.

²⁸ James E. Coté and Charles G. Levine, *Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture: A Social Psychological Synthesis* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002), 9.

²⁹ Donald Mathews, *Religion of the Old South* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, 1977), 220.

though agency and healthy self-esteem existed during slavery, it was post-emancipation when it blossomed, when black self-expression was set at liberty both physically and mentally in America. Hence, the four periods I highlight in the development of positive Black self-identity stretch in the one hundred year span from the end of the Civil War through the Civil Rights era: 1) the period of Reconstruction (1861 – 1877) which gave breath and life to unfettered and uninhibited Black brilliance expressed across the achievement spectrum of education, business, religion, and social progress; 2) Post-Reconstruction (1878 – 1917) which saw each of the Reconstruction amendments effectively annulled and the retrenchment of social inhibitors on blackness; 3) the New Negro Era/Harlem Renaissance (1920 – 1940) which marked the burgeoning of Black expression through culture and the arts; and 4) the Civil Rights Era (1945 – 1965) which birthed the quintessential and fearless somebodiness of the Black Power Movement marking the simultaneous highpoint of Black self-expression and the visceral white response to crush it. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon sagaciously posits that “Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any form or substance. With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it.”³⁰ Rendering blackness a shell meant wrenching every ounce of self-determination from it without killing it completely to fill it again with second-class acceptability and with remnants of whiteness.

During this foundational one-hundred years, the locus of my examination is the period of post-Reconstruction (1878 – 1917), the nadir of race relations in America, marked by the fierce backlash of whiteness’ attempt to extinguish any semblance of humanity in blackness in a futile effort to salvage some remnant of its own humanity.

³⁰ Fanon, *Wretched*, 149.

Definitions

Below are definitions for words and concepts used throughout this examination thesis to help bring clarity and potentially answer questions that may aid in following the reasoning.

Black

Throughout this dissertation, as I have thus far, I capitalize the nomenclature “Black” referencing Black people as a group. Self-identifying and referring others by any “label” stokes uneasy feeling in some, and “Black” is no different, as its many pejorative uses over time evoke fresh feelings of anger. The mental scars remain from labels applied to Blacks from “slave” to “colored,” to “Negro,” to “Afro-American,” to “Black” and “African American.” The complexity of the identity crisis leaves many with unreconciled and unresolved feelings, and consensus will not be found soon. However, I follow in the footsteps of scholars like William E. Cross and J. Lorand Matory who explains from the outset in his book *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* that he uses “the capitalized term ‘Black’ as an ethnic self-identity, which may include some very light-skinned people who believe that their primary social identity is defined by the African part of their ancestry or the Africanness of their primary religious commitments.”³¹ Indeed, “Black” is a state of mind, and as Matory reasons, it references a “self-identity.” However, because of the social setting in America, the spectral presence of negative associations with blackness is conditioned from without by the dominant culture, with the de facto reality that the dominant culture retains control of the historical narrative. Matory further explains, “In the United States, the capitalization of the term is meant to convey more than a shared, externally perceived phenotype; it denotes an internal sense of

³¹ J. Lorand Matory. *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), x.

nationality shared by dark- and light-skinned people of African descent.³² In short, Tzvetan Todorov quotes Antonio de Nebrija's decisive words, "Language has always been the companion of empire," which means that language and its effective use connote who has power and where power lies within relationships. Any group discerning meaning and the scope of life experience through only the lenses of the dominant narrative, particularly by those outside the dominant narrative, is blinded by and limited in power.

J. Kameron Carter explains through the lens of Emanuel Kant that the perfection of whiteness "was the destiny of whites as they made developmental progress towards becoming a race, and it is the perfection that was lost by other races, particularly by the black race."³³ Carter would continue to explain Kant's establishing the uniqueness of white flesh that endures even today:

In the Negro race, white flesh observes a race so mired in its particularity as never to be able to speak with universal force and, therefore, as never positioned to be an analogy or index of the universal. Black flesh lacks universal gravitas. It is trapped in its particularity in such a way that it always needs to justify its existence before universal white flesh."³⁴

For me, "Black" is a unifying term amongst African peoples across the globe. Regardless of social or physical location, even where there may be superficial differences, the Black lived experience as subservient, either internally or externally, unifies Blacks in blackness. Just as happened in the European colonization of the continent of Africa, imperial forces have done an outsized job in destroying Black identity and Black unity and pitting Black people against one another by emptying blackness of itself; so thoroughly has this been accomplished that Blacks in

³² J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 7.

³³ J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90.

³⁴ Ibid, 90.

some cases have become complicit with untoward efforts that seek to sow division and discord amongst Blacks through differentiation and as a result have attempted to assimilate into other cultures that look askance at blackness. This mindset signals the effectiveness of colonization, making blackness the pervasive and proverbial elephant in the room. Paolo Freire explains the effects of imperialism thusly: “The interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated.”³⁵ Part of establishing belongingness and acceptance in dominant non-Black cultures is the aspiration towards “colorblindness” that would allow one to feel whole in unkind and unfriendly settings towards blackness. This is seen in other cultures who emigrate to the United States, who believe sight unseen that when they arrive to become Americanized, they begin their journey “below whites, but above Blacks,” including other Blacks who emigrate to the United States. But, of course, the differentiation shifts in the case of other African Blacks. There is the careful admonition to differentiate African Blacks or Caribbean Blacks from “American” Blacks on perceived differences between the different Black groups based on the vain hopes the unifocal lens of whiteness refracts upon one's nativity. It is a way of elevating the particularity of certain elements of blackness in the eyes of whites, yet most conscious Blacks realize it has nothing to do with the individual's accent; it is the blackness of skin that is most offensive to whiteness. Oftentimes, this aspiration results in having to distance oneself from his or her own culture to “fit in” with the dominant culture. Turning the tide from blackness sculpted by whiteness will not be easy. Still, the development of positive Black self-identity grows in importance when viewed

³⁵ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 74.

through labels assigned and affixed by those who consciously or unconsciously seek the preservation of their own culture as base toward which all others must strive.

Blackness

Blackness is that which is, in America, juxtaposed to whiteness in culture, custom, and belief. By nature, blackness is complementary to all others when it is confident in self-affirmation. Without self-affirmation, it is weak and useless. William E. Cross defines blackness as “a state of mind, not an inherited trait, and its acquisition often requires considerable effort.”³⁶

Whiteness

“In this country, American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate” is Toni Morrison's contribution in *The Bluest Eye* as a base consideration in the meaning of whiteness. Understood here and elsewhere, whiteness is to be viewed as a social construct wherein white is accepted as normative and all others are abnormal or inferior. For the dominant culture, whiteness is the base against which all others must be legitimated as worthy, good, right, acceptable, or even in cases of blissful or innocent ignorance (where, for example, blissful may be related to accepted standards of beauty and innocence may be associated with the obfuscation of truth in education...or a lack thereof) across customs, culture, and beliefs. It would be a mistake to believe that the particularity of whiteness only affects and impacts others. James Baldwin, in *The First Next Time*, writes about the internal subconscious struggle of whites in and with whiteness: “They are, in fact, still trapped in a history which they do not understand...Many of them, indeed, know better...In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is

³⁶ William E. Cross, Jr., *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 148.

the loss of their identity...Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality."³⁷

Belongingness

"Belongingness" is defined here as an amalgamation of different hypotheses offered by Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary in their article "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation."³⁸ For this dissertation, belongingness should be understood as the innate human need to belong or be connected to something greater than oneself; additionally, it is the need "to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships;"³⁹ it is a measure that provides a sense of self-value and "somebodiness" as a part of a group or a whole. Baumeister and Leary support (and I concur) that belongingness is a fundamental human motivation that can affect emotional patterns and cognitive processes. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid demonstrates how attaining or achieving a positive sense of self through healthy self-esteem is impossible without a deep sense of belongingness. In this light, belongingness must be achieved before developing positive self-esteem. In the article "Maslow and the Motivational Hierarchy: Measuring Satisfaction of the Needs," Robert J. Taormina and Jennifer H. Gao quote the findings of Baumeister and Leary, who reveal potential implications of a lack of belongingness: "Social exclusion may well be the most common and important cause of anxiety" because it is accompanied by feelings of social rejection, isolation, loneliness, and depression, which confirms Maslow's observation that "practically all theorists of psychopathology have stressed

³⁷ 1. James Baldwin, *Collected Essays: Notes of a Native Son, Nobody Knows My Name, The Fire Next Time, No Name in the Street, The Devil Finds Works, Other Essays* (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 294.

³⁸ Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, American Psychological Association, *Psychological Bulletin* 1995, Vol 117, No. 3, 497-529.

³⁹ Ibid.

thwarting of the love needs as basic in the picture of maladjustment.”⁴⁰ Any attempt to circumvent belongingness and develop self-esteem proves futile, and the making of a fragile personality shatters under life’s pressures and trials. Devoid of belongingness, one succumbs to the same “otherliness” status described in Tupac Shakur’s confessional release of “Me Against The World” where the individual has internalized the struggle “to be” in aloneness against all others. Belongingness is a prerequisite upon which self-esteem is to be built; indeed, only therein is the opportunity presented for shared positive values and outlooks that portend a healthy and productive self-actualization.

Positive Black Self-Identity

Given the centrality and significance of agency in the development of positive Black self-identity within an American social context, identity itself must be defined, explicating it as a “function of both external (social) and internal (agentic) factors, and that both the sociological and the psychological perspectives are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of human self-definition.”⁴¹ Identity is at once a psychosocial mechanism that combines what Ruth Horowitz describes formulaically as a combination of group identity (GI) plus personal identity (PI), culminating in self-concept (SC). The formula, then, is $GI + PI = SC$. From this, it is possible to deduce that identity is a combination of how one perceives oneself both from a personal perspective and simultaneously how one perceives oneself as part of a

⁴⁰ Robert J. Taormina and Jennifer H. Gao, “Maslow and the Motivation Hierarchy: Measuring Satisfaction of the Needs,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 126, no. 2 (July 1, 2013): 155–77, <https://doi.org/10.5406/amerjpsyc.126.2.0155>.

⁴¹ Côté and Levine, 9. James Cote and Charles G Levine. *Identity Formation, Agency, And Culture: A Social Psychological Synthesis* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002), 9.

larger group to which one belongs, particularly and especially, in this case, racially. These two components combine to imbue the individual with an identity. Erik Erikson explains that

“Every person’s psychosocial identity...contains a hierarchy of positive and negative elements...The human being, in fact, is warned not to become what he often had no intention of becoming so that he can learn to anticipate what he must avoid...The individual belonging to an oppressed and exploited minority, which is aware of the dominant cultural ideals but prevented from emulating them, is apt to fuse the negative images held up to him by the dominant majority with the negative identity cultivated in his own group.”⁴²

Hence, given the mental, social, and psychological assault on Black personhood and selfhood by the dominant white culture in America, my working definition of positive Black self-identity is *one’s self-awareness, self-discovery, and self-acceptance of the particularities of blackness unencumbered by (the inevitability of) whiteness*. This definition breathes life into the self-confidence that can only be realized intentionally, as noted by Erik Erikson: “Identity-consciousness is, of course, overcome only by a sense of identity won in action.”⁴³ Positive Black self-identity does not merely come about...it must be forged out of despair and adversity. Examples of positive Black self-identity are found in the likes of W.E.B. Du Bois and Nannie Helen Burroughs, who, in their respective fields, refused to allow the environment around them to control who they became and what they contributed. In every case, they were their own successes against forces, within and outside the Black community, that sought to limit their impact. Examples of negative Black self-identity are those like Casper Holstein and “Madam” Stephanie St. Clair of Harlem and Daniel McKee Jackson of Chicago, who built criminal

⁴² Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968), 303.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 300.

empires in and on the Black community, replicating the oppression of whites upon Black people for their personal benefit and wealth.

Evangelical

First and foremost, the term “evangelical” extends from the time of the First and Second Great Awakenings, at a time of religious formation and nation-building in America. Donald G. Mathews argues that instead of a First Great Awakening (1730s – mid-1740s in the northern colonies and 1740s – 1750s in the southern colonies) and a Second Great Awakening (1790s – mid-1840s), there was merely one continuous evangelical flow with ebbs and tides. These were periods marked by a renewed religious fervor which greatly emphasized forging a personal relationship with Jesus, a change of heart, and a personal reflection. Charles Taylor in *Sources of The Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* submits that while “there are strands of American evangelical Protestantism which in some respects are continuous with the spirituality of the Great Awakening,”⁴⁴ there have been some crucial changes, among which is the negation in modern beliefs of predestination. While Taylor only scratches the surface in speaking about predestination, he does not mention a couple of fundamental aspects of contemporary evangelicalism. First, modern “evangelical” has arguably come to often connote a politicized movement rather than a specific doctrine of salvation or “Gospel dispensation.”⁴⁵ Some of this can be traced back to the waning days of the Second Great Awakening, which coincided with the

⁴⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of The Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 497.

⁴⁵ Kristin Kobes Du Mez, and Hannah Butler. “The Reinvention of “Evangelical” in American History: A Linguistic Analysis,” *Anxious Bench*, Patheos. May 31, 2018.
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2018/05/the-reinvention-of-evangelical-in-american-history-a-linguistic-analysis/>

northern states' systematic abolition of slavery and the subsequent emergence of the Southern Baptist Convention, explicitly founded in a break with the Triennial Convention over the issue of the preservation of slavery across the South. Second, "The political nature of modern evangelicalism is not surprising as there have been many manifestations and evolutions over time."⁴⁶ Kristin Kobes and Hannah Butler report, "Historically, it's important to realize that this isn't the first time 'evangelicalism' has been a topic of public conversation. And it's not the first time that the term has been reinvented. Linguistic analysis reveals multiple shifts in meaning, which often correlate with spikes in public usage."⁴⁷ Contributing factors to this historical shifting are evidence of literal whitewashing central tenets and teachings of Christianity like '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*' (Matthew 22:39, *New King James Version*), "*Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard*" (Proverbs 21:13), "*Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven*" (Matthew 23:9 a stark revelation in light of the evangelical implications on the meaning of Ephesians 6:5 which says "*Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters*"), (Isaiah 58:6), *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28) and terrifically the distortion of the meaning of Jesus' teaching "*And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. 36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed*" (John 8:35-36) and so on. Bridging the gaps in the understanding and application of Christian scriptures to preserve slavery was not a task too tall for the proponents of the Lost Cause, who shifted meanings to justify untoward Southern social conventions. This undaunted legacy has been carried forth

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

steadfastly and unchallenged, albeit more tacitly, as a core belief and understanding of God's hierarchy of human existence in modern evangelicalism. Mathews highlights an intentional occlusion in American Christian thought held consistently in belief and practice. It provides insights into the adamance of American Christianity's stance: "To more sensitive whites...the assumption that 'God is no respecter of persons' was a judgment upon the system which admittedly rested upon invidious social distinction and was therefore judgment upon them as whites and as slaveowners."⁴⁸ In other words, to consider fault in understanding the Gospel is to challenge not only their faith, and worldview, but also their identity. For these reasons, in this examination thesis all references to modern evangelicalism are to a post-colonial civil, nationalistic religion of dominance and subjugation that continues to protect the Southern way of life; heretofore, more accurately referred to as Amerianity Evangelicalism or White Evangelicalism.

It is important to note here that while juxtaposing Amerianity over against Black religion and, more importantly, Black Christianity, it does not in any way suggest that the Black church or Black religion is perfect. It is, however, to suggest strongly what Jurgen Moltmann summarized in his academic year at Duke University in 1967-68: "Black theology opens up for the theology of the whites the unique chance to free itself from the constitutional blindness of white society, and to become Christian theology."⁴⁹ Similarly, Eric Metaxas tells of Dietrich Bonhoeffer growing "weary of sermons in places like Riverside [Baptist Church of New York City]" and other prominent white churches, but "There in the socially downtrodden African

⁴⁸ Mathews, *Religion of the Old South*, 220.

⁴⁹ Vincent W. Lloyd, *Religion of the Field Negro: On Black Secularism and Black Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 154.

American community, Bonhoeffer would finally hear the gospel preached and its power manifested.”⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer would write back to his academic supervisor in Germany that “I do believe that the negroes will still give the whites here considerably more than merely their folk songs.”⁵¹

Religion

Religion is typically defined in terms of a set of beliefs an individual may have that in some way may pertain to a supernatural being or a supreme being who governs the affairs of the universe. Given the nature, importance, and centrality of religion over the millennia, the above definition is suitable up to a point, however, religion is far more part and parcel of the fabric of life. Religion, I argue, is more profound and broader. It extends beyond the parameters of a set of beliefs to encompass, on one hand, that which provides a worldview and, on the other hand, the way one views oneself in that world; it is at once how I see what I see and concomitantly how I see myself in that world. Understanding religion from this perspective removes religion from solely the sanctum of faith and belief; knowing that faith and belief are inextricably intertwined in the everyday navigation and negotiation of life helps to see its added dimensions that permeate the totality of life and all that gives life meaning. Hence, in his book *Introducing African American Religion*, Anthony B. Pinn takes religion even a step further when he defines it precisely as it relates to Blacks. Pinn defines religion as “the effort to make life meaningful, and to do so in response to the questions we ask about our existence and the world in which we live.”⁵² As defined above, Pinn’s understanding of religion includes not merely questions that

⁵⁰ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 107-108.

⁵¹ Ibid, 110.

⁵² Anthony B. Pinn, *Introducing African American Religion* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 13.

may pertain to the potentiality of things relating to the supernatural, but also inclusive of life's most perplexing and seemingly inexplicable conundrums. Correspondingly, it is essential to note that Black religion is not monolithic, and it cannot be simplified or limited to the Black church experience or even further to only Christianity and Islam. Instead, Black religion and the Black religious experience are made up of many different religious traditions including but not limited to traditional African religions, Afro-Cuban religions which "include Candomble, Umbanda, Xango, and Batique in Brazil, as well as Vodou in Haiti and 'Santeria,' or Ocha, and Palo Mayombe in Cuba,"⁵³ and many other manifestations of Black religion in European and North American religious traditions.

The development of positive Black self-identity in a post-colonial culture where the superiority of whiteness is endemic, subsumed by whites and ingested by Blacks, has never been more critical in the health and sustainability of Black self-esteem. Being well-adjusted under abnormal circumstances does not legitimize the deracination of blackness. This shows resilience and resourcefulness, but it implies nothing about the essence of "shalom", total and complete health. Cherene Sharrard-Johnson exemplifies this very point in her discussion on the struggles of hewing the distinctiveness of blackness out of the stubbornness of whiteness using the thoughts of Claude McKay: "Could there be a more commendable prescription for the souls of colored Americans than the bitter black imitation of white life?"⁵⁴ Given its centrality within the communal psyche of Blacks, religion facilitates a potentially dangerous role when and where acceptance is tacitly predicated upon relinquishing one's Black identity and Black culture to

⁵³ Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to Their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 1.

⁵⁴ Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman: Visual and literary culture in the Harlem Renaissance* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007) 77.

avert feelings of discomfort in those of the dominant culture. In other words, the core of blackness suggests that blackness cannot and should never be negated to make others feel more comfortable. True acceptance can only happen when a Black person can be authentically Black, devoid of misconstrued amalgamations of whiteness forced upon blackness, or personalities constructed against the intrusions of whiteness upon blackness, in any socio-religious setting. Demands, implicit or explicit, that one relinquish their identity to be accepted leave deep psychological wounds and scars imperceptible to the naked eye, but they surface in visible ways that over time cause the person to begin to think the dominant culture's thoughts about themselves and their people. Positive Black self-identity does not ensure that the person will become rich or popular, nor does it elevate the person above others. Positive black self-identity does, however, increase the life satisfaction quotient and the assurance that one can be authentically their own self and celebrate not only who they are and where they come from but others as well. Assimilation, integration, and seeking acceptance by relinquishing one's identity is a tranquilizing drug that imprisons, a result of the illusion of seeking freedom from the strictures of blackness in a white world. Striving for and achieving "success" is, in most cases, construed as "checking the boxes" created by the dominant culture, but the trappings of success cannot guarantee or ensure personal satisfaction. Fancy cars, c-suite job titles, healthy bank accounts, or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, living down to lowered expectations, celebrating miscreant behavior, and degrading and debasing oneself to disavow whiteness is, in actuality, a capitulation to it. Deeply ingrained in the psyche of whiteness is a colonial spirit that is undetectable by whiteness and highly contagious to blackness: "Oppression justifies itself through oppression: the oppressors produce and maintain by force the evils that rend the oppressed, in their eyes, more and more like what they would have to be like to deserve their

fate.”⁵⁵ In other words, the ends do not necessarily justify the means. Instead, here, the means justify the ends...over and over and over again. This is the canvas against which the importance of positive Black self-identity is cast. Any ultimately negative outcome from seemingly positive or negative actions tied to a lack of positive Black self-identity can, in truth, be tied to internal and inevitable identity eruptions caused by a lack of self-knowledge, self-affirmation, and self-love. Still, all are corrected and enhanced by unencumbered and unfettered self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-discovery.

⁵⁵ Memmi, xxvi.

CHAPTER 2:

Literature Reviews – “Warring Ideals”

In this section of literature reviews, I share and summarize other voices contributing to the development of positive Black self-identity. These studies demonstrate that Black identity has proven to be fertile ground for research and analysis, particularly as it relates to Black Americans within the constraints of white Christianity. Cultivating a positive sense of self is a critical component in maximizing personal and communal potential. Given the significant obstacles to positive Black self-identity in America, gaining deeper insights into some of the underlying reasons will assist in achieving a healthier sense of self. As noted, positive Black self-identity manifests in one’s self-awareness, self-discovery, and self-acceptance of the particularities of blackness unencumbered by the inevitability of whiteness. This is how one can be authentically true to oneself without the intrusions of the dominant milieu. This chapter contains works of clinicians and scholars whose psychological, sociological, and religio-cultural insights on the development of Black identity are based on their in-depth research and analysis. Combined, their expertise provides a solid foundation to demonstrate positive Black self-identity development, resilience, and strength. Additionally, these resources reveal the ripeness of this examination thesis as there have been, until now, few approaches that tie the development of positive Black self-identity to Black religious thought.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework for this Project

Given the ubiquitous presence of whiteness as superior, beautiful, successful, and intelligent among other superlatives over against the similarly and intentionally ubiquitous presence of blackness as inferior, ugly, ignorant, and lazy even the seemingly most well-adjusted can suffer from the ill effects of negative self-identity unbeknownst to the “conscious” self leading to what I call “Black exceptionalism.” Black exceptionalism (“talented tenth”) is itself a false positive as it is a defense mechanism against whiteness, in response to whiteness or white supremacy. The importance of understanding other studies and approaches to developing Black identity development rests partially in knowing that Black exceptionalism may score or index high on general self-esteem scales. In those cases where high equates to “positive,” it is undoubtedly tenuous, limited, and temporary, and rarely is it healthy. Black exceptionalism carries with it the fallacy of white acceptance (perceived or hoped-for equality) and the illusion of Black giftedness, either unavailable or unattainable by the masses of other Blacks. In this, external trappings hide internal brokenness for those who negotiate life beneath the oppressive weight of white impositions that suggests Black success is either the isolated “exception,” a set-aside, a result of affirmative action, or for the individual a complete disavowal of one’s culture which inures, amongst other things, a spiritual death. This is a critical point as for many Blacks, not all, religiously there is the acceptance of the inevitability of physical death as a natural occurrence even when it “happens too soon” as it signifies an eternal life beyond, but there is a finality to a spiritual death that eclipses all hope of “over yonder” because spiritual death speaks of the soul of the individual. This exceptionality serves the purpose of separation which makes spiritual death a reality. Speaking of the centrality of religion for Africans, John Mbiti argues:

A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships

and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence... Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion.”⁵⁶

Living under such conditions for Blacks becomes motivation for some but crushing for far too many. Black success and achievement are anathema to an ingrained worldview of Black inferiority and had to be quelled by any means necessary. To this Nancy McClean’s *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* connects the New Negro Movement to the enduring undercurrent of Black suppression when she reveals the supreme importance placed up keeping Blacks in their place which was expressed by the state of Georgia’s Grand Dragon in response to Klan members’ angst over Black ambition: “The black man...must be brought *again* to realize that he is of an inferior race and of a lower standard.”⁵⁷ Although the Klan, a militia of the Democratic Party, had a firm grip on the South, it was Black resistance to their attempted dehumanization by whites that infuriated and perplexed the Klan the most. McClean summarizes the irony of the Klan’s genesis and what fed it: “...while the pervasiveness of racism made a movement like the Klan possible, it was the resilience of Blacks in the face of this antagonism that led die-hard racists to believe the Klan necessary.”⁵⁸ This resilience in Blacks is the “somebodiness” created by having a sense of belongingness to a community bigger than the self and offering an identity.

Impediments to Black identity development are found in the seeds planted in the religious philosophy of America and it had a particular impact upon Blacks; it impacted not only how

⁵⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 2.

⁵⁷ Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024), 129.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 129.

Blacks saw and felt about themselves internally, but it was also how whites saw and felt about them which was a greater danger because of its exacting and unrelenting power of dehumanization. Given the complexity of the history of the relationship between Blacks and whites regarding positive Black self-identity, my approach to the literature review is not unifocal but a broad swath of investigations from three different methods: psychological, sociological, and religio-historical.

Psychological Approach

This approach is typically employed to explain and understand human behavior and the mind. Here, Black identity is viewed through the lenses of Behavioral psychology (observable actions that are learned through conditioning), Cognitive (the thoughts and other cognitive processes that lead to behavior), Psychodynamic (internal drives and resolving behavioral issues from the unconscious mind), Humanistic (considers the entire person, including their mind), and Structuralism (how a person's life experiences structure their mind and cause behavior). What this is not is the disproven biological scientific approaches reasoned and substantiated by racialized assumptions of Black inferiority and/or white superiority.

Sociological Approach

This approach represents those social forces that, without consent, unduly impress upon the individual or community the dominant culture's ethos. More so than the other two approaches mentioned in this section, it recognizes the impossibility of interaction with others and not being impacted by them and their beliefs. In my thesis's case, the legacy of slavery pitted those with power (whites) over against those without power (Blacks) shaping the

worldviews of both. The agency of the powerless makes this relationship reciprocal, meaning that the powerless also had an indelible impact on the worldview of the powerful. This section surveys writings that focus on the period and influences on white Christianity leading up to 1845, the year the Southern Baptist Convention was founded when the South crafted and cultivated its own particular brand of white supremacy laced with Christianity where metaphorically Christianity served as the South's proverbial "jab" but white supremacy was its coup de grace, its knockout punch. This period is a critical defining point in the hearts and minds of whites who used Christianity to support their claims of white superiority, but also of Blacks who would exercise resistance to a derelict religion. The Southern Baptist Convention's founding represented a force so grand that its core tenets of white supremacy still endure more than two centuries later.

Religio-cultural-historical approach

The intersection of religion and culture, and how religion has been molded by history, society, and everyday life. In my study, this approach is shown through the writings of those who understand the implicit role religion plays in the fabric of Black communal life and thought, even in cases where an individual does not ascribe to, claim, or completely disavows religious practice, whether tacit or explicit. Mbiti's explication reaches beyond the African continent, for he argues further that "Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being. It is this that makes the Africans so religious: religion is in their whole system of being."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Mbiti, 3.

The following studies and books are fertile grounds for the exploration of Black identity development. They also point to the necessity of this particular study given the centrality of religious thought in sustaining Blacks through the nadir of race relations in this country. There are innumerable compelling psychological, sociological, and religio-historical studies, articles, and books that examine Black identity development and formation, but those that follow are intentionally chosen for the contributions they make in relationship to positive Black self-identity.

PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH: *The Need Reasoned*

“Black Is Beautiful: An American History”

Stephanie M. H. Camp’s article “Black Is Beautiful: An American History”⁶⁰ lays bare the underpinnings of the racialization of beauty. Camp, formerly the Donald W. Logan Family Endowed Chair in American History at the University of Washington, traces the stratifications of beauty along racial lines from roughly the seventeenth century forward in movements. She details that beauty assumptions about Black bodies are not a new concept, however, since the Seventeenth Century, she highlights a systemization of beauty along racial lines which endures through the present time. This essay was compiled from a planned book on beauty and race before Camp’s untimely death.

Camp’s central question is the “problem” of Black beauty: “Are African and Black bodies beautiful?” The sliding scale on Black beauty across the centuries does not ameliorate, but instead it intensifies during the late nineteenth and through the twentieth centuries, a period

⁶⁰ Stephanie M. H. Camp, “Black Is Beautiful: An American History.” *The Journal of Southern History* 81, no. 3 (2015): 675–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43918403>.

marked by “white supremacist beauty ideals.” I review this essay first because it looks intently and historically at how and by whom beauty has been defined; she further identifies and connects social, political, and cultural periods to the degradation of Black beauty all undergirded by the social construct of race. One of the periods she lists as a pivotal era for Black and white beauty is the Enlightenment period and its “obsessive compulsion for categorization.” She states that “The Age of Reason’s valorization of knowing through seeing and its obsession with classification combined nefarious with the sights that Europeans were perceiving in their travels in Africa, the Americas, and Asia *and with their desire to extract labor and resources from these places.*” (italics added by me) Herein she stakes the claim that the “contempt for African and Black bodies originated in a very specific historical context: modern slavery in the Americas.”

During the planting of these thoughts in the hearts and minds of whiteness, Camp contends that the lessons of the Enlightenment period were predicated upon notions of European ideals of beauty, even amongst white Americans. In this time, assumptions of beauty essentially became the official measures of racial superiority and inferiority. Under America’s rubric of beauty, the values assigned to blackness were concomitant with chattel slavery and the objectification of the Black body. She recounts that during the twentieth century as Black voices began to emerge in discussions on beauty, they, too, placed the locus of the question of Black beauty in slavery asking questions like “Did slavery mold and damage the bodies of the enslaved...or did slavery distort the perception of all Black Americans?” Herein is the argument that is not taken up in the article but begs for a discussion on the validity of blaming the institution of slavery rather than looking intently at those who instituted and maintained it. This part of the discussion can potentially make more significant strides in exposing the true source of the “problem” of Black beauty.

She engages the monumental study by Mamie and Kenneth Clark conducted during the 1930s and 1940s during segregation in Washington D.C. and how it represented a monumental turning point in the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* that Brown v. Board of Education dismantled. Camp concludes with a look at studies by George Williams, author of *Do Negroes really believe Black is beautiful?* (1974), who looks at correlations between rising self-esteem and skin color. She reports that he found that the communal “Black is beautiful” campaign had left a positive mark on the Black community in perceptions of hair, but concluded that where skin color was concerned, some of the same impediments ingested from whites still plague Blacks with regards to spurning darker black skin. The dismantling of the white standard of beauty, Camp says, “requires letting go of the notion of essential race...it demands the dissolution of American ideas of race.” Camp’s article does a solid job of identifying some of the racial factors that lead to the problem of Black beauty, and it is a study worthy of continued development in a broader scope, which was in the works for a book that would follow up prior to her death.

Becoming Black

Michelle M. Wright’s *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African American Diaspora* demonstrates the difficulty in attempting to develop Black identity, particularly when it is cast against the backdrop of Black religious thought, which is not an area that she examines. While this may be the case, it does not pre-empt her thorough analysis as the obstacles are related in many ways. Wright casts the crafting of Black identity over time beneath the rubric of a near all-encompassing Black subjectivity and beyond to the problem of patriarchal theories of Black identity within the Black community itself.

Setting the framework is critical to developing a positive Black self-identity, and if it is to be accomplished, myriad complexities must be overcome. Wright moved from the threats upon blackness through three different perspectives, finally arriving at the sole prescriptive, intellectual way for it to be accomplished, the inclusion of the woman, or “the Black Mother.” Wright looks intently at the shaping of Black identity through an “Other-from-within” and the “Other-from-without” Western thought as Blackness is in a constant state of being defined in stark opposition to the other (whiteness) and consistently from a less-than perspective. She raises the examples of Thomas Jefferson, G.W.F. Hegel and Arthur de Gobineau. While each defined blackness from their own perspective in varied and disparate ways, each inherently lacked the cohesion necessary to provide or achieve a Black identity. Wright submits that “Black identity has been produced in contradiction...Blacks in the West have nonetheless had their history shaped by the very concrete effects of Western racism.”⁶¹

Wright frames “‘Black’ as a concept that cannot be 1) limited to a particular national, cultural, and linguistic border, or 2) produced in isolation from gender and sexuality.”⁶² Herein her argument shifts from European or whites’ attempts to define Blackness to include male Black thinkers in W.E.B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Frantz Fanon whose thoughts she also examines and exposes as “produced in isolation from gender and sexuality.”

Her assessment of their methodologies on the whole is summed up as:

In a striking imitation of the American myth of the founding fathers..., American Black nationalism constructs a history in which those whose lives and contributions fail to correspond to its conservative gender and racial dichotomies...are condemned and/or ignored altogether. By erasing mothers, both nationalist narratives, whether Black or white, perpetuate the myth that

⁶¹ Michelle M. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2005), 1-2.

⁶² Ibid, 4.

men hold absolute power over their origins and therefore are the natural leaders over the present and future of a supposedly “pure” race.”⁶³

In other words, though Black, the methodologies of the Black males reproduce the subjectivity of whiteness that first produced what she calls “Black others.” The suppression of the voice of the Black female, né the Black mother, objectifies her in ways that even denies agency granted white women.

Wright completes her exploration of Black identity with the inclusion of the voice of Black mothers, the feminine voice in its varied manifestations across Black feminist and queer discourses. She employs methodologies of feminist giants like Audre Lorde and Carolyn Rodgers as she argues that “By substituting the Black mother for the mask as the Black subject’s trope, Lorde and Rodgers are arguing that it is our West African ancestry, rather than our tortured relationship to the Western nation, that links us.”⁶⁴ Overall, Wright summarizes her arguments by concluding that it is the voice of the “subaltern” that must be heard whether Black subjectivity comes from within or from without before Black identity shaping can take form from a point of strength rather than that which is forced upon it.

Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity

William Cross’ *Shades of Black* is a groundbreaking contribution to studying Black identity. Cross was a clinical psychologist and former Cornell University professor best known for developing his “nigrescence” model studying racial and ethnic identity psychology. His study picks up where many of the studies of the first half of the twentieth century left off. His

⁶³ Ibid, 141.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 182.

study was a necessary corrective for some of the studies that predated his own. For others, it laid the foundation for deeper reflection and exploration of Black identity. Of particular interest for Cross was the need to address the overwhelming scholarship or “conventional wisdom [which] stated that the average Black person suffered from low self-esteem and anti-Blackness”⁶⁵ impressed upon them by the dominant culture. Additionally, he sought to address the overly simplistic diagnoses that the identity shifts in Blacks during the 1960s may not have had as much to do with negativity associated with anti-Black feelings as much as it was a shift in Black self-acceptance and for all things Black. Cross’ goal was “to purge Black psychology of both its overly pejorative and its romantic propensities, replacing them with a discourse centered on diversity and complexity in Black psychological functioning.”⁶⁶

Of great pertinence for my study was the summary offered by Cross that relied upon the Black family as the impetus for the positive shift, or the appearance of a positive shift from negativity towards Blackness. Central to his analysis is his distinction between personal and group identities. Here, the crux of his study rests at the intersection of personal identity and the person’s reference group identity that positive, healthy selfhood is nurtured and produced. Cross offers valuable insights into the development of positive Black self-identity or what others deduced was a shift from negative to positive self-assessment. To this, Cross submitted that it “was not so much the dynamics of personal self-hatred as the metamorphosis of a Eurocentric world view into an Afrocentric one.”⁶⁷ This contribution by Cross speaks loudest and succinctly in my discussion of the development of positive Black self-identity. It is the disavowal and

⁶⁵ William E. Cross, *Shades of Black: Diversity in African American Identity* (Temple University Press, 1991), ix-x.

⁶⁶ Ibid, xiii.

⁶⁷ Ibid, xiv.

purging of an identity inflicted upon Blackness that is the inhibitor whereas the positive reinforcements of family, community, and church that have a more lasting and more profound influence; it is the reflective association of the individual with the nature of what it means to be Black that proves to be the most significant component of positive Black self-identity. Cross argues persuasively that the connection between personal identity and group identity, while important and intrinsic, is not dependent upon one another; they are and must always remain independent of one another.

Cross, who coined the term ‘nigrescence’ in 1971, offers updated theories of nigrescence given his findings in disproving the Eurocentric notion of intrinsic self-hate amongst Blacks. He defines nigrescence as the psychology of becoming Black, which he notes “is a state of mind, not an inherited trait, and its acquisition often requires considerable effort.”⁶⁸ Herein is the trepidation of an imposed or assumed identity by Blacks not forged by Blacks. In his rethinking of nigrescence, Cross explains how Black identity is not an exclusionary process where one is separated, instead one’s Blackness becomes a window on the world, but it all begins with self-awareness undergirded by self-exploration: “Thus, the more deeply Blacks explore themselves and the lives of those around them, the more likely they are to understand people as reflections of systems and personal experiences, and less so as clusters of ever distinct “racial groups.”

Meaning-Making, Internalized Racism, and African-American Identity

Given that the groundbreaking research on Black identity by Cross remains relevant, in *Meaning-Making, Internalized Racism, and African-American Identity*, along with Jas M. Sullivan, he takes a step further by not only updating his work from 1991 but also inviting others

⁶⁸ William E. Cross and Jas M. Sullivan, *Meaning-Making, Internalized Racism, and African American Identity* (State University of New York Press, 2016)., 149

to share their works that augment and further build upon his findings. Amongst the studies of greater importance to my work are those related specifically to Black identity as it relates to Black belongingness and self-esteem. The titles of articles that are of greater importance for my study are those that focus on meaning-making: “Affirming Blackness: Racial Identity from Racial Color-Blindness to Critical Consciousness” by Helen A. Neville, Tuyet-Mai H. Hoang, and Arielle Brown; “Ethos Matters: Identity, Spirituality, and Meaning and Purpose among African-American Youth” by Lisa K. Hill, Debra D. Roberts, and Kelli A. Hill; “Through the Lens of Gender: An Intersectional Perspective on Race and Racial Identity” by Isis H. Settles and Elizabeth R. Cole; and “The Intersection of Racial and Cultural Identity for African Americans: Expanding the Scope of Black Self-Understanding” by A. Wade Boykin, R. Davis Dixon, David S. B. Mitchell, Adrian W. Bruce, Yetunde O. Akinola, and Nikeshia P. Holt. Then there are the studies that focus more intently on internalized racism: “Black Identities, Internalized Racism, and Self-Esteem” by William E. Cross Jr. and David M. Frost, “Racial Oppression and Other Black Identity Correlates” by Kenneth Foster Sr., and “The Role of Discrimination in Shaping the Presence and Strength of Linked Fate” by Jas M. Sullivan and Jonathan Winburn.

Cross adds that “The writings, research, and theorizing presented in the current volume make the case for understanding Black identity as wide ranging in content, subject to multiple interpretations, and linked to both positive mental health and to varied forms of internalized racism.”⁶⁹ Some of the general precepts result in a handful of takeaways like 1) There is no one way to be Black, 2) Black identity does not follow a simple linear relationship with self-esteem, 3) the “cost” of Assimilation and colorblind attitudes has more to do with estrangement, miseducation, false consciousness and diminution of one’s capacity to contribute to the vitality of

⁶⁹ Ibid, 329.

the group, than damage to one's personality, 4) Black identity falls under the rubric of the search for meaning and purpose, 5) there are multiple forms of internalized racism (some leading to distortions of the personality, others resulting in damage to the group more so than damage to the person), and 6) that a close analysis of blackness reveals multiple layers, speaks to the complex humanity of Black folk, often overlooked in simplistic theorizing on what it means to be Black.

The one exception I would pose to the studies that considered "assimilation" in its findings to result in a positive outcome. While there is a basis for it, I contend that greater study of the participants is needed and warranted. Their conclusions are factually correct in that the self-esteem of those studied is positive, but the question that remains unanswered is whether that self-esteem is healthy. In my previous dissertation, which studied the self-esteem and belongingness of Black men, I endeavored to examine those who had never served time in prison, those who had served but were then "returning citizens," and those who were incarcerated. The scale used combined the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the Likert 5-Point Scale for computing self-esteem scores. In that study, I used "'Masking' [as] a term...to explain this process of subconsciously disguising internal feelings, creating a façade that projects an image of social belongingness."⁷⁰ It was further resolved that "a strategy is needed to ameliorate the camouflaged, endemic 'low' self-esteem and subsequent lack of belongingness in Black men that will enable them to define for themselves their own collective identity free from outside encumbrances that depend on him living beneath his God-given purpose and potential."⁷¹ Also, absent from these great studies is the step that fully considers the culture of survival

⁷⁰ Daryl Gabriel Bloodsaw, "Building Transformative Ministry for Black Men Returning Home from Incarceration," *Building Transformative Ministry for Black Men Returning Home from Incarceration* (dissertation, Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, 2017), 111.

⁷¹ Ibid, 103.

required by inmates who scored the highest in self-esteem amongst the three groups. Because of their social condition, incarceration, as a matter of survival, they have to show strength and confidence in a place where fear not only equals weakness but could also equal death.

Likewise, albeit under different circumstances, Blacks develop, as a matter of course, a chameleon-like dynamism in identity as a means of survival and progress in a social setting constructed and dependent upon Black subjectivity. Thus, being “assimilated” is just as psychologically functional as developing some other variant of Blackness in another arena of life. This strikes at the core of one of the study's limitations in that the measurement of the negative tends to appear as a naturally occurring positive, which is accomplished through subconscious coping mechanisms. It was in adjusting the tools of measurement, the survey, that corrected the misnomer of Black men in prison having “higher” levels of positive self-esteem – where general studies of Black men typically rest – moving towards a more accurate result that showed not merely more “positive” self-esteem but also healthier self-esteem in Black men who had never been to prison. Using the same approach may give the studies in this book a broader base from which to measure positive Black self-esteem.

“Reconstructing Black Identity: The Black Panther, Franz Fanon And Achille Mbembe In Conversation”

In Jaco Beyers’ article “Reconstructing Black Identity: The Black Panther, Frantz Fanon and Achille Mbembe in Conversation,”⁷² there is the realization that Black identity is not static but dynamic and ever evolving. However, he posits that the identity shared by Blacks, whether in Africa or elsewhere, is a created identity through the lens of whiteness, or as he deems it,

⁷² Jaco Beyers, "Reconstructing black identity: The Black Panther, Frantz Fanon and Achilles Mbembe in conversation." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019).

“Western mind.” Beyers’ article is written from an African scholar's perspective, and his primary reference point, Professor Maake Masango, is South African. In the article, he puts Frantz Fanon in conversation with Achille Mbembe on reconstructing Black identity. While he includes several other scholarly voices, Kwame Appiah amongst them, his emphasis lies on the philosophies of Fanon and Mbembe and their philosophies on Black identity.

Of particular interest for my project is that the Black identity Beyers seeks to construct or reconstruct, as it were, is an identity that is Christian infused, making religion and culture directly correlatives in identity development and construction. While he describes the two as being in relationship, he also stresses that religion and culture are inseparable, casting religion more so as a “cultural expression” and defining it less so within the strict confines of a belief system. While he does not separate religion from being a belief system concerned with dogmas, religion as an “identity marker” becomes a “source of identity, either social or personal.” This is a distinctive break from the other sources discussed, as identity has been viewed strictly through a psychological lens, which is helpful, but given the centrality of religion and culture in the identity of Black people, it becomes a nearly insurmountable task to develop Black identity. Indeed, any attempt to reconstruct a damaged Black identity without one of its core constitutive components renders the task highly unlikely, and nearly, if not entirely, impossible.

His positioning of Fanon and Mbembe in conversation in many ways juxtaposes two giants in the business of reconstructing Black identity, not so much in the way that they are on opposing sides, but that they employ different tactics to reach the same destination. Fanon’s contributions lead to an identity that longs to be treated as an equal human. He believes that Black should not be a “signifier,” but the goal must be to “accept the identity of being human. To be human is to recognize the human in others.” Mbembe, on the other hand, casts

reconstruction as a state of equality in the way that Black identity is shaped and formed, unabated by whiteness. He continues by positing that “under a new paradigm, a new identity is to be created for both white and Black people.” This approach suggests, on some levels, that Blacks and whites are inalterably linked.

Beyers summarizes by summoning the collective and concluding spirit of the movie *Black Panther* with a call towards “shared humanity” and the definition of the principle of ‘Ubuntu’ as acknowledging “the humanity in others, irrespective of the race, language, and descendency of the other.” Leaning more heavily towards Fanon Beyers’ approach, while worthwhile, seems idealistic in that he underestimates both the remaining structures of colonial domination and the inherent desire by whites to maintain it at any cost. His suggestion that “white identity is also in need of a change” must first be acknowledged as a need for change by whites. Otherwise, his approach becomes idealistic and falls victim to underestimating the structures of evil.

“Reconstruction Of Black Identity In Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”

Parastou Pourhassan’s “Reconstruction of Black Identity in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”⁷³ takes a slightly different tack from previous articles and books on the reconstruction of Black identity. Pourhassan’s investigation centralizes Morrison’s use of the character Sethe in *Beloved* while exploring Frantz Fanon’s use of “The facts of Blackness” and Homi Bhabha’s “hybridity and resistance” theories. Overall, in the quest for liberated and authentic Blackness, “Morrison concludes that the Black identity is constructed on the socio-political ground where cultures are hybrid, and these Black people are recreated as resistant individuals.”

⁷³ Parastou Pourhassan, “Reconstruction of Black Identity in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 31 (December 21, 2022): 1269–80, <https://doi.org/10.29000/rumelide.1222253>.

Pourhassan employs Fanonian theory when she highlights that the crux of the problem of Black identity in Fanon's thought is that Black identity is not a self-created identity, but "it was imposed and defined by the white dominant society in which they lived, mainly based on their skin color." White culture and dominance are settled by color in the post-colonial world, casting Blackness as wholly the 'other', "brutal and barbaric." She further explicates based on Fanon's "The Facts of Blackness" essay that Blacks the world over are caught between and betwixt two adversarial worlds: 1) the world of Blackness that Blacks are bequeathed by their ancestors (Black heritage, traditions, and customs), cast as utterly inferior and 2) a world of whiteness which does not consider Blacks human beings. Fanon's theory is consistent in his focus and intent on humanness in both whites and Blacks. However, his solution is through Negritude, which demands recovery of their inherent "resistance, self-determination, self-respect, and self-reliance" to find their rightful place in the world.

Here, Pourhassan employs the Sethe motif from Morrison's *Beloved* to reconstruct Black identity. The richness of this example by Morrison is that the reconstruction of Black identity necessarily hints at the existence of a Black identity, one which Morrison sought to recover and reform. She accomplishes this through the character of Sethe who reclaims her self-authority (agency) in a way the non-empathetic white world would label 'savagery' and 'brutality' in the taking of the life of her own child. Sethe's resistance at once reclaims her Black power and her ability to decide for herself what her identity will be. In reconfiguring her identity, Sethe achieves Morrison's goal by becoming a symbol of agency and resistance. Pourhassan deftly points out that Morrison "emphasizes that the Black identity's resistance occurs exactly where the western colonial violence happens" which aptly places "white dominant society at the center of oppression and resistance."

Pourhassan locates the theme of “definition” as a central motif in *Beloved*. Sethe, the character with no power, successfully assumes power by shifting the power structure so that her once muted voice becomes the lead voice through an act of agency historically denied to her and her people. That “the definition only belonged to the definer, not the defined” had been the clear motive in relations between the whites, who traditionally and socially had power, and the Blacks, who were the subjects and, thus, had no power. The importance of defining is highlighted in many ways, and in most cases, historically, the definer had always been the “master.” However, Sethe’s action, even here, shifts that dynamic by refusing to allow her child to be fuel for a system that perpetuates the white definition of Blackness. The act itself of killing her child brought to the fore white definitions of inexplicable and inexpressible horror while being blinded by the underside of the defining of Blacks as enslaved people, subalterns, or even “non-humans.” Pourhassan then highlights Bouson’s (2000) use of Morrison’s *re-memory*, the reconfiguration of a memory, which painfully had also been controlled and defined by the white master. Sethe’s dastardly act in white eyes was a way of recasting the memory on her terms, which was not merely upon the minds of whites, but also Blacks whose minds were conditioned to remember what and how the white master defined and dictated. Herein, Pourhassan adds Bhabha’s (2012) theory of hybrid space, which identifies two different contrary powers at work. In the case of *Beloved*, it was the white man’s power to define, and the Black woman’s power to resist that constituted the *hybrid space*.

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* lays bare that “the reconstruction of Black identity leads to Black liberation,” and she seeks to reconfigure the Black identity that was colonially misshaped. Through the example of Sethe, Morrison acknowledges the trauma Black identity will endure in redefining itself out of a colonial mindset and world, as the process not only entails the visceral

reactions mentally and physically from white colonialism but also from within Blacks themselves, who also understand the world through a world defined by white colonialism. The reconstruction and reclamation of Black identity as self-defined establishes agency and re-establishes dignity.

SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH: *The Need Revealed*

“Elephants In The Room: The Francis Wayland, Richard Fuller Correspondence On Slavery As A Case Study In Nineteenth-Century Baptist Hermeneutics”

Keith Harper’s “Elephants in the Room: The Francis Wayland, Richard Fuller Correspondence on Slavery as a Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Baptist Hermeneutics”⁷⁴ provides a window of opportunity to eavesdrop on the swapping of dialogue on the most pressing domestic issue in the United States, slavery. Two clarion voices of the time on missions amongst Baptists provided the opinions. In the two decades leading up to 1845, when a split would create the Southern Baptist Convention separate from the Triennial Convention, mission grew in importance, just at the time the West was being explored and settled.

Francis Wayland, a pastor and later president of Brown University, was adamant in his objection to slavery and advocated “on the broad basis of common sense and inalienable right.” He believed strongly in Christianity as an “active” influence on society and mission work was the engine that would drive change. Richard Fuller, who would be one of the principal founders and prominent voices in the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention, was a Harvard-educated lawyer who practiced only briefly before turning full-time to ministry. Harper notes

⁷⁴ Keith Harper, “Elephants in the Room: The Francis Wayland, Richard Fuller Correspondence on Slavery as a Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Baptist Hermeneutics.” *Perspectives in Religious Studies.*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2021, pp. 281–96.

that by the 1840s, the Baptist Home Mission Society, stationed in New York City amongst northern states that had all but abolished slavery by 1830 (except New Jersey, which still had approximately 3568 enslaved Africans), had begun to feel the pressure from abolitionists to distance the organization from enslavers. Adding fuel to the fire was a letter from Francis Wayland to the *Christian Reflector* titled “Domestic Slavery” which roundly denounced slavery primarily on moral grounds as an evil “because it assumed the right of the master to use forced labor for his benefit without the slave’s consent, thereby denying the slave’s humanity.” His perspective is supported by his understanding that common sense must rule where the scriptures *appear* to be silent. Wayland’s summary was essentially that whites “were guilty of exploitation.”

Invited to respond to Wayland’s letter by the *Christian Reflector*’s editor, Fuller immediately went on the defensive. His defense was complicated in that he absolved Southerners of guilt or blame because they inherited a complicated, imperfect system and, second, on financial grounds questioning who would remunerate former enslavers (which, incidentally, sounds an awful lot like reparations); thirdly, his response was preoccupied by the potential of Blacks doing to whites what whites had done to Blacks. Indeed, he positioned slavery as a “positive good” without ever considering “the issue of human ownership.” Fuller’s arguments were situated in “legal” precedent to justify and preserve the Southern way of life, of which slavery was the linchpin, fearing that the elimination of slavery could disrupt the South’s social order.

In his analysis, Harper situates “culture” as the fulcrum upon which biblical interpretation amongst Baptists swings; however, Baptist missions drew the proverbial line in the sand. Northerners wanted to exclude slaveowners from mission work, which had become the driving

force in spreading Christianity at home and on foreign soil. Mission work was a fundamental part of shaping the Baptist identity.

Harper demonstrates how convoluted the understanding of the Bible can be when read and attempts to understand it are filtered through culture, particularly a staid, stubborn culture that still exists. Both Wayland and Fuller are bound to the limits of their environment, dominated by the reality of slavery. Neither Wayland nor Fuller could see beyond the fallacy of the Biblical mandate for slavery, and Harper never hints at Wayland attempting to do so. Instead, Harper highlights that Wayland's letter leaves unchallenged that the Bible mandate was never issued to end or abolish slavery. Also absent from the Wayland-Fuller exchange was any discussion on the type of slavery history and the Bible records (indentured servitude) and the type of slavery practiced in America (perpetual servitude) to serve the singular purpose of enriching the slaveowners. Finally, Harper does a thorough analysis of the several letter exchanges, however, his analysis not only leaves silent the voices of the subjects upon whom slavery was built, but, in the process, he leaves whiteness as an unchallenged normative.

Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell

David Torbett's *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* raise for consideration opposing views on slavery from two Northern nineteenth-century theologians who provide alternate views from the same region, a region many today look back on, believing it was a monolith. Torbett traces the thoughts and writings of Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell on slavery and race through the lens of practical Christianity *as they lived it*. The pertinence of this book is that it covers two northern theologians during the critical period of retrenchment in white theology and practice during the 1830s and 1840s, when the Southern Baptist Convention

was founded and formed. Few can claim to have been untouched by the impact of Hodge and Bushnell, as they were among the preeminent thinkers of the time on the practice of Christianity. Hodge was a conservative Presbyterian professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, and Bushnell was a Congregationalist minister, whom Torbett reports was dubbed the “father of American religious liberalism.” Throughout the North, Torbett allowed that consensus acknowledged slavery as a moral problem, but they permitted its temporary existence; it was widely accepted as evil, but its abolition should be gradual as opposed to immediate.

Hodge, the conservative, believed most Blacks were not ready for immediate freedom, and he doubted that Black and white races could ever coexist freely as equals in America much the same way as Black ministers in Savannah felt in a meeting with General William T Sherman and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton at the close of the Civil War. Hodge read and understood scripture literally and legalistically, which led him to believe that slaveholding (not slavery) cannot be a sin “per se,” which is consistent with Richard Fuller’s argument. He argued in his article *Slavery* “on the basis of a number of biblical texts that slavery per se (“slaveholding in itself considered”) was not a sin and should not in itself be the subject of church discipline.” It should be noted that this line of reasoning is not farfetched, understanding that Hodge himself had been a slaveowner. Hodge understood the perils of slavery, although he could never be considered nor confused with an abolitionist whom he considered “troublemakers.” He was right that “The South must choose between emancipation by the silent and holy influence of the gospel...or abide the issue of a long-continued conflict with the laws of God.”⁷⁵

⁷⁵ David Torbett, *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 2006), 6.

Bushnell, the liberal, believed that slavery was wrong and should be dismantled immediately and said it deprived people of their humanity, which he did not note included the humanity of whites. He opposed any remuneration for slaveowners but was never ambivalent in his feelings towards the Blacks whom he essentially gave a “no confidence vote” once or if they were ever freed. He and Hodge were noncommittal to the collective or individual worth of the Black race. However, Torbett wrote that Bushnell “did not doubt that a number of individual former slaves might survive and even thrive after emancipation: The difficulty is to elevate the race, as a race, *among us*”⁷⁶ flinging open the door to more accurate interpretation. Was the question about the elevation of the Black race intrinsically, or was the problem whether or not the Black race could be elevated amongst or in the vicinity of whites who would undoubtedly be obstacles to that elevation?

As mentioned above, both Hodge and Bushnell were Northern opponents of slavery, yet both assumed the innate inferiority of enslaved Africans; they both exuded an attitude and the “burden” of paternalism in deciding what to do with Blacks, never considering nor entertaining the thought that Blacks might have had anything to say on their own behalf. In drawing symmetrical lines between Hodge and Bushnell, Torbett summarizes that both “were loyal to their own versions of an ideal Christian society, and these visions drove their policies on slavery.”⁷⁷ He brackets their thinking within the limitations of their social and spiritual realities by invoking the thoughts of a descendant of the enslaved quoting James H. Cone in his seminal work *Black Theology of Liberation*: “American white theology...has been basically a theology of the white oppressor.” Their thoughts on slavery and race are wholly determined by their racial

⁷⁶ Ibid, 9

⁷⁷ Ibid, 13.

prejudices. Torbett concludes, "Hodge and Bushnell confirm the need for Christian Theology to rely on some objective standard, some kind of special revelation that stands over and against any human subjective judgement."⁷⁸

Religion Of The Old South

Donald Mathews' *Religion of the Old South* makes a "religious-social continuum" argument about the development of religion in the old South: "As a social, historical process, Evangelical Protestantism...enabled a rising lower-middle/middle class to achieve identity and solidarity, rewarding its most committed religious devotees with a sense of personal esteem and liberty."⁷⁹ His analysis, while adept in its time, has been proven short-sighted for two reasons: 1) he presupposed a "continuum" in which Blacks would be a mirror for southern Evangelicalism to be judged and by their presence and "*through their [Blacks] appropriation* of Evangelical Christianity expresses a religious-social ethos that could best convey its significance in the Evangelical promise to 'preach liberty to the captives.'"⁸⁰ (italics added by me for emphasis) Time has revealed that his skillful analysis underestimated the depth to which many of the issues he discusses reach and the fortitude of some Black Evangelicals to withstand the intoxicating lure of white Evangelicalism to their own degradation. The arc of *Religion of the Old South* shows an overestimation or, in some cases, an incorrect assumption that white Evangelicalism would yield or undergo a transformation in any way through self-reflection in light of the unfolding of Black Christianity.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 189.

⁷⁹ Mathews, xiv-xv.

⁸⁰ Mathews, xv.

He goes to great lengths to analyze the full context of white Evangelicalism through an unclouded prism, avoiding the temptation of capitulating to the pitfall of “white people and their experiences [being] the standard of judgement in our history.”⁸¹ His treatment of Black religion/Christianity is solid in light of his predisposition towards its importance in the future and further development of white Evangelism. Ultimately one finds that he juxtaposes self-esteem and identity of whites through white Evangelicalism versus that of Blacks through Black Christianity when he points to the many psychological supports of Christianity by noting that “The strengthening of one’s self-esteem, battered and damaged by the psychic and physical brutalities of slavery” while noting simultaneously that for whites Black Christianity brought forth an unsettling ‘assumption that “God is no respecter of persons.”’⁸² This was unconscionable and perceived as “judgment upon the system which admittedly rested upon invidious social distinction...and was therefore judgment upon them as whites and as slaveowners.” This aspect, whether accidental or intentional, is critical in my study of Black identity because it recognizes that identity formation not only affects Blacks, but it also challenges the notion of whiteness as base and, therefore, also the development of white identity.

Mathews’ tactic was clear; it was to write a fair or balanced account of religion in the old South, which is mostly positive and objective. But in total, there are instances, particularly as the book progresses from white evangelicalism to Black evangelicalism, of a spectral presence of his own limitations of critique as a creature of his time (late 1970s). For instance, in the case of slavery, he appears to be overly sympathetic in the way he positions the perspectives of those during that time. He is aware that Evangelicals were unapologetically confined to the limitations

⁸¹ Ibid, xvi.

⁸² Ibid, 220.

of their own times, but to miss the opportunity to share examples of those courageous voices of opposition and contrariness to the slaveholding contingent of society leans towards being “fair” at the expense of honesty, as he does so aptly in other places. Mathews’ denouement lies in his concluding argument which he situates as the foundation of the struggles and failures of white Evangelicalism in its liberty: “The tragedy of southern Evangelicalism was not that its institutions were unable to make white men behave as they should have, but that they could not allow Black people full liberty in their Christian profession.”⁸³

Baptized In Blood: The Religion Of The Lost Cause, 1865-1920

Charles Reagan Wilson’s *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* examines “the product of white Christian churches and Southern culture in the South from the end of the Civil War until the end of World War I...Southern civil religion.”⁸⁴ Wilson places at the fulcrum of southern society and southern religion, race, and racism as the determinant of the religio-social context of the Lost Cause by Whites. Though the South was at the losing end of the Civil War, it scored a decisive victory in the culture war. It was in the Lost Cause – a mythic construct that established a Southern religious identity as the chosen people – that in their eyes validated white superiority even though they were on the losing end of the war. Reagan skillfully weaves the story through Southern ritual, religious myth, and theology, and then he offers a critique of what he terms the “New South,” shaped indelibly by race and the valorization of the Confederacy, which continues even today.

⁸³ Ibid, 247.

⁸⁴ Wilson Charles Reagan, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 1.

Here Wilson's project intersects with my study on developing an identity. What he does so well is that he establishes both the religious and social context and content assembled by whiteness for the preservation and uplift of a defeated South with the simultaneous willful subjugation of blacks and blackness. At no other historical junction beyond religion and culture (religio-social) could the feat have been accomplished with such accuracy and speed, and it may have been impossible had it been attempted another way. Wilson details how white southerners were able to connect their plight to scripture from casting themselves as the oppressed Hebrew children in Egypt for whom God would surely raise a Moses to rescue them to comparing their Southern plight to Christ's suffering and death which, notably, explained how a superior people could have been defeated...and, most importantly, raised again. It is this notion that revived and concretized the idea of racial superiority in the Southern way of life, and, thus, reinforced in white eyes, and in some cases in Blacks as well, the idea of innate inferiority.

Wilson's study begins in 1865, corresponding with the beginning of a search for a Southern identity smarting from the loss of the war. It traverses through the activities of groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Ku Klux Klan, who served the purpose in very different ways of crafting, creating, and memorializing the notion of white superiority. It is here that identity in whiteness, both cultural and religious, can be best seen as it represented a melding of Southern identity with an amorphous version of Christianity that at once 1) cast white southerners as a "chosen people" in the vein of the Israelites and in death casting Jefferson Davis as "modeled after the Man of Galilee;" and 2) affirmed white superiority creating an enduring messiah-complex that cast whites as Christ-like and all others, particularly Blacks, as bad, evil, criminal, and bestial. Within its context, Wilson daringly connects the lynching of Blacks to "the highest symbol of Southern virtue" in the Confederacy, the white woman. It should be noted that

this understanding, both social and religious, supported and undergirded the practice of lynching as a means of social control. He reveals that “The extreme racists of the South believed that the Negro was a beast...They advocated rigid repression and control, which meant strict public segregation at the least, and which sometimes even extended to the justification for lynching.”⁸⁵

In his description of the attempt to salvage and retain Southern identity, Wilson also highlights the outsized role that the Ku Klux Klan, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and Southern clergy in setting up local historical societies, launching magazines, and shaping and crafting history and history books from the point of view of the Confederacy, valorizing its version of the Civil war versus those produced in the North that they believed disparaged and painted the South in unflattering terms. In essence, the mark of their success – not limited to the South – was demonstrated by Confederate students who became “serious crusaders for culture.” Towards the book’s conclusion, Wilson highlights Robert E. Lee whose religious virtues in the eyes of southerners matched their own, but he stopped at equating Southern virtue with Christian virtue when a veteran of the Confederacy asked him to confirm the conflation of the two which would result in any good Confederate soldier’s entrance into heaven. It was reported that Lee replied “No, my good friend. I’m afraid not. That may be good Confederacy, but it’s poor theology.”⁸⁶

Wilson’s *Baptized In Blood* helps to paint the picture of the conscious and deliberate actions made on behalf of the preservation of the Southern way of life, with or without chains. He tells of the enormous effort to recast white identity on the heels of a devastating defeat as

⁸⁵ Ibid, 47.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 154.

positive and dominant, and every step in the process equating Southern culture and white superiority as integral components of good Christianity.

Pulpits Of The Lost Cause

Steve Longenecker's *Pulpits of the Lost Cause: The Faith and Politics of Former Confederate Chaplains During Reconstruction* investigates the postwar political thoughts and religious meditations of ten preachers. One of the most essential features of Longenecker's offering is that he demonstrates that while generally chaplains of the confederacy are lumped together as a monolith, and to be sure they had much in common, he extrapolates differences among them even when they were not pronounced. Such is the case in his discussion of two Southern Baptist Seminary luminaries, John A. Broadus and Crawford H. Toy, who had been very close friends until the evolution of Toy's theological modernism defined by Longenecker as "each generation adapts the faith to fit its age and the modern scholarship, including archaeology, history, linguistics, and literary analysis, enhances understanding of the Bible and removes cultural baggage present when it is written."⁸⁷ While both favored the Lost Cause, Broadus, who according to Longenecker "cherished the Confederate memory and despised theological liberalism,"⁸⁸ would find himself at drastic odds with Toy's modernism which would eventually lead to Toy's firing from the Southern Baptist Seminary and Broadus lurking in the shadows tacitly sharing responsibility.

⁸⁷ Stephen L. Longenecker, *Pulpits of the Lost Cause: The Faith and Politics of Former Confederate Chaplains during Reconstruction* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2023)., 5.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 151.

Longenecker states that *Pulpits of the Lost Cause* “is about former Confederate chaplains..., their faith, and their romanticized memory of the Confederacy, the Lost Cause.”⁸⁹ He continues that it “aims to expand knowledge of former chaplains by juxtaposing their religion and politics and by portraying them as multifaceted, multilayered, sometime compartmentalizers who embraced a Lost Cause movement that had a variety of uses.”⁹⁰ Given that the preachers examined were similar in many ways, yet held different views on some issues, Longenecker’s book provides readers with a view of human nature exhibited by the chaplains. He offers an insightful approach which broadens the scope of understanding in the reader, in that, like most people, these men “often simultaneously subscribe to conflicting perspectives,” where, at times, though they were mostly conservative, their views on matters like economics and religion could very well be progressive.

The value of Longenecker’s *Pulpits of the Lost Cause* for my study lies in the point mentioned above...the element of “operationalized” humanity inherent in the hearts and minds of Confederate chaplains who proved to be staunch armor-bearers and significant cogs in the vast machinery in the creation and perpetuation of the Lost Cause. It is telling that of the former Confederate chaplains discussed in this book, all “embraced white supremacy, except perhaps Atticus Haygood, who preached Black equality, but” as per those mentioned above “operationalized” humanity, he “conformed to racial conventions.”⁹¹ Longenecker makes good use of compartmentalization as it aided the chaplains in making sense of the complicated existence that placed them in otherwise tenuous positions in their dedication to, among other

⁸⁹ Ibid, 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 6.

⁹¹ Ibid, 199.

things, the nation as a whole and the Confederacy: “On Decoration Day, they were flag-waving Confederates, and on July Fourth, they were flag-waving Americans.”⁹² While this may seem ingenuine and self-serving, it was a distinctive mark on how they saw and interpreted the world, not the world they inherited but the world they played an active part in creating. While the ten preachers/chaplains highlighted were universal in being racists, they prove that the Lost Cause chaplains’ variant racist views that sought to maintain a Southern culture and religion – in that order – that would shape Southern identity that has proven to have staying power long beyond their lifetimes and has become ingrained in more subtle forms of white supremacy well into the twenty-first century.

Southern Civil Religions: Imagining The Good Society In The Post-Reconstruction Era

Arthur Remillard’s *Southern Civil Religions: Imagining the Good Society in the Post-Reconstruction Era* opens for the reader a view of Southern civil religion that moved beyond the always fertile ground of shaping of civil religion to include the oft maligned and muted voices of the marginalized in the Post-Reconstruction era. Remillard acknowledges and raises the voices and plights of Blacks, women, Jews, and Catholics during a period when any movement that was not what he calls the “Protestant Democratic South” stood in grave danger in many ways and was shut out in others across the Wiregrass region of Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. One of his goals was to broaden the topic beyond the dominant white voice as it relates to civil religion to show that several movements of civil religions afoot in this period left indelible fingerprints on this region. Under the rubric of shaping the “good society,” Remillard notes that “Some groups had more political influence, economic strength, or numbers than others did. Still, the politically

⁹² Ibid, 203.

disfranchised, the economically alienated, and the numerically diminutive had the will and imagination necessary to envision what society ought to be on their own terms.”⁹³

Remillard situates Southern Civil Religions “at the nexus of religion and public life, where social values, beliefs, and symbols assume a transcendent status.”⁹⁴ His aim covers the travails and advantages (inherent or achieved) of Jews, Women, and Catholics where even the outward appearance of cooperation was betrayed behind closed doors. Examples of this explored by Remillard are within the Catholic Church between men and women, as well as the conflicts that existed between Jews and Catholics where Jews stood against their racism; they were able to make inroads in the Wiregrass region more ably than Catholics.

His chapter on Blacks and the “race problem” after Reconstruction drew my attention as it relates to developing positive Black self-identity. Remillard highlights many of the drudges faced by Blacks in the region that stymied efforts to build community and progress. At the heart of the Black community was their religious fervor that blossomed amongst and against white religion. He details how Blacks “produced their civil, religious discourse; one marked not only by resistance but also by an understanding of freedom developed from Black history and Christian theology”⁹⁵ formulated as “Christianized resistance to white dominance.”⁹⁶ Remillard provides numerous examples of Black religious leaders, mostly pastors, who, for one reason or another in such a society, were thrust onto the stage as either defenders of their community or defenders of the status quo for the betterment of the Black community. One such example was

⁹³ Arthur Remillard, *Southern Civil Religions: Imagining the Good Society in the Post-Reconstruction Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 2.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 1.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 61.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 76.

Reverend Emanuel K. Love, an esteemed Black Baptist pastor in both Thomasville and Savannah, Georgia, who was respected by whites and who, just as Booker T. Washington had, advocated that Blacks who worked hard could indeed work their way up, that is, until he experienced an unprovoked, violent attack by whites. Still, he would call out the violence of whites while continuing to appeal to the dignity of Blacks as he reminded them that their gifts of exemplary character came from God despite what whites advocated.

Overall, Remillard does a solid job of arguing that the Lost Cause was not the only civil religion of the South, the belief systems and value sets that shape a region's or a nation's religious identity. Several civil religions were developing in response to one another, but the Lost Cause was predominant; it sought to create and define a faith based on the supremacy and dominance of whiteness formed by a culture of resistance to Northern industrialism and liberalism, which defined the South as a failed society demonstrated by the result of the Civil War. Each of these "communities" of civil religion sought to create a good society based on their social standing against the dominant narrative in the South, the Lost Cause.

Faith, Race, And The Lost Cause: Confessions Of A Southern Church

Christopher Alan Graham's *Faith, Race, and the Lost Cause: Confessions of a Southern Church* sets the tone from its introduction: "Deep historical problems required deep historical excavation to be understood and rooted out."⁹⁷ Graham begins his narrative inauspiciously with the murders of nine Black Christians in 2015 by a young white man, Dylan Roof, while in Bible Study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. He does so to drive home the point that Dylan Roof was enamored with Confederate history and

⁹⁷ Christopher Alan Graham and Melanie Mullen, *Faith, Race, and the Lost Cause: Confessions of a Southern Church* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2023), 6.

relished the idea of white supremacy, both of which fueled the impetus for the heinous act. This germ would fuel *Faith, Race, and the Lost Cause*. This is a book full of essential questions that, when answered in earnest, possess the potential to set all interested parties at liberty from the constraints of a tainted legacy writ large upon the broad shoulders of white supremacy. At the heart of this book are the unsettling questions of “Have we done enough?” and “Are good intentions sufficient?”

Graham sets out to disprove this conundrum, though not through the time-honored and always fruitful investigation of the wily roots of the Lost Cause. He takes the approach of looking intently through the lens of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church of Richmond, Virginia, notable for its deep and rich history and legacy in the Confederacy. Amongst notable members were past confederates like General Robert E. Lee, former president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, and John Pegram, a Confederate General, who has the ominous distinction of having been married in the same spot where, one month later, after his death, he would lie in state for his funeral. St. Paul was a willing, towering figure of the Confederacy adorned with emblems, stained glass windows, and messages that pay tribute to the Lost Cause. Graham points out that “The Lee and Davis windows served as a draw for gatherings of Confederate memorials, and the church became the religious annex to Richmond’s frequent reunions, monument unveilings, anniversaries, and funerals.”⁹⁸

One of Graham's key points in the book is the value of “good intentions.” St. Paul’s Church possessed good intentions; however, they were muted by the actions of the well-meaning congregation. Like many white Christians throughout the South, they rationalized that God was the ultimate determinant of their guardianship over Blacks. It is in this crowded and lonely space

⁹⁸ Ibid, 72.

where Graham's discussion and definition of "lived religion" applies. He notes that "lived religion is a study of how particular people, in particular places and times, live in, with, through, and against the religious idioms available to them in a culture – all the idioms, including (often enough) those not explicitly their own."⁹⁹ So well-intentioned was St. Paul's that it was well ahead of its time but remained stuck in the past when, in 1930, the church sponsored a Race Relations Day that seated both Blacks and whites on the main floor of the church...but with Blacks confined to one side and whites sitting on the other, a la Billy Graham revivals which were not integrated until 1953 in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Where *Faith, Race, and the Lost Cause* crosses paths with my study is Graham's portrayal of St. Paul's Church as steeped in white supremacy, but perhaps due to politeness, they never indulged in explicit and deliberate racism which parallels so much of white Christianity today – still steeped in and undergirded by white supremacy but due to politeness the racism practiced is not overt nor demonstrative. This is the implicit danger of white Christianity demonstrated over the past two centuries and, again, so alive and well in the twenty-first century. Like so many churches, the benevolent indifference of white Christianity, which has at times indeed been complicit and overt in its racism, is demonstrated by a bastion of white Christianity in St. Paul's Church. However, St. Paul's Church paves the way for other churches without half the baggage of the Confederacy to shift and receive a truer Gospel than the one it has been bequeathed. In the words of St. Paul's Church's sixteenth rector, The Reverend Doctor Charles Dupree, who challenged his congregation during the Black Lives Matter Movement (2013 –

⁹⁹ Ibid, 7.

present) protests by noting that “we can’t sweep it (the legacy of the Confederacy, racism, etc.) under the rug.”¹⁰⁰

Chaplain To The Confederacy: Basil Manly And Baptist Life In The Old South

James Fuller’s *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South* is a scholarly study on Basil Manly, designated by the Jefferson Davis administration as Chaplain to the Confederacy, who was a multi-faceted man of the cloth, an educator, University of Alabama president, and considered by many to be the architect of the Southern Baptist Convention in its break from the Triennial Convention on the issue of mission work and slavery. Manly’s presence, in many ways, proved to be larger than life as he stood to pray at the opening of the inauguration of Jefferson Davis as president of the Confederacy. Fuller notes that having worked for nearly thirty years for the establishment of a Southern nation, “How fitting it was that Manly had been selected to perform the solemn ritual.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, from his pen, the Alabama Resolution for secession came and eventually led to the state’s secession, and the other southern states moved.

Fuller looks broadly at Manly’s life across the areas mentioned above. Fuller’s narrative “attempts to understand Manly’s life within the framework of his social prescription given in the ‘Sermons on Duty’ and his dialectical analysis of the themes of mercy and judgment,” and it is these ideas and ideals which Fuller argues “shaped his decisions as a Southerner and as a Christian gentleman.”¹⁰² Fuller details some of the finer points that contributed to Manly’s

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 160.

¹⁰¹ A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 1.

¹⁰² Ibid, 9.

overall understanding of the world around him and how they influenced not only what he taught and preached but also how he lived his life.

Manly's years in Alabama as president of the University of Alabama made him "more resolute in his defense of Southern institutions. In part, this was a response to the growing power of abolitionists in the North."¹⁰³ Fuller treats the depth and breadth of Manly masterfully, offering a view of one who in many ways was very complex, a man whose presence was outsized in both the secession of the Southern Baptists from the Triennial Convention to establish the "Southern" Baptist Convention, and not long afterward the secession of the Southern states from the Union. Manly, himself an owner of 40 enslaved people, held, as many Southerners did, that God's natural order and hierarchy was the model for white supremacy practiced in the South. Again, in step with the rationalizations of many Southerners, Fuller recounts how Manly sought to improve the spiritual condition of the enslaved, and much of it based upon the convenience of slavery, he believed, served as a means of peace. An absentee landowner, Manly did, on occasion, however, when present, behave like many other slave-owning evangelical pastors, and he beat his enslaved people into submission.

Manly's ambiguity on slavery and Blacks was highlighted when, as a son of the South, while in college in April 1821, he argued for gradual abolition and colonization of Blacks in a speech titled "On the Emancipation of Slaves," where he also offered strong criticism of the peculiar institution. While it may sound revolutionary for the time, this happened when colonization seemed reasonable to Southerners, and it is not beyond the imagination that his speech was one of debate where he was assigned to defend the institution, given his dramatic turn in full adulthood. If, indeed, it was his conscience as a young man, that time would not last

¹⁰³ Ibid, 212.

long, and the utterance of such a thought any time later would have cast him as a hated and despised abolitionist, as happened to his friend Fredrick A. P. Barnard, who would later found Barnard College in New York City.

The purpose of Fuller's book in relation to my study is that I do not argue that Basil Manly (along with William Bullein Johnson and Richard Fuller) are the progenitors of that into which they collectively breathed life; I do argue that he and his cohorts laid a foundation for Southern Baptists that was central to the Convention holding fast to a Christianity that was clothed and drenched in white supremacy. I further argue that the retinue of this theology still laces the preachment and attitude, though more subtle, of those who belong to the Convention today. That being the case, it does nothing to diminish the role Basil Manly played as a giant in a critical time in the life of this country. Fuller recounts that as Manly neared the end of his seventy-year-old life, he remained confident in his God and his life as lived: "Intellectually, Manly refined his evangelical Christianity and classical education, and the result was his own synthesis, a natural theology that brought together religion, the Charleston Ideal, and history in a form that allowed him to express the meaning he found in life, as he reconciled tensions and problems."¹⁰⁴

RELIGIO-CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH: *The Need Resolved*
The Golden Age Of Black Nationalism, 1850-1920

Wilson Jeremiah Moses's *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1920* locates his study in what I determined to be the most critical period of Black identity development in the nation's history. He does so by tracing Black nationalist movements and formations during this

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 317.

period. He states, “This book is intended to provoke controversy and provide a new thesis concerning the Golden Age of Black Nationalism – that during these years, the ideology was conservative rather than radical.”¹⁰⁵ His examination includes Black luminaries of the period and their varied yet ultimately connected contributions to the Black nationalism of Alexander Crummell, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and culminating in the leadership and time of Marcus Garvey. Moses’ choice of this era mirrors the time period for my study, which is why looking at the development of different notions of Black nationalism has connections to and with the development of positive Black identity.

Moses’ objective was no small task in that his primary purpose was to focus “on the assimilationist or acculturating tendencies dominating Black nationalist ideology in the Golden Age.”¹⁰⁶ He outlines five salient points to be argued:

- 1) Ideological Black nationalism has been chained to the concept of “civilization” and has embraced an evolutionary conception of history.
- 2) The Black nationalist view of history is mystical... a decline of the West will accompany Africa’s redemption; God will make a new covenant with Black people
- 3) Black nationalism assumes the shape of its container and transforms by changing intellectual fashions in the white world
- 4) Black nationalism is a genteel tradition in English letters
- 5) Black nationalism, therefore, becomes a prime vehicle for acculturation processes because Black nationalism in the nineteenth century was much concerned with preserving Anglo-American values and transmitting them, in modified form, to the Black community.

Each of these is a deft analysis, particularly given that, as Moses argues, much of the shaping of Black nationalism has some tinge or overt white inclusion that rendered it more a tool for continued white control. Interestingly enough, not only does my definition of positive Black

¹⁰⁵ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism: 1850-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 11.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 10.

self-identity include the necessary ingredient of “without white encumbrances,” but also because the period of Black identity development immediately following the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro movements will, through the arts, struggle with the same dichotomy of seemingly innocuous (and sometimes overt) interference versus purging. One example of this interference or imposition upon Black nationalism is the language of the Black leadership. Often, Black leaders, too, used idioms borrowed from whites like “civilizing” Black people as though under the circumstances of their lives, their reactions were inconsistent with either the treatment they received or the illusory assumptions of God-ordained white supremacy by whites. This underscores what renown psychiatrist Viktor Frankl concluded in *Man’s Search For Meaning*: “An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is perfectly normal”¹⁰⁷ typifying Black responses to the barbarism of white supremacy.

Moses’ definition of Black nationalism is critical given his objectives and the tools he was working to achieve his goal of “provoking controversy” with an end toward a newer and more explicit discussion on the topic. He defines Black nationalism as “The ideological basis of nationalism ...that people concerned are tied to a geographical region which they have either traditionally possessed or felt entitled to possess.”¹⁰⁸ Though broad, Moses’ definition served his purpose of bringing many concepts of Black nationalism beneath the umbrella and weaving together a new thesis of unity. The “warring ideals” between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois (and A. Philip Randolph) on the future development of Blacks are of particular interest. In chapter 4, Moses discusses the approaches of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, and while he makes the unproven claim or assumption that “Washington idolized Douglass” on

¹⁰⁷ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search For Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), 38.

¹⁰⁸ Moses, 17.

more than one occasion, he highlights where the two agreed and where they differed on the best path towards development. Herein is seen both the dependence upon whites as well as the elitism of both Douglass and Washington: Both were self-made men in the age of enterprise and hoped to see the masses of Black people catch the spirit of the times; both employed the rhetoric of “rugged individualism” rather than the gospel of racial collectivism, and both were inclined to place a disproportionate amount of the blame for Blacks’ problems on Blacks themselves. Both operated beneath the veil of ‘up by your own bootstraps’ teaching that “African assimilation into American life could be solved simply by equipping Blacks with skills necessary to the larger society.”¹⁰⁹

Moses closes *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism* with the demise of Garveyism, which he says “hewed out a strong, rough-edged and honest expression of Black nationalist consciousness,”¹¹⁰ but then he, Moses, points the way forward through the artists and the artistry of the Harlem Renaissance. The era would not be without its problems in the lure of whiteness and European values that beset Crummell, but he concluded that from there, there was indeed a New Negro. Moses signs off with a note of hope: “As existing Black nationalist groups die out [as they had previously] or abandon their separatist policies, new ones will spring up to take their places.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 91.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 268.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 271.

Black Reconstruction In America, 1860-1880

W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* is written as a needed and necessary corrective action to the Dunning School, which had set out to craft its own version of the history of Reconstruction as a failed enterprise and that Blacks were the reason it failed. The Dunning School, named after Professor William A. Dunning of Columbia University, was the skeletal system of Jim Crow. The school advocated for the "Acceptance of the reality of racial inequality"¹¹² and that the targeting of suffrage for Blacks during Reconstruction was a great mistake. Its erroneous findings and fallacious recapitulations were relied upon by the United States Supreme Court well into the twentieth century, when historically justifying the nullification of the Reconstruction amendments. *Black Reconstruction* answers resoundingly the call for a detailed, factual, and historical response. *Black Reconstruction* is monumental for its contributions and stands singularly as one of the most thorough and grounded historical documents on the period of Reconstruction. One of the book's recurring themes is found in the first two chapters, The Black Worker and The White Worker. He seems to lament the fact that these two groups did not unite against the elite capitalist planters to demand and fight for what would have undoubtedly benefitted both given that the plight of the poor whites was only "better" than the poor freedmen in skin color. Du Bois notes the obvious in that poor whites valued their whiteness more than their class, which fulfilled the purpose of the elite class's propaganda. A book replete with primary sourced documents Du Bois quotes a poor white worker who eventually became president to support the notion of the potential power in poor whites and poor Blacks coming together in a united front: "I am not ashamed to confess that

¹¹² Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 159.

twenty-five years ago I was a hired laborer, mauling rails, at work on a flat boat – just what might happen to any poor man’s son.”¹¹³ The quote came from the sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln, in 1860.

Du Bois’ recounting of the Negro’s role in Emancipation was comprehensive, which historians of that day – and some remain today – protest that Blacks played little-to-no role, except through corruption helping to undermine Reconstruction. Du Bois is not tepid about stating that slavery was the primary reason for the Civil War, and, again, Lincoln’s voice concurs: “I admit that slavery is at the root of the rebellion, or at least it’s sin qua non...I would also concede that Emancipation would help us in Europe...And then, unquestionably, it would weaken the Rebels by drawing off their laborers, which is of great importance.”¹¹⁴ Du Bois also demonstrates how even under the auspices of slavery, Black somebodiness and agency propelled them (Blacks) to be of great use during the war, fighting on behalf of the North, understanding that a loss could no more dehumanize them than slavery had already attempted, but a victory would give them liberation. It was reported by a white northern soldier that “This war has been full of records of Negro agency in our behalf. Negro guides have piloted our forces; Negro sympathy cared for our prisoners... Negro hands have made for us naval captures; Negro spies brought us valuable information.”¹¹⁵

Du Bois also examines “black codes” enacted after the Civil War. These codes, he reminds us, were merely a reenactment of the “slave codes” and their sole purpose was to restrict the rights of Blacks through social control and, at the same time, secure them as cheap labor.

¹¹³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 17

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 85.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 105.

These codes, I argue, inadvertently planted the seeds of positive Black self-identity, revealing an inexplicable and irresistible determination ‘to be.’ Du Bois shows how Black Reconstruction leaders founded and started the public school system across the South, notably in North Carolina, according to Du Bois. He details how some states established integrated schools and some segregated schools, and how it proved to be more expensive to have segregated schools. Here in Black Reconstruction, he notes that tremendous gains were made for Blacks – which, in the final analysis, proved Reconstruction’s undoing – across many spectrums of life. He details the establishment of Historically Black Colleges and Universities during this time as well as the presence of other businesses like insurance companies, banks, barbers, salons, butcheries, doctors, and lawyers, which all proliferated in this time. Black political figures on the local, state, and federal levels numbered twelve hundred who participated in the legislative process as equals, securing unprecedented rights and protections for Blacks. It is pertinent to add here that Du Bois himself would also fall victim to the adoption of white critique of Blacks, just like his mentor Alexander Crummell. This is not to say that Blacks were blameless in the problems and issues that plagued the period, but it is to say that the subversion and the ensuing narrative that pinned the fall of Reconstruction was an inversion of the truth. Du Bois would acknowledge, along with the many other nefarious tales, that those Black political leaders – whom he also lauded as “ordinary men doing extraordinary things” – took bribes, and they did it because they were poor and did not know any better because of slavery.

Black Reconstruction provides the backdrop for a period that revealed for Blacks and whites alike the untold prowess of Blacks, and given a seemingly level playing ground, they could not only compete with whites but excel. The brief twelve-year period of Reconstruction displayed a never-say-die attitude that struck fear in many whites and ignited a fire smoldering

under the aegis of chattel slavery in the hearts and minds of Blacks that took flight even when Reconstruction was dismantled. Jim and Jane Crow would take the throne of the South.

Stony The Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, And The Rise Of Jim Crow

Henry Louis Gates' *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* traverses some familiar territory in his multifaceted discussion of the New Negro, but what I would call the struggle to develop positive Black self-identity in "the nadir of race relations in this country." Gates discusses this topic of the New Negro in depth. He informs the reader at the beginning and the end of the book that this has been a topic of fascination for him since his undergraduate days at Yale which he labels a "commodious concept" given its many different incarnations and ideological presuppositions - some of which he says are "diametrically opposed to each other."¹¹⁶ He applies a dual approach, which chronicles and examines, on one hand, the history of using imagery to overturn Reconstruction and the reversal of the Fourteenth Amendment and Fifth Amendments. On the other hand, it tells "the history of the use of imagery embodying the counternarrative by Black people themselves in the civic and cultural self-defense."¹¹⁷

As he weaves through the four chapters of the book – Antislavery/Antislave, The Old Negro, Framing Blackness, and The New Negro – he makes two principal interrelated arguments: "First is that resistance to white supremacy never ceased among African American, despite the unbearably hostile climate that white supremacy created" and second, the reality that

¹¹⁶ Henry Louis Gates, *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), 248.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, xvii.

“black activists refused to grant that crucial events in the rise and fall of Reconstruction were endpoints to their drive for equitable race relations in America.”¹¹⁸ Gates adroitly, liberally, and judiciously employs the use of imagery in period cartoons depicting Blacks as barbarous, unsophisticated animals in need of the white man’s control to undermine all notions of Black equality or their ability to achieve as may have appeared or assumed during Reconstruction. Herein lies the dovetailing of my study and interest in Gates’s study. On several occasions and in numerous ways, Gates intimates that the crushing of blackness and its spirit were essential to the milieu of the day: “That Africans and those of African descent were either not human or fully human was a cardinal tenet of proslavery thought and reveals the depths of depravity at the heart of white supremacy ideology.”¹¹⁹ It is imperative to understand this central motif in whiteness and white supremacy and their expressed intent to subdue and crush Black identity.

Gates’s fascination with the concept of the New Negro stretches beyond the usual confines of the Harlem Renaissance period and Alain Locke back thirty years earlier in 1895 when Booker T. Washington, who, after his infamous speech deemed the “Atlanta Compromise,” was conferred the title of “the new negro” by an admiring, white reporter. A contemporary and equally contentious, forceful personality during this era was Bishop Henry Highland Garnett, who would aptly respond: “There was no new negro. He was simply the same old negro, showing his capacity as he was given opportunity by the new white man.”¹²⁰ Washington’s reception by whites directly reflected his acquiescence to the white ideal of blackness over Douglass’ insistent “agitate, agitate, agitate.” White acceptance of Washington was replete with

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 253-4.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 65.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 252.

and intimately related to an accepted and expected spirit of Black deference if his (meaning Washington's) impact on Blacks was to be successful; thus, the closing argument of their case would have been made by a Black man who would have ultimately secured the Redeemers' goal of white supremacy's rule and Black inferiority and subserviency -- in perpetuity.

Amongst the many other personalities Gates examines, one other I'd like to raise is that of Thomas Dixon and his contributions to shaping the thoughts and mindsets of whites. Of particular mention amongst his works is his novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, which captured the hearts and imaginations of whites everywhere, but, more specifically, it caught the heart and imagination of D. W. Griffith, who would make the landmark film "The Birth of a Nation" cementing the notion of white supremacy and Black inferiority. Gates notes that "Dixon's interpretation of Reconstruction did more over the next several decades of the twentieth century to shape the country's understanding of that historical period...than any other single factor."¹²¹ He would later cast Dixon's novels as literal "'how to' guides for white supremacists."

Though it appears in the early pages of the book, the most excellent summation of *Stony the Road* is found in the remark by a Baptist minister, Garrison Frazier, designated as spokesman by a group of nineteen other Black church leaders in Savannah, Georgia, for a meeting with General William T. Sherman and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. They asked the group whether or not they wanted land in the South amongst whites, to which Frazier spoke prophetically on behalf of the group and freed people everywhere: "I would prefer to live by ourselves, for there is a prejudice against us in the South that will take years to get over."¹²²

¹²¹ Ibid, 104.

¹²² Ibid, 30.

Given the close of Gates' examination and the idea that this discussion requires more attention and research, one is left to ponder the prophetic spirit present, given the depth and breadth of Frazier's assessment above all that has transpired in race relations since January 12, 1865.

From Slavery To Freedom: A History Of African Americans

John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* is a monumental work of which none other had heretofore ever been completed. Franklin's approach in this outsized project was to provide a comprehensive view of African Americans since their arrival in the colonies in 1619, up through World War II. Still, up through the eighth edition, it covered up to the twenty-first century. *From Slavery to Freedom*, over the span of 636 pages, is a virtual encyclopedia of Black history in one volume and is considered by many to be the most authoritative and comprehensive work of its kind. This magnum opus is comprehensive in that it covers four centuries of history in one volume, and it provides enough information on each topic for those interested to seek and discover more. The reader will not find in-depth analysis, as others have critiqued Franklin's effort in this regard; however, there is scarcely a relevant topic of Black interest that goes unmentioned or explained.ⁱⁱⁱ

Few, if any, topics of note are left out as Franklin provides a sweeping historical bird's eye view from the shores of Africa, through slavery into Reconstruction, Post-Reconstruction, both World Wars, the Black Power and Civil Rights movements up through the turn of the twenty-first century, through subsequent editions and updates. Of particular note and interest for my study are chapters covering the "Civil War" (11), "The "Effort to Attain Peace" during the Reconstruction years (12), "Losing the Peace" highlighting the overthrow of Reconstruction and its concomitant movements and triumph of white supremacy (13), "Philanthropy and Self-Help"

during the dark days of Post-Reconstruction (14), and “The Color Line” issues at the turn of the twentieth Century (15). It is in these years that Franklin lays bare the historical backdrop for the need and necessity of this study on positive Black self-identity. He chronicles the uncertainty during the Civil War when Blacks were forced to choose sides. Some willingly ran to join the United States Colored Troops while others felt self-preservationist allegiances to the South, igniting thoughts of “Why would a Black man fight for the South?” Regarding this question, Franklin quotes Bell I. Wiley who pointed out that “These acts of loyalty, in the light of contemporary evidence, must be considered as exceptional.”¹²³ And in freedom post-Civil War, Franklin steps into the quagmire of the full rights of citizenship for Blacks and all of its related issues as the white hot attempts to continue to control Blacks through the Black Codes after the Civil War bore a strong resemblance to the Slave Codes before the Civil War.¹²⁴ With the marks of great advancement and achievement in many areas for Blacks, particularly in education and the growth of Black churches, which both contributed to Black empowerment, Reconstruction would be overthrown and the brutal disfranchisement and dehumanization of Blacks would ensue.

This dastardly period would lead to the triumph of white supremacy and what Franklin labels a “Resurgence of laws in the South segregating Blacks and whites.”¹²⁵ The importunity of this era would be signified by a “new century [opening] tragically with 214 lynchings in the first two years.”¹²⁶ Amongst the great names he raises is the indomitable Booker T. Washington, who

¹²³ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023), 233.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 250.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 290.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 291.

Franklin writes took on a similar mentality towards Blacks as did his mentor, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, a white president of Hampton University, Washington's alma mater. Washington, like Armstrong, believed that Blacks must earn the respect of people who believed they were inferior and less-than-human. There is also, in the book, a powerful deposition on the conflict between contemporaries in Washington and the equally luminous W.E.B. Du Bois. Franklin deftly lays bare for the reader how one of great esteem amongst Blacks nationally inadvertently served as their gatekeeper: "[Whites] agreed with his advocacy of a type of education that they believe would consign African Americans to an inferior economic and social status in Southern Life."¹²⁷ Franklin brings the reader through this time up to the beginning of the first World War when few things allowed for a peaceful Black existence. While it may seem antithetical, it is this period toward which my study in developing positive self-identity takes root. It is found in the resurgent somebodiness of an assumed moribund people at a time when only the minutest slither of light could penetrate the otherwise thickness of the darkest night.

White Too Long: The Legacy Of White Supremacy In American Christianity

Robert P. Jones's *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* is "the story of just how intractably white supremacy has become embedded in the DNA of American Christianity."¹²⁸ Jones was born a beneficiary of the legacy of the old South and its religion. Being Evangelicals, Jones' family and ancestors were also faithful Southern Baptists. His education is also a signifier of his authority over this topic as he received his undergraduate degree from Mississippi College, his Master of Divinity from Southwestern

¹²⁷ Ibid, 301.

¹²⁸ Jones, *White Too Long*, 3.

Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas, and his doctorate from Emory University in Georgia. Though a social scientist, Jones's roots give him an insider's view, which provides a solid base from which to draw, in some cases, surprising conclusions. In essence, Jones exposes strands of racism and white supremacy that remain alive and well in white churches. Jones "reveals unsettling truths about what white Christians believe, what motivates their behavior, and what constitutes the core of their identity."¹²⁹ While my study rests heavily on Blacks developing their sense of positive Black self-identity, it is critical to understand the deleterious impact of American Christianity upon the ethos and, sadly, the pathos of Black identity. Trained in ministry, Jones, as a sociologist, successfully presents statistics and facts about a way of believing that is strongly characteristic of many religionists in this country and while not as overt as in times past, its impact is a colorless, odorless, and tasteless nerve gas that debilitates Blacks while reasserting whiteness as supreme.

Jones's analysis begins with the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention and their separation over the issue of slavery in 1845 under the leadership of Basil Manly, Sr., a leading Baptist voice nationally in the Triennial Convention and then-president of the University of Alabama. Jones asserts that "The theologically backed assertion of the superiority of 'the white race' and Protestant Christianity undergirded a century of religiously sanctioned terrorism in the form of ritualized lynchings and other forms of public violence and intimidation."¹³⁰ While many correct charges have been levied against the white church, Jones contends that these charges "overlook the proactive role white religious leaders and white churches played in

¹²⁹ Ibid, 6.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 5.

creating *a uniquely American and distinctively Christian form of white supremacy.*”¹³¹ (italics added for emphasis)

Jones sufficiently covers in chapter three the birth of a white ideological theology, beginning with the Lost Cause. This enduring theology was a powerful testament to white supremacy, which relied on an operationalized interpretation of the Bible to sustain their control. Beginning at the close of the Civil War, the Lost Cause was a movement that sought to paint the Confederacy as justified and honorable while at the same time denying and/or minimizing the role of slavery in the conflict. Jones demonstrates both how slavery was the reason for the split from the Triennial Convention, as well as the root cause of the Civil War. One of the studies he conducts ties directly to this fact. He measured the legacy of slaveholding among white Americans today and found that the following attitudes were stronger in states where slaveholding had the highest rates in 1860. His findings regarding Whites who lived in these states were: “(1) they are more politically conservative and Republican-leaning; (2) they are more opposed to affirmative action; and (3) they score higher on questions measuring racial resentment.”¹³² Jones notes often, as he does here, that these attitudes also exist in the other areas canvassed. However, in the South, the tendencies towards these attitudes were the highest.

Jones’ perspective as Southern, white, Baptist, a minister, and a sociologist is deeply and firmly rooted in Southern Baptist ideology. He carefully notes that his analyses do not merely cover evangelicals of the South; they also cover Protestants in the Midwest and Catholics in the Northeast.

¹³¹ Ibid, 33.

¹³² Ibid, 156.

With his many startling findings on the staying power and legacy of racism in the white church, he does not leave the reader in a low place. He closes his study with a call to white churches to reflect and act on what has been an heirloom from ages past: racism and the myriad ways it continues to exist. The fact remains, however, that “White Christian churches have not just been complacent; they have not only been complicit; rather, as the dominant cultural power in America, they have been responsible for constructing and sustaining a project to protect white supremacy and resist Black equality.”¹³³ In the final chapter and the Acknowledgements with a debt of gratitude to James Baldwin, from whose lips he takes the title for this book from a New York Times op-ed: “I will say flatly that the bulk of this country’s white population impresses me, and has so impressed me for a long time, as being beyond any conceivable hope of moral rehabilitation. They have been white, if I may put it so, too long.”¹³⁴

The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, And Refounding Democracy

Jim Wallis’ *The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy* takes a very personal approach to exposing white Christian nationalism for what it is: a fake Christianity. In supporting his contention that white Christian nationalism is harmful, even toxic, Wallis quotes sociologist Samuel Perry, who says: “...Christian nationalist ideology is fundamentally antidemocratic because its goal isn’t ‘government of the people, by the people, and for the people.’ Its goal is power.”¹³⁵ He

¹³³ Ibid, 6.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 233.

¹³⁵ Jim Wallis, *The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy* (New York: Macmillan Audio, 2024), 18.

challenges many notions held by white Christianity on defining who the “neighbor” is, particularly in relationship to attitudes on immigration, and by linking a denial of voter rights back to Genesis. He calls it an assault on the “image of God” amongst other scriptural texts. He relies upon the scholarship of Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, who clarifies that in Genesis, the word “dominion” means more ‘to care for,’ rather than ‘dominance to control and exploit.’ Brueggemann says, “Being made in God’s image meant....Creatively using power to invite, evoke, and permit was what made Homo sapiens special and a reflection of God because this is the way God exercised God’s power.”¹³⁶

Wallis provides a historical view of the roots of what made white Christianity’s gospel false, but only to provide a more accurate view of sample scriptures that help paint a picture of how the white church got where it is. He employs several familiar passages in the Bible; in invoking who is the “neighbor,” he applies the parable of the “good” Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Other texts used to “let Jesus do the talking” are Matthew 5:9, Matthew 25:31-46 (which he calls his personal “conversion text”), John 8:32, and Galatians 3:28. Each of these texts is lifted to drive Christians into uncomfortable places of reflection with the overall mission of strengthening the backbone of the church to withstand the false white gospel epidemic. Of particular note in the book is his exposition on democracy: “Democracy will not be saved or fulfilled by just politics and especially not by partisan agendas.”¹³⁷ Given that the book was written in the throes of the presidential election, Wallis sees a reciprocal relationship between true, authentic Christianity and the survival of American democracy, and he considers the thirst and manipulations for power an imminent threat undergirded by support from the church. Indeed,

¹³⁶ Ibid, 84-85.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 235.

this is one of the places Wallis reminds the reader of how history points to the source of problems: “The American churches...were divided over slavery and the Civil War, and white Southern churches tried to use the Bible to justify slavery, but the vanguard of the abolitionist movement was Christian”¹³⁸ where he lists names, Blacks and whites, who stood against the swelling tide of advocacy and indifference to the peculiar institution.

Wallis does not leave the reader hopeless. As the book closes, there are or should be some serious misgivings about the state of much of white Christianity and the false gospel to which it adheres. However, Wallis offers strategies for pastors and churches to help bridge the chasm between where the church is today and where it needs to be. He implores Christians not to lose hope, for “hope,” he says, “is a choice, a decision, and one based on what we call faith.”¹³⁹

Given the depth and breadth of the psychological, sociological, and religio-culturo-historical sources reviewed here, the study of Black identity development has long been and continues to be fertile ground for scholarly examination. The strength of these studies shows that despite numerous hardships, Black resilience has prevented dehumanization from defining them or their responses. This selection of studies also reflects a diversity of ethnographic and anthropological lenses through which the topic has been viewed, and combined, they set the stage for this examination thesis.

The following chapters build upon the work of these and other sources in a couple of ways. First, it is rooted in the religio-culturo-historical approach, intentionally focusing upon the impact of religion as central to the development of positive Black self-identity. Second, it

¹³⁸ Ibid, 211.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 239.

focuses on a period of intense legal, political, and socially institutionalized degradation and denudation of blackness. And third, it positions this post-Reconstruction period as the catalyst for the birthing over a half century later of the Black Power Movement, representing the pinnacle of positive Black self-identity. The undeniability of positive Black self-identity in the emergence of the Black Power Movement would cause consternation both inside the Black community (Civil Rights activists, those seeking to keep the “peace”, etc.) and outside the community (US Government’s COINTELPRO, militia groups, etc.). Thus, the length and breadth of the Black Power Movement, seeds planted and watered during post-Reconstruction, laying the foundation for positive Black self-identity, would be truncated.

CHAPTER 3:

Historical Context – “Sitting Where the Captives Sat”

“Slaves would not have imagined this brutal march as a theological act, yet it was so in the most sinister way. African Peoples walking together, bound together, first in varieties of rope and finally, as they approached the ships, bound in chains, left a way of imagining themselves when they left their lands.”¹⁴⁰

Black religious thought has been and continues to be a citadel in the protection and shaping of positive Black self-identity, particularly during post-Reconstruction, when the strength of white Christianity stretched beyond the church to include local, state, and federal legislation crafted to maintain Southern sensibilities. Given the importance of Black religious thought in Black communal life, this chapter highlights the nexus of the need for developing and maintaining positive Black self-identity as I examine its underlying nemesis, white Christianity. As has been in many other places and will be noted and discussed here, at first, under strict prohibition, Black conversion to America’s peculiar version of Christianity would eventually be permitted, but not for biblical reasons. Permission would come as a tool of control within the context of a society predicated upon white supremacy. Southern theology was predicated upon a regional iconoclasm that shaped the Southern moral identity as a “chosen” people by God.

As noted, positive Black self-identity is one’s self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-discovery of the particularities of blackness unencumbered by the inevitability and pervasiveness of whiteness within American society and culture. It is worth noting here that, conversely to Black religious thought shaping and molding positive Black self-identity, white Christianity is

¹⁴⁰ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and The Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 175.

the dominant narrative in American culture, which has consumed it and shaped it. Within this social context, blackness was anathema to whiteness and, therefore, became the central target of the deliberately deleterious effects of the South's avant-garde Southern White Christianity.

Religion has long been a major seam – arguably, for some, *the* central seam – that has held the Black community together. It was noted by Howard Thurman in relationship to his upbringing at the beginning of the twentieth century that “Not only did church membership seem to bear heavily upon one’s ultimate destiny beyond death and the grave; more than all the other communal ties, it also undergirded one’s sense of personal identity.”¹⁴¹ One of the aims of Black Theology is “looking at the world and discerning blackness, not as conceived from the perspective of whiteness...but as that which exists orthogonal to the world of white supremacy.”¹⁴² Far from merely satisfying the spiritual or nontemporal needs of the people, Black religion and Black Theology have symbolized social cohesion and advancement for the Black community against the forces of domination and oppression that sought to extinguish the light of hope in Blacks. Never monolithic in belief, Blacks have ascribed faith traditions across the religious spectrum. All of these religious traditions – Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religions, and the many syncretizations therein and beyond – have played a significant role in shaping and forming positive Black self-identity under and through myriad challenges of subjugation. These faiths have, amongst other things, created value, purpose, and belongingness when Blacks have found themselves under dire and desperate circumstances meant to dehumanize and subject them. French sociologist Emile Durkheim concurs, suggesting that “religion’s true role is not to bring people to a god or offer them salvation in a realm beyond; it is

¹⁴¹ Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979), 17.

¹⁴² Lloyd, 235.

rather to anchor them, here and now, in the clan, the community that shapes and sustains their lives.”¹⁴³ For Durkheim “humans do not just exist; *they belong*”¹⁴⁴ which lends credence to the continual existence and growth of blackness despite untoward attempts over time to exterminate.

Critical here is the link between religion, a sense of belongingness, and the discovery of meaning, which are foundational in the shaping and forming of positive self-identity. As noted earlier, belongingness is to be understood as the desire and need to belong to something bigger and more significant than oneself, which, in turn, provides safety, security, and an environment fertile for meaning-making without the fear or precautions necessary due to the threat of predatory subjectivity. Regarding the historical subjugation of Black personhood in this nation, what happens when the social infrastructure required to foster a sense of belongingness is either disrupted or irreparably impaired with purposeful intentionality? Caught “betwixt and between”¹⁴⁵ the triumvirate of 1) a continent with which one has no connection - Africa; 2) a nation which views one as a thing to be used rather than a human being of equal intellect, ability, and value – America; and 3) the community to which one belongs that is constantly beset with internal and external strife – Black America, how does one cobble together a coherent identity while plagued by autophobia (hatred of one’s self or one’s group), nationalism (which risks replicating the oppressive systems one suffers), or apathetic fatalism signified by haplessness, hopelessness and meaninglessness?

¹⁴³ Daniel L. Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from Classic Theorists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 102.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 99.

¹⁴⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

In *Religion of the Field Negro*, Vincent Lloyd brilliantly posits that “Whiteness and secularism, conjoined, thoroughly shape reasoning, feeling, and imagining...The ideas of the ruling class, of which whiteness and secularism are preeminent, manifest in social practices and institutions, and it is these that must be renounced.”¹⁴⁶ Lloyd delivers a sobering critique of the impact and prevalence of whiteness on *and in* blackness while simultaneously presenting a strategy for wholeness amid whiteness without succumbing to it...and that vehicle is Black religious thought, more particularly here, Black Christianity. He asserts that as a sociologist, W.E.B. Du Bois often transcended his training in empirical data analysis to explain phenomena when he spoke of the church. He reminds us that in 1898 Du Bois argued that “the Negro Church” is not a new thing; it has existed from “the African forest,” and he places what he calls the “Christian pastor” alongside as a descendant of the African “priest or medicine man.” As mentioned as part of the definition of positive Black self-identity, one of the pitfalls of shaping and forming a positive Black identity is the permeating presence of whiteness from both its nefarious actions and the conscious or subconscious gravitation by Blacks towards whiteness. Subconscious because the gravitation towards whiteness happens gradually through the bombardment of signs and symbols of white superiority in nearly all facets of American society that negate, override, and overrule blackness. Then there is the conscious gravitation by those who are or have been convinced – either through defeatism or assimilationism – that they are simply being who God made them to be or doing what they believe is in their own best interest. These forces and the odorless, invisible impulses towards whiteness that condition the person to believe the decision was theirs are absent from this logic. Also, in this class of Blacks are those infected by what I call the “Exceptional Negro Syndrome” or “ENS.” Unbeknownst, some strive

¹⁴⁶ Lloyd, 235-236.

for ENS while others are placed in it by those of the dominant narrative either as a differentiator from the masses or as a symbol of having “made it” as a way to negate the structural prejudices that plague the masses or as a stamp of approval. Those who fall victim to the Exceptional Negro Syndrome revel in being the “only” Black on the job, in the boardroom, invited to the party, etc. The exceptional Negro says, “I may not be able to ‘pass’ but I can attempt to remove my proverbial ‘marks of circumcision’^{iv} by attempting to reduce my offensiveness amid whiteness by becoming more white – on the inside (in Black vernacular this is referred to as an “oreo” – black on the outside and white on the inside). The thinking is, “I become more white by thinking white, speaking white, dressing white, acting white, and altogether eschewing inconvenient blacknesses” that are offensive to whites. In other words, the unspoken, and in many cases, subconscious goal becomes to become the “white man’s Black man” or “woman.” Inconvenient blacknesses are those marks of blackness that do not set me apart as ‘special’ or those marks of blackness that cause me to stand out negatively in white eyes and minds. Martin Luther King, Jr., in *Where Do We Go From Here*, summarized ENS in the waning moments of the Civil Rights Movement this way:

“He is often more at home with the middle-class white than he is among his own people, and frequently, his physical home is moved up and away from the ghetto. His language changes, his location changes, his income changes, and ultimately, he changes from the representative of the Negro to the white man into the white man’s representative to the Negro. The tragedy is that too often he does not recognize what has happened to him.”¹⁴⁷

To be sure, the Exceptional Negro Syndrome is a definitive result of shaping Black identity, but despite its material trappings, it is all-too-often not positive. Being imprisoned in blackness when the ultimate, intimate desire is to be “free” or “liberated,” meaning white, is the

¹⁴⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 160.

worst kind of incarceration because the one who locked you in is the only one who can let you out.

In an American social context, positive Black self-identity is foundational to building and sustaining a strong, self-sufficient personhood and, therefore, community. Agency in blackness has long been and continues to be a problematic birthing process under the pseudo-aegis of a system that prioritizes and elevates whiteness as the base social construct against which all others must be measured. Standards for beauty, good, intelligence, and success, amongst others, are categorically measured in their relationship and value to whiteness. For example, the choosing of what is beautiful in Black or who should be the “Black leader” is oftentimes the fodder of those outside the community rather than those inside the community. Therefore, in the Black community, there persists an illusion that achieving greater whiteness leads to greater acceptance...lighter complexion, processed hair, “talking white,” being overly sensitive to white discomfort, etc. Black acculturation to whiteness comes fraught with implicit institutional knowledge passed down intergenerationally, arming the next crop of adolescents with the maxim that “if you’re white, you’re alright; if you’re brown, you can stick around; but, if you’re Black, you better get back.” Du Bois captures this inexorable internal struggle in *Souls of Black Folk* when he says, “[o]ne ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”¹⁴⁸

To be sure, whiteness in and of itself is not the core issue; it is the application, and the concomitant *assumed* value of and in whiteness as the baseline of exceptionality in the eyes of whites *and* Blacks. Historically, the idea of the human “exception” has repeatedly proven

¹⁴⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: The Modern Library, 1996), 5.

problematic. German jurist and legal theorist Carl Schmitt is known best for his theory of the “state of exception.” In 1922, he began his landmark book *Political Theology* with the sentence: “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.”¹⁴⁹ His “friend-enemy” distinction not only erased any notion of middle ground by vilifying any potential dissenting opinion, opposition, or stance, but Schmitt’s theory would be a central component of the legal foundation for Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich’s subsequent annihilation of six million Jews. The very nature of exceptionalism erects a power structure where none exists and seeks to elevate the “chosen” while subjugating the “other.” Chief amongst the “others” in the American social context are Blacks who bore (and bear) the brunt of white exceptionalism. The gravitational pull towards “the exception” was infectious as nearly a generation earlier, in 1903, Du Bois both opened and closed his enduring essay, “The Talented Tenth,” with “The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its *exceptional* men.”¹⁵⁰ Unlike Schmitt, Du Bois would much later relent on male exceptionalism, inferring that leadership could and would come from many different levels. It bears noting that while the notion of “exceptionalism” is employed by both, one, Schmitt, is sinister and divisive, and the other, Du Bois, is directed towards the uplift and the strengthening of a downtrodden people. However, as demonstrated in the Exceptional Negro Syndrome, at the core of Du Bois’ use of “the exception” is the reality that oppression ingested becomes self-destructive even in the hands of the oppressed.

¹⁴⁹ Carl Schmidt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters On The Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 5.

¹⁵⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Writings: The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade; The Souls of Black Folk; Dusk of Dawn; Essays* (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 842, 861.

Slavery: The Denuding of Blackness

Out of a sea of degradation and hopelessness, Black religious thought has buoyed Black identity and provided a framework from which to work through slavery, Reconstruction, Post-Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and post-colonial Americanism. Black religious thought is an irretractable force in shaping positive Black self-identity. Why is there a central focus on Black religious thought in shaping and sustaining positive Black identity? Because much of the reason and rationale by white Christianity for the enslavement of Africans rested (and rests even today) upon the idea of missions to the lost and unsaved. So ingrained in the fabric of white Christianity was the notion of “mission work” that it caused the schism in the Triennial Convention, leading to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention (to be discussed later). To be sure, mission work is a core tenet in Christianity, as found in the Great Commission of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew to “go ye therefore into all nations.” In *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, Albert Raboteau reports that “From the very beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, conversion of the slaves to Christianity was viewed by the emerging nations of Western Christendom as a justification for enslavement of Africans.”¹⁵¹ This ideology went through many “incantations” from saving Africans from heathen worship who “otherwise would die as pagans” to prohibiting their conversion for it portended equality in God and, therefore, equality *with* whites, to allowing circumscribed conversion under the watchful eye of perennial white oversight, to the belief and understanding that allowing the enslaved to practice Christianity aided in keeping them docile. It is from here that the concept of white supremacy would not only seek to throttle Blacks under white Christianity, but whites would also subsume it. Effectively, the prevailing thought was to shape and use Christianity as

¹⁵¹ Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 96.

their weapon of control, which, in their minds, presumed a more salient reason for slavery. Ultimately, history records that white Christianity played an outsized role in deracinating Blacks, purging them of any self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-discovery while filling them with white values of unrelenting subservience. Indeed, Kenneth Stampp's monumental work *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* documents a couple of ideological turning points. First, there was the shift from prohibiting conversion of the enslaved to the time "when southern clergymen became ardent defenders of slavery, [and] the master class could look upon organized religion as an ally"¹⁵² to accomplish their desired end. In effect, it was an operationalization of Christianity to suit their desired ends, and "it was this conviction that ultimately opened the way for the gospel on the large plantations."¹⁵³ Second, Stampp explicates the complex, psychological indoctrination process to convert and train Africans not towards full acceptance of Christianity but to instill an inherent lack of self-worth and total and complete dependence upon the white man, God's chosen. The brilliance displayed in Stampp's examination was not from his inductive reasoning to discern the foolproof slaveowner's indoctrination process; it was, however, in his assembling of documents produced by the leading hearts and minds of the slavocracy. From this wide-ranging potpourri of documents, Stampp listed the components most frequently mentioned in training and producing mindful "slave" and thereby creating the perpetual inherent machinery of servitude within the hearts and minds of Blacks. He identified five steps in wrenching selfhood from Blacks:

¹⁵² Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 158.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 158.

- 1) “to establish and maintain strict discipline in which one slaveowner is quoted as having said, ‘Unconditional submission is the only footing upon which slavery should be placed.’”¹⁵⁴
- 2) “To implant in the bondsmen themselves a consciousness of personal inferiority...to feel that bondage was their natural status...[making them] feel that African ancestry tainted them, that their color was a badge of degradation.”¹⁵⁵
- 3) “To awe the enslaved with a sense of the slaveowner’s enormous power...to make them stand in fear.”¹⁵⁶
- 4) To “persuade the bondsmen to take an interest in the master’s enterprise and to accept his standards of good conduct.”¹⁵⁷
- 5) And to “impress Negroes with their helplessness: to create in them a habit of perfect dependence upon their masters.”¹⁵⁸

Martin Luther King Jr. would summarize the program highlighted by Stampp in *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community* by noting that the program sought to “Accustom [Blacks] to rigid discipline, demand from him unconditional submission, impress upon him a sense of his innate inferiority, develop in him a paralyzing fear of white men, train him to adopt the master’s code of good behavior, and instill in him a sense of complete dependence.”¹⁵⁹

The spectral presence of Christianity within this program of deracination looms large in the development of the Western slave trade fostered by the seedlings of globalization one hundred thirty years before the arrival of the initial twenty or so African indentured servants (along with many other European indentured servants) in 1619. After celebrating a hero’s return from his 1492 exploration of what he erroneously thought was Asia, Christopher Columbus was initially rebuffed in his desire to return to the “new world” with ideas of permanent occupation.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 144.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 145.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 146.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 147.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 147.

¹⁵⁹ King, Jr., 39-40.

However, those efforts were immediately dismissed because the land was already inhabited by an indigenous population, of which he brought “nearly a dozen captive Indigenous people”¹⁶⁰ with him as part of his booty. In 1493, Columbus would finally be “commissioned to return to the Americas with a larger fleet of seventeen ships, nearly 1,500 men and more than a dozen priests to speed the conversion of Indigenous people who inhabited what he, along with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, still believed were Asian shores.”¹⁶¹ Heretofore prohibited based upon human rights of Indigenous peoples, Columbus’ return voyage was made possible by the issuing of a papal bull, the Doctrine of Discovery or “*Dum Diversas*,” the initial edict that laid the theological and political foundations for the Doctrine. *Dum Diversas* was issued by Pope Nicholas V on June 18, 1452, to King Alphonso V of Portugal under the authority of the church to conquer “discovered” lands. This papal bull (a public decree or an official edict that carries the full weight of church and papal authority) overrode previous efforts to protect “undiscovered” lands that were at once spurned by the church. It reads:

*“We weighing all and singular the premises with due meditation, and noting that since we had formerly by other letters of ours granted among other things free and ample faculty to the aforesaid King Alfonso – **to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever; and other enemies of Christ** wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and **to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors** the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and **profit** – by having secured the said faculty, the said King Alfonso, or, by his authority, the aforesaid infante, **justly and lawfully has acquired and possessed, and doth possess, these islands, lands, harbors, and seas, and they do of right belong and pertain to the said King Alfonso and his successors**”.*¹⁶² (Bold added for emphasis by me)

¹⁶⁰ Robert P. Jones, *The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy and the Path to a Shared American Future*, New York: Simon & Schuster 2023, 14.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶² Indigenous Values Initiative, “Dum Diversas,” Doctrine of Discovery Project (23 July 2018), <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/dum-diversas/>.

This papal bull brought what had been outside the purview of the church (and Christianity, for that matter) and legitimated it as official church doctrine. Irony strikes in the church's sanctioning of exploratory voyages like Columbus's in its specific mention of "Saracens" (Muslims) as "the enemies of Christ" when neither the church, the nation sanctioned, nor the chosen explorer knew to whom they were going to convert in the new world. This papal bull is singularly responsible for the legitimation of the Europeanization of lands inhabited by Indigenous peoples and, in this case, birthed the colonization of Africa and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Robert P. Jones' *The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy and the Path to a Shared American Future* captures the papal bull's impact in this way: "This sense of divine entitlement, of European Christian chosenness, has shaped the worldview of most white Americans and thereby influenced key events, policies, and laws through American history."¹⁶³ This inbred aura of Eurocentrism fed and nourished a unique brand of white supremacy, which, in turn, would give birth to its home-grown brand of nationalism, which it called "Christianity."

Reconstruction: The Threat of Blackness

The period of Reconstruction in United States history covered the years of 1865 – 1877 (arguably beginning in 1863 with pilot programs like the Port Royal Experiment in South Carolina) bracketed by General Robert E. Lee's surrender speech at the Appomattox Courthouse to the victorious General Ulysses S. Grant and the Compromise of 1877 punctuated by the removal of federal troops from the South keeping the peace. This post-Civil War era was marked by reconstructing the governments of the Southern states while simultaneously integrating millions of newly freed Blacks into the fabric of Southern life. Complications arose in part due

¹⁶³ Jones, *The Hidden Roots*, 19.

to the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865, whose administration set forth the parameters of readmittance of the Southern states into the Union. However, the administration of Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's Vice-President and successor, assuaged readmittance conditions, ceding control of the South back into the hands of Southern Democrats who immediately, through Black Codes, sought to effectively annul the Reconstruction's 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. In *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, Eric Foner refers to the Reconstruction era as "the violent, dramatic, and still controversial era that followed the Civil War."¹⁶⁴ Reconstruction was a time of great strife for the newly freed Blacks but also a period of unprecedented prosperity and advancement for Blacks, which, ironically, ultimately proved to be the ruin of the era. Black success and achievement were demoralizing to Southern notions of white supremacy as they simultaneously undermined white notions of Black inferiority while casting doubt and consternation on white superiority.

As noted, the close of the Civil War was greeted with extreme violence throughout the South in reaction to the end of slavery and the stunning defeat of the Confederacy: "Across the South, night riders went out – hooded in white, burning, raping, beating, and killing. They stole one state's elections after another. They torched the houses of black folks bold enough to buy land, or even bold enough to paint their houses, for that matter."¹⁶⁵ White Southerners viciously resisted Black independence at every turn. The University of Houston's Digital History website notes that in the aftermath of emancipation, "Freedpeople were assaulted and murdered for attempting to leave plantations, disputing contract settlements, seeking to enter white-controlled

¹⁶⁴ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), xvii.

¹⁶⁵ Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 409.

churches, and refusing to step off sidewalks to allow white pedestrians to pass.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, Kay Wright Lewis argues in *A Curse Upon The Nation: Race, Freedom, and Extermination in America and the Atlantic World* that the assault upon blackness was, indeed, more egregious in the eyes of White southerners given that Blacks had betrayed the South and fought on the side of the Union, and therefore resolved that “the scheme is now...to exterminate the negro.”¹⁶⁷ Black freedom and advancement weakened associations of white identity with white dominance, and it struck incomprehensibly close to altering the white worldview, and the response was visceral, igniting, amongst other things, legislative responses. After weakening and annulling the Reconstruction Amendments, new laws would be passed to curtail further Black freedom and advancements attained on the tenuous equal footing in Reconstruction. In the aftermath of soundly defeating white boxing former champion Jim Jefferies and shortly thereafter defeating the “great white hope” “Fireman” Jim Flynn, boxing great Jack Johnson, a Black man, then married a white woman prompting U. S. Representative Seaborne A. Roddenberry from Thomasville, Georgia, to not only draft and pass a bill restricting interstate shipment of Johnson’s tapes, but he is also quoted as having said, “It is destructive to moral supremacy, and ultimately this slavery of white women to black beasts...Let us uproot and exterminate now this debasing, ultra-demoralizing, un-American, and inhuman leprosy.”¹⁶⁸ So violent was the era for the newly freed Blacks that Polly Shine, one who lived much of her life in slavery and who would get to taste the fruits of freedom, wondered aloud about the costs incurred: “The

¹⁶⁶ America's Reconstruction: People and politics after the Civil War. (n.d.). Retrieved December 7, 2021, from https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/exhibits/reconstruction/section2/section2_violence.html.

¹⁶⁷ Lewis, *A Curse Upon The Nation*, 192.

¹⁶⁸ Remillard, 47.

Reconstruction period has been hell on the Negro race, but we suffered it through, somehow. If we had another time like that to go through, believes I would hang myself, so es I would not suffer again.”¹⁶⁹

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, Reconstruction was an unmitigated success...truncated. This does not assume nor argue that there were no agency abuses or shortcomings in the Freedmen’s Bureau. Still, it is to posit 1) that none were uncommon to other governmental agencies and programs, and 2) the exaggerations and misrepresentations were magnified based on the population the agency was set up to assist, Blacks (and impoverished whites). Reconstruction succeeded in doing the work its advocates had hoped for, and it appeared to be doing the heavy lifting of transforming a nation desperately in need of healing after tearing the fabric of its soul in the Civil War. Revisionist history offers a passing glance at this pivotal learning and development period in American history when an intense gaze is warranted and unequivocally necessary. At the close of the Civil War, four million American citizens of African lineage suddenly emerged free from the dehumanizing effects of two hundred forty-six years of chattel slavery with little more than answered prayers from a God who had proven at last that delayed did not mean denied. No prospects or provisions for land, home, or employment, it was a battered, scattered, and tattered family unit that garnered much of the immediate attention of this beleaguered people in search of, amongst other things, an identity. “Slave,” “servant,” “property,” “runaway,” “nigger,” and among others, “contraband” in American parlance had “properly” defined the totality of their existence in the eyes, minds, and hearts of their oppressors who beat back at first sight with a fierce vengeance any vestiges of Black personhood. While resilient in many ways to the abuses of slavery, mentally, physically,

¹⁶⁹ James Mellon, *Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 406.

and spiritually, the quest for identity in the quandary of a nation searching for its own, Black identity waxed and waned but overarchingly towards the better and stronger. History is replete with examples of the uncommon resiliency of blackness throughout slavery, but reality suggests that sweeping generalizations almost always rend salient details needed for a complete portrait of Blacks and blackness. Under such intense pressure of not merely oppression or racism, but extermination, Black identity across the spectrum was continually forged as a means of survival, whether that survival was “by any means necessary” or through acquiescence to daily pressures to make it through the moment. Certainly, they were a bruised people, but their indomitable spirits were not beaten.

How does a people emerge from such a predicament? How does intergenerational hopelessness, desperation, hurt, and anger not harbor an insatiable hatred for whites and whiteness? How is the strength for so long channeled to accomplish the oppressor’s bidding not redirected in the first instance of freedom with blood in their eyes against those same oppressors, or, maybe worse, towards an insurrectionist assault on the government, its buildings, and its officials? Coursing just beneath the surface of the degradation faced at every turn was the lifeline that held just enough meaning to hang in there and to fight on. Given the primacy of religion in the life of Black people, the focal point rests not only on the importance and centrality of the church house, but it also includes equally the necessity and significance of the church house as a schoolhouse in the struggle for freedom for Blacks during Reconstruction. As intimated by W.E.B. Du Bois, it is upon the pendulum of education that the survival and success of Blacks would hinge during and after Reconstruction. The path towards progress post-emancipation was marked by the presence of schools and colleges for Blacks in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War and through the days of Reconstruction. Spirituality was to Black

religion what education was for Black survival in the South; the two went hand-in-hand. Scarcely was any topic found agreeable between the venerable Booker T. Washington and the incomparable W.E.B. Du Bois, except the centrality and importance of education in the life, freedom, and advancement of “the Negro.” To be sure, it was not the Civil War, emancipation, or Reconstruction that ignited the fire in Blacks for education. Education had long since been the proverbial fire that burned in their hearts and minds, but it was not a consuming fire...it was a smoldering fire that never burned out. From the deepest entrenchments of slavery, Blacks would risk life and limb to learn to read. William McWhorter, himself born in slavery, would recount:

How-some-ever, dere was some niggers dat wanted larnin’ so bad dey would slip out at night and meet in a deep gully whar dey would study by de light of lightwood torches. But one thing sho’: dey better not let no white folks fid out ‘bout it, and if day was lucky nuf’ to be able to keep it up till dey larned to read de Bible, dey kept it a close secret.¹⁷⁰

The Bible symbolized freedom because of the place and prominence of Trans-Atlantic spirituality in Blacks. Albert J. Raboteau’s book *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* points to the fact that the enslaved “interpreted Christianity according to their experience, applying the stories and symbols of the Bible to make sense out of their lives...Out of the presence of whites, the slaves were free to express openly their desire for freedom in this life as well as the next.”¹⁷¹ It is upon the bedrock of faith and education in the long, dark night of Post-Reconstruction that Blacks would launch schools at all levels, open banks and butcheries, build insurance companies, and purchase land, laying the foundation for prosperity that

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 197-198.

¹⁷¹ Alfred J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 43.

exemplified for themselves as well as for whites that given equal opportunity they were capable of succeeding even against the most daunting odds. Learning to read equipped freedmen to achieve in the world and go deeper in their faith. So well-versed on the Bible were they that they understood the abuses and, more importantly, the motives behind white preaching. Jack White recalls how the “marster” would preach to whites on Sunday mornings, and at night, he would preach to the enslaved:

“He hab two fav’rit tex’es he uster preach from to de slaves. One was, “Serv’nts, obey your marsters.” He didn’t say much ‘bout de Marster in Hebben... De other tex’ was, “thou shalt not steal.” He preach dat over an’ over, to de niggers. Dey couldn’ read deir Bibles, so dey hatter b’lieb jis’ what he say. Since I’s got to readin’ an’ studyin’, I see some of de chu’ches is wrong, an’ de preachers don’ preach jis’ like de Bible say.”¹⁷²

Learning to read the Bible was the first step in both knowing for themselves what the Bible said and, second, the more deeply they understood the word of God, the more grounded they could become in the knowledge that what they were enduring was not the will of God. Learning to read the Bible provided the primary motivation for many who learned to read as they wanted to know the Bible for themselves if they knew nothing else. The freedmen risked everything to learn to read so that they could “undo the heavy burdens” of living under the suffocating effects of white Christianity that did not resemble what they had learned to read and understand for themselves. As a testament to the sacrality of Black religious thought and Black faith, it was during this period of Post-Reconstruction suppression that Black faith took root and grew organizationally, not as an extension of white Christianity, but as a necessary corrective to beliefs based not on a gospel of love but beliefs predicated upon white supremacy and control. Though not monolithic, the Black church has shared ideals across its many different variations,

¹⁷² Mellon, 197.

which unify, providing a commonality that draws it closer in relationship to one another. Without question, there are some distinct differences that cannot and must not be overlooked or minimized. During this difficult time, seven historically Black church denominations were created yet unified in their struggle for liberation. Those denominations are the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Colored (later Christian) Methodist Episcopal Church, the Church of God in Christ, and three National Baptist Conventions that cover Black Baptist congregations: the National Baptist Convention of America, the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. Lines between these seven different denominations can further be drawn along the groupings of Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals. Arguably, except for only one, each of these denominations was founded due to the suffocating intrusions of white Christianity. Critical to note is that for each of these denominations, the foundations were not laid post-emancipation; these foundations had been laid during slavery, which means it took boldness and brashness to chisel out a meaningful existence. While different for each, racism, prejudice, and discrimination played significant roles in their inevitable split from the socio-religious control and domination of white denominations.

Like the church, besides developing further business acumen that was no doubt born during slavery, there was also the franchise. With the passing of the Fifteenth Amendment, Blacks had the right to vote, which, according to Frederick Douglass, finally signaled Black freedom. Indeed, it would be the pursuit of the Black vote that would make Abraham Lincoln the “plus one” of the losses of life in the Civil War. His commitment to it in his last speech addressing his plans for Reconstruction, which included equal voting rights for Blacks, would lead John Wilkes Booth, in attendance at the speech, to remark as he left with Lewis Powell,

“that is the last speech he will ever make... Three days later [April 14, 1865], he made good on his threat.”¹⁷³ In possession of the franchise, Blacks ran and were elected and seated at the local, state, and federal levels, not just as seat fillers, but they were effective legislators. Many wondered how, in such a short time, so many leaders could be developed. Where had they come from? “There was something amazing about the suddenness with which, all over the state [Mississippi], they emerged from the anonymity of slavery to become directors and counselors for their race.”¹⁷⁴ Further debunking myths of white supremacy was the incontrovertible and inconvenient truth that the overwhelming majority of those who were elected represented Blacks who had been previously enslaved. Lerone Bennett recounts that “Almost none of them came from the small group who had been free before the war. Such men, as barbers, artisans, or small farmers, had depended too long on the favor of the whites for the maintenance of their existence.”¹⁷⁵ Despite the charge by southerners that Blacks were incompetent and ignorant, Blacks were the majority population in the states of South Carolina and Mississippi, and their elected officials reflected that reality. Begrudgingly, but justifiably, it was the assessment by the *Charleston Daily News*, no friend of the freed people, that despite “the rapacity and tyranny [of the Republican government], South Carolina was better off than before the war....in the sixth year of the black man’s accession to power...God was in Heaven, the black man was in power, and, despite that fact or perhaps because of it, South Carolina was thriving.”¹⁷⁶ Understanding that education was key to the uplift of the people, W.E.B. DuBois noted in *Black Reconstruction*

¹⁷³ Louis P. Masur, *Lincoln’s Last Speech: Wartime Reconstruction & The Crisis of Reunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 12.

¹⁷⁴ Bennett, 82.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 192.

in America, 1860-1880, that once elected, “Practically all of the Negro Senators and Representatives introduced bills on education.”¹⁷⁷ The hopes and dreams of black dependency were shattered, and white supremacy grew more vile, determined, and hateful.

Examining the utility, the desire, and the promise of education and voting aids in understanding them as the most critical social components in building a people as the nation struggled intently through an irreconcilable identity crisis that put at odds the North versus the South and White versus Black. It is the utility, desire, and promise of education and voting that revealed the agency of Black people who, despite the deleterious attempts to diminish, dissolve, and exterminate them, became their own successes through the creation of religious, socio-political, and financial institutions. Certainly, there were those outside the Black community, like the northern and European benevolent societies, who played pivotal roles in the freedom of the people, but it was the agency of the people from within that proved to be the arbiter of survival over extinction and extermination. Considering the rigors of slavery upon the body, mind, and soul of Blacks, a slow death through the breaking of the will of the people would have been easily reasoned and explained, “But the body of African America stretched, and chained, and stretched again, the body whose tongue and spirit and blood had developed alongside slavery’s expansion, was still alive.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1935), 651.

¹⁷⁸ Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 411.

The Suppression and Fortification of Blackness

When considering the inhumanity of two hundred and forty-six years of chattel slavery, the joys of an intergenerational hope of emancipation, and the terrific, but unfortunately temporary, advances by Blacks during Reconstruction, the period following, Post-Reconstruction, represents what, in my estimation, amounts to something equal in punishment, if not worse, than slavery itself. On the dusk of tremendous gains, Blacks would face cruel punishment at the hands of those who fought on the wrong side of history and of the war but ended up with the spoils of victory.

Critical reflection establishes that contrary to modern concoctions of American history, Reconstruction was a bona fide success and was well on its way to setting the nation on a course to unimaginable prominence. Indeed, Masur would add to this sentiment that “We can never know what would have happened had Lincoln lived, but one writer was not alone when he predicted ‘the development of things will teach us to mourn him doubly.’”¹⁷⁹ Black progress lifted the bottom, but that same progress was perceived as an imminent threat to whiteness. Indeed, Black progress – as will be shown later – spoke less about Black ability but more so in the white mind, it was an assault on a worldview bloated by white supremacy. Black success challenged every notion whites had not of Blacks but of whites themselves. And, because of the irreconcilable notions of their selfhood, there was only one resolution in their eyes, and Kay Wright Lewis spells it out from articles in *The New York Times*. *The Times* “noted that newspapers in border states like Maryland were prognosticating that ‘emancipation...would be no philanthropy to the Negro: his fate was extermination. Another article in the Times expressed concern that if emancipation was “carried into effect, the blacks remaining intermixed with the

¹⁷⁹ Masur, 12.

whites....will induce a war of extermination.”¹⁸⁰ Like nuclear war of the present age, the discussion of Black elevation ceased being about victory or defeat; it devolved into oppositional efforts of existence and non-existence as though violently directing their internal brokenness towards exterminating black humanity in some way salvages vestiges of white humanity. Robert Hamilton, a Black abolitionist, argued that “the hatred was so severe and “their jealousy of the former slaves is such that they would rather see every one of them blotted out of existence than to see them free.”¹⁸¹

Physical shackles no longer allowed, the systematic denuding of Black rights, “the retreat,” as historian Eric Foner terms it, introduced what Douglas A. Blackmon called “slavery by another name.” Given the forthcoming treachery Blacks would face at the hands of Whites, the redressing of fundamental rights in society and constitutional laws by the Court would be “death by a thousand cuts.” Appropriately labeled because this disambiguation was an archaic ancient Chinese form of torture that perfected the slow death of bleeding out. It is the accumulation of smaller events, of which, separate and alone, none were lethal; however, the combination of many small “cuts” became an imminent threat to Black existence. What makes this period worse than slavery, in my opinion? To be sure, while slavery itself is as old as humankind, the chattel slavery in America was a new low for humanity. Indeed, it was a crime against humanity of biblical proportions reappropriating the creation myth; never seen before and, hopefully, never to be seen again, chattel slavery sought to create a permanent redefinition of blackness as subaltern. In my humble opinion, it is one thing to be enslaved and to harbor *hopes* of freedom someday, but it is an altogether different torture to know that you are free and

¹⁸⁰ Lewis, 178.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 192.

yet unprotected and enslaved through restrictions that undermine “freedom.” Henry Adams, an emancipated slave in Louisiana, affirms this sentiment when he succinctly stated to his former owner, “If I cannot do like a white man, I am not free.”¹⁸² In essence, it can be argued that faux freedom, such as was experienced by Blacks in post-Reconstruction, is to be treated worse than an enslaved person because in their “freedom,” there was a total and complete loss of value in Black life for whites. Therefore, blackness in this period meant being sheep led to slaughter; animals, proverbially locked up and locked in by fear, prejudice, and indiscriminate violence behind gates that were seemingly wide open.

The Reconstruction Amendments were landmark pieces of legislation that dramatically and systematically improved the lives of Blacks in the American South yet exposed them as public enemy number one. The advancement was swift, as African Americans established their own communities, founded businesses, established institutions of higher education, and actively engaged in legislative processes. Their success was not to their sole benefit. Many parts of the South thrived under Black leadership, and self-contained Black communities were strong and vibrant, but none of it lasted for long as Black success represented terror and fright to the Southern way of life. As much as the law leveled the playing field, white militia groups that some historians referred to as “the military arm of the Democratic party,” like the Ku Klux Klan, the White Camellia, Society of the White Rose, The Pale Faces, the Red Shirts, and the Innocents would proliferate for the sole purpose of destroying and disturbing Black life and disrupting Black progress. The fetishization of whiteness and securing white advantage meant submission and subservience for all things black, and their ruthless efforts knew no limit. Still, Blacks progressed, “and African Americans navigated their way through this world they did not

¹⁸² Foner, *Second Founding*, 181.

make during and after enslavement by ultimately making survival their greatest form of resistance.”¹⁸³ Ironically, the success of Reconstruction would ultimately be its undoing. Three Amendments would be the landmarks that secured and established Black liberation, and three landmark nefarious events would fling open the floodgates to white supremacy, submerging Blacks beneath the dark, oppressive tide of Jim Crow, convict leasing, and sharecropping that would provide the necessary cover for the preservation of white supremacy for the better part of the next one hundred years from the Civil War to Civil Rights.

The first event was the *United States versus Cruikshank* (1876). After a contentious gubernatorial race in 1872 in Colfax, Louisiana, both parties claimed victory. The Black militia stationed themselves at the Colfax courthouse to protect the Republicans who had assumed the offices. A well-armed white militia, including former Confederate soldiers and at least one former Union soldier, marched into town, murdering Blacks on sight. The Black defenders had more numbers but were outmatched in ammunition and weaponry. On April 13, 1873, Easter Sunday, the white militia escalated the fighting and overwhelmed the Black defenders, forcing them to surrender. Richard White reports that “Whites lined up their prisoners and then called black men out of line by name, sometimes one, sometimes more. They shot some, slit the throats of others, and hanged a few...Among the dead was Alexander Tillman, a black framer of the 1868 Louisiana Constitution.”¹⁸⁴ Because most were residents of the same area, many of the men on both sides were known to each other, and, therefore, the retribution was both political and personal. Of the ninety-eight who were indicted, only a handful were arrested, and only

¹⁸³ Lewis, 200.

¹⁸⁴ White, 280.

three tried, but none for the murder of better than eighty Black men, fifty of them that evening, after they had surrendered and been taken as prisoners.

Among the charges, the government would accuse the defendants of violating the First Amendment right of Black people to assemble and their Second Amendment right to bear arms. After deliberating, the Court ruled that the prosecutors had not supplied enough evidence to prove that the killings were an attempt to suppress Black political rights protected under the Fifteenth Amendment. In short, by saying that the case had not been prosecuted properly, they, in effect, left open the possibility that if it had been prosecuted appropriately, the defendants would likely have been found guilty. The court was laying the lack of conviction at the feet of the prosecutors, willfully and legally obfuscating their operationalizing of the law. The court even ruled that “the rights to assemble and bear arms” were not among the “privileges and immunities” of citizens. Chief Justice Morrison Remick Waite’s definition limited protection to be only from congressional interference, and beyond this, any further protection depended on the states. On a much broader level, the tragic realities of this ruling determined that the right to vote came from the states. Therefore, Blacks had to seek protection from the very states that saw no legal or moral basis in prosecuting white men for crimes against Black men. Precedent had been set in the *Dred Scott Decision*. The full weight of Waite’s decision in *Cruikshank* rested on two determinations: first, that vague charges deprived arrested individuals of due process, and second, that the right to vote had come from the states and that the Reconstruction Amendments did not protect individuals from one another nor from actions by the states. White would summarize: the evidence was overwhelming that “Federal protection for the freedpeople was crumbling.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Foner, *The Second Founding*, 285.

The *United States v. Cruikshank* would only be the first proverbial shoe to drop. The second would come a year later in the *Compromise of 1877*. After the presidential election of 1876, the result remained undecided. Rutherford B. Hayes submitted a letter of acceptance of the Republican nomination for the office of president, where he vowed a return to “‘local self-government’ in the South, a phrase that everyone understood to mean white control”¹⁸⁶ – and Black hell. The breadth of the *Compromise* was as follows:

- The linchpin upon which the remainder of the agreement rested was the removal of all remaining U.S. troops from Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida, completing the withdrawal from the entire region.
- The appointment of at least one Southern Democrat to Hayes's cabinet.
- Construction of another transcontinental railroad using the Texas and Pacific in the South
- Federal help industrializing the South to restore its economy
- ...And the coup de grace, *the right to deal with black people without northern interference.*

Hayes's booty in the *Compromise* would net him the White House, but history would prove that the South got the lion's share in the deal. A short five years after leaving office, a disillusioned Hayes would write a letter, this time recalling that “experience has shown that the protection and conduct of national elections cannot be safely left to the states.”¹⁸⁷ Hayes's agreement to withdraw federal troops from the South in exchange for the keys to the White House effectively ended Reconstruction and sealed the fate of Blacks as “game” to be hunted for another century. Amos Akerman, Grant's old attorney general, thought the new president

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 148.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

[Hayes] rewarded “lawlessness by letting the lawless have their way.”¹⁸⁸ Forgotten were the 750,000 + 1 lives lost; 750,000 soldiers from the North and the South combined, plus one president, Lincoln, who paid with his life for pressing to give Blacks the right to vote. White would aptly capture the presidency of Hayes by pointing out that “he had been elected with a minority of the votes and held a bad hand in 1877, but he made things worse by misplaying it.”¹⁸⁹

While other landmark cases would have an indelible and lasting impact on the lives and the viability of livelihoods for Blacks like *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896, which resulted in the flawed “separate but equal” philosophy that birthed Jim and Jane Crow, the third landmark case would be *Williams v. Mississippi* of 1898 that rolled the proverbial stone into place sealing closed the door on the Reconstruction Amendments and flinging the door open to unabated harassment and destruction not only of Black rights, but also Black property, and Black life. In one fell swoop, the United States Supreme Court struck down key parts of all three Reconstruction Amendments, two directly and one indirectly, rendering every supposed or inferred right of Blacks null and void.

Henry Williams was convicted of murder by an all-white jury in 1896, and he appealed on the basis that he was denied “due process under the law,” given that there were no Blacks on the jury. His appeal challenged the constitutionality of an 1890 Mississippi statute 1) regarding residency requirements, poll taxes, literacy tests, the grandfather clause, and the requirement that only registered voters could serve on juries, and 2) it gave administrative officers’ discretion to determine which citizens were qualified to serve as jurors and in upholding these statutes,

¹⁸⁸ White, 335.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 336.

particularly the grandfather clause all combined to deny him “due process.” He was convicted to death by hanging, and on appeal to the State Supreme Court, the Court upheld his conviction. He would then appeal to the US Supreme Court, whose ruling, in short, was “based upon the doctrine that the possibility of evil administration of a law was not necessarily proof of the fact that the law itself was evil.”¹⁹⁰ The Court refused to interfere with Mississippi’s narrow interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment, and Justice Joseph McKenna issued the court’s opinion stating that “The constitution of Mississippi and its statutes do not *on their face* discriminate between the races, and it has not been shown that their actual administration was evil; only that evil was possible under them.” In essence, the ruling affirmed that regardless of intent or actual use, the court’s opinion rejected Williams’ appeal because the statute as written could apply to anyone, not only Blacks, and therefore, the statutes were ruled nondiscriminatory. “This remained true even when the state confessed that its administration of these provisions had been carried out with a discriminatory intent.”¹⁹¹ In this case that undermined the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, the courts permitted that it was the administrative officers who were discriminating against Blacks and not the law. Further and potentially more dangerous is what was to follow. Other Southern states, including Louisiana, South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Virginia, and Georgia, in the coming months, would enact similar voter suppression laws, setting in motion wrongs that would masquerade as laws until the Civil Rights Movement. The full weight of this ruling could have rested on the aforementioned opinion of Chief Justice Roger B. Taney’s ruling in *Dred Scott v Sanford* (1857) because if Williams was not a citizen, he had no right to bring the case.

¹⁹⁰ Logan, 115.

¹⁹¹ Amanda Brown, “Williams v. Mississippi,” Mississippi Encyclopedia, April 15, 2018, <https://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/williams-v-mississippi/>.

Charles Lane's book *The Day Freedom Died* looks specifically at the *United States vs. Cruikshank* as the pinnacle moment of betrayal that put the death knell in freedom's ring. I concur but contend that it was merely the first of two knells. In the final analysis, in a "nation of laws," Blacks had attempted through legislation, deft political acumen, and the courts to chisel out a secure freedom, but these otherwise tried and true methods rendered their worthy efforts towards "the abolition of slavery...tragically insecure."¹⁹² The period of post-Reconstruction would be predicated upon and marked by the fifth condition of the *Compromise*, where one presidential candidate's aspirations overruled the nation's destiny towards equality and prosperity for all by giving the South "the right to deal with Black people without northern interference," and deal with Black people they did. Other than increased vigilante justice by armed and hate-filled white militia, the nation witnessed the brutal effects of white supremacy that, once again, did not seek to subdue Blacks but to exterminate them. Under the sweltering heat of white supremacy, Blacks would weather the storms directed at them and refused to hate or allow hatred to determine their destiny. They had grown accustomed to surviving despite the conditions around them, and post-Reconstruction would be no different. Charles Darwin, in 1871, opined that "At some future point, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly *exterminate* and replace the savage races throughout the world."¹⁹³ Alternately, Booker T. Washington would later declare that "Friction between the races will pass away in proportion as the black man, by reason of his skill, intelligence, and character, can produce something that the white man wants or respects in the commercial

¹⁹² Ibid., 127.

¹⁹³ Norrell, 83-84.

world.”¹⁹⁴ While Washington’s sentiments place far too much of the emphasis and onus of race relations upon the shoulders of Blacks, the core of his message was one of hope that continued to sustain Blacks and for some whites who believed in and supported him...within reason.

After nearly two and a half centuries of chattel slavery, Reconstruction was noonday in the hearts and minds of Blacks, but *United States vs. Cruikshank* (1876), the *Compromise of 1877*, *Williams vs. Mississippi* (1898) signaled sundown followed by an enduring midnight in post-Reconstruction. To be Black was to be a target for racist taunts and hateful acts that drew few if any negative consequences. Questions abound as to how this people could have ever faced all that they faced and yet hold on to their sanity and their humanity and not resort to returning hate for hate. There are many valid reasons why “hate for hate” was irrational and unreasonable, but there always remained the biblical option in the darkest of days in the wilderness of a developing America to do as the children of Israel did in the book of Numbers 14:4 where they declared “*Let us select a leader and return to Egypt (slavery).*” Instead, as their Black ancestors had done under and behind wet blankets “stealing away” in slavery, the enterprising spirit of Blacks did not look back and refused to wither. Instead, they continued to fight for the rights that had been usurped and rescinded; they planted gardens and built homes and schools and churches; they organized and started business from Black-owned banks to butchers, barbers and salons, insurance companies, funeral homes, newspapers and magazines, tailors and seamstresses, and many other ventures knowing that at any given moment it could all go up in flames, literally or figuratively, as the target of Whites who despised Black progress and Black success...but, still they pressed forward and they prayed for the welfare of the nation to which they had been carried away captive.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 98.

Much can be deduced from the continued presence and progress of Blacks, but none more significant than the people's belief in their God. Even those who may not have been particularly religious could not escape the fervent belief that "God would make a way...somehow." That's hope unborn...*yet still alive!!!*

CHAPTER 4:

Relinquishing An Ascribed Hermeneutic of Inferiority – “Turned Up Seven Times Hotter”

In chapter four, a backdrop was provided against which Black self-identity had to endure either just to survive or be erased by the pervasive assaults of whiteness attempting to shape it as inferior because it belonged to an inferior being. These onslaughts came against every facet of life through power dynamics that left no room for debate or question that God ordained the supremacy of whiteness, and that blackness existed exclusively and subserviently in service to whiteness. The enduring reality of slavery, a brief respite of twelve years of Reconstruction, and then the oppressive plunge into the abyss of post-Reconstruction provided the conundrum for Blacks that chapter 5 seeks to unravel.

In chapter 5, we provide the proverbial “but” that Jurgen Moltmann in *Theology of Hope* explains: “Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it:...Peace with God means conflict with the world.”¹⁹⁵ For Blacks, this “conflict with the world” was as commonplace and as central to Black existence as life itself; indeed, there was no recognition of a life without this ever-present conflict. Chapter 5 provides the impetus behind the progressive somebodiness of Blacks who have withstood attempts at personal and communal degradation to become their own successes. Just as Blacks withstood untoward attempts by whites to inject and instill in them a permanent, negative self-identity, Blacks themselves clung to a hope and belief that not only was better possible, but better was

¹⁹⁵ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 21.

imminent and that it was proven through history that it would not come from the outside...it would only come from the inside.

Post-Reconstruction was a pivotal period in the development of positive Black self-identity, shaped and compelled by resistance against attempts by whiteness and white Christianity to confine blackness to the inferior. Following the dehumanization of chattel slavery, Blacks emerged during Reconstruction, demonstrating that when given the opportunity for quasi-equal footing, they could not only achieve but also produce and excel. Despite enduring intergenerational challenges, hope illuminated the path forward toward the great expectation that freedom would one day be theirs. The marks of achievement during Reconstruction were evident in the rise of Black success and progress, reflected in business development, the founding of Black churches, the establishment of schools at all levels, and personal career advancements. This period of prosperity was abruptly curtailed by the Compromise of 1877 between the incoming Rutherford B. Hayes administration and southern Democrats, signaling the twelve-year end of Reconstruction and the onset of post-Reconstruction. What distinguishes this period is the vitriol and rabid hatred directed at Blacks by whites, driven not merely to frustrate or control them but to exterminate them. No longer protected as property, as they had been in slavery, Blacks were now labeled a “black beast” and an imminent threat to whiteness, with Black life holding no value for whites. For nearly two and a half centuries, the relationship between master and slave had been, as Walter Johnson quotes J. W. C. Pennington, a former slave, who wrote that “The being of slavery, its soul and its body, lives and moves in the chattel principle, the property principle, the bill of sale principle; the cart- whip, starvation, and nakedness are its inevitable consequences.” Johnson concluded that the basic rationale for Black subjectivity in white society was condensed to: “Slavery reduced to the simplicity of a pure form: a person with

a price.” During slavery, the preservation of Black life was tied to a dollar value determined by white wealth; the more enslaved people one owned, the greater the wealth. Fiercely punishing an enslaved person meant beating them “within an inch” of their life, but it rarely resulted in death since death meant diminishing one's wealth. However, Blacks in post-Reconstruction were no longer legally classified as enslaved, meaning that considerations of wealth loss for whites no longer applied; the killing of Blacks was perceived as a public good.

Complicating this dark period was the relative legal immunity afforded those who committed crimes against Blacks as had been established by the Supreme Court in *Dred Scott v Sanford* in 1857, which rested on Chief Justice Roger B. Taney's ruling, which declared, in effect, that Blacks were not citizens and therefore had no right to bring a case against whites before the court. Chief Justice Taney wrote that:

“Blacks had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that *they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect*; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever a profit could be made by it.”¹⁹⁶

The lingering effects of this ruling persisted in the hearts and minds of whites even with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution and “due process.” The effective annulment of the Reconstruction Amendments would embolden white supremacy and sow doubt in the spirit of Blacks. Lamenting the Fourteenth Amendment as a mistake, Oscar W. Underwood of Alabama said, “Southerners...were not trying to oppress the Negro, but were seeking to ‘protect their homes and property against misgovernment’ and at the same time to

¹⁹⁶ Foner, *The Second Founding*, 285.

give “this inferior race a chance to grow up and acquire their civilization.”¹⁹⁷ Against daunting odds, it was post-Reconstruction when Blacks could have relented and died mentally, physically, and spiritually, but history records a miracle. That miracle evidenced not the anticipated and expected diminishing of Blacks and blackness but their resilience. The period represented the shaping of positive Black self-identity under tremendous emotional, physical, and psychological duress in a time I argue was worse than slavery due principally to the aforementioned valuelessness placed upon Black life.

Relinquishing and transforming a hermeneutic of inferiority constitute an act of resistance against the attempts by whiteness to diminish and devalue blackness, particularly in refusing to acquiesce to the prevailing extremes and violence of whiteness. This is most evident in the defiance of the Black church, which continued to organize itself and its people. E. Franklin Frazier notes in *The Negro Church in America* that, “In providing a structured social life in which the Negro could give expression to his deepest feelings and simultaneously achieve status and find a meaningful existence, the Negro church offered a refuge in a hostile white world. For those enslaved who worked and suffered in an alien world, religion provided a means of catharsis for their pent-up emotions and frustrations.”¹⁹⁸

Paradoxically, it can be argued that many of the advancements of Blacks were developed in direct proportion to the demeaning and obtrusive efforts of whites to ingrain in Blacks the innate superiority of whiteness and the abject inferiority of blackness, particularly through the peculiarities of American Christianity. Erroneously, given the religiosity of Africans, religion, as it were, appeared to whites to be an effective means of impressing upon the Black

¹⁹⁷ Logan, 94.

¹⁹⁸ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 50.

body, mind, and spirit their subservency and powerlessness. Their goal was to instill a perpetual surplus powerlessness, explained by Michael Lerner as “the set of feelings and beliefs that makes people think of themselves as even more powerless than the actual power situation requires, and then leads them to act in ways that actually confirm them in their powerlessness.”¹⁹⁹ Initially prohibited, conversion of the enslaved eventually became one of the South’s strongest plays in pursuit of control of the Black *levav* (heart-mind) and one that I contend still maintains its hold in the present. Like the absence of the physical shackles of slavery, white Christianity was a weapon that left no physical marks, cuts, abrasions, or scars, but the wounds were unmistakable. Indeed, Thomas Jefferson wrote in *The Jefferson Bible*, “No man can conform his faith to the dictates of another. The life and essence of religion consists in the internal persuasion or belief of the mind.”²⁰⁰ Hence, it becomes essential to identify a pertinent beginning point for the employment of religion as a tool of control. While there are many, few rival the impact of the men responsible for the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention, which in 1845 separated from the Triennial Convention in defense of the institution of slavery as a fixed asset in the Southern way of life. With the yawning of the chasm between Northern and Southern thoughts on slavery at the turn of the nineteenth century and the declining of Southern confidence in the impact of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of the government to preserve its peculiar institution, it was left up to the white church to stem the growing tide of anti-slavery. The church would, in post-Reconstruction, have the able assistance of other secular organizations, but none more critical and utilitarian than the United Daughters of the

¹⁹⁹ Michael Lerner, *Surplus Powerlessness: The Psychodynamics of Everyday life...and the Psychology of Individual and Social Transformation* (New York: Humanity Books, 1986), xii.

²⁰⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth Extracted Textually from the Gospels in Greek, Latin, French, & English* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2011), 13.

Confederacy, who were “even more aggressive and single-minded than Southern men”²⁰¹ in their efforts to catechize Southern youth in the Lost Cause. They purged history books of information they thought disparaging to the South and only allowed books they approved: “Several clergymen made notable contributions to the assembling and writing of Confederate history, and their works were on the official lists approved by Confederate groups.”²⁰² Ministers representing the church legitimized white supremacy in ways the government could not. Under mounting political pressures and shifting social morals, the physical means of enforcing white supremacy through laws and unspoken codes would begin to wilt, but apprehending the hearts and minds of Blacks who ingested the particularities of whiteness disguised as the gospel was far more effective and lasting. And, while still prevalent well into the twenty-first century, the time has come to relinquish the notions of these ministers being subjects or “men of their own time.” They acted against the very gospel they preached and believed for private, personal gains as a means of concretizing for Blacks and whites’ fallacious beliefs of white supremacy.

Robert Carter, III: A Man of His Times

Being “men of their times” is the *raison d'être* of scholars, historians, and others who have become slavocracy apologists. This accepted reasoning has been accommodated and warmly received to not only exempt them from serious objective investigation of their negative behaviors but also the underlying motives to maintain the status quo for their own personal benefit. In fact, it has had the additional effect of turning a blind eye towards the behaviors of those who were in position to alter course, and instead, the focus is routinely placed on those

²⁰¹ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), 140.

²⁰² Wilson, 141.

subjected by the system while there has been near complete erasure and discreditation of those who fought against the prevailing notions of the day. It would be one thing if there were no other examples in their own times against which to measure themselves, however, examples abound of those who refused to continue bowing to slavery's gods. Notable examples of those who did not bow to the social pressures of becoming slaveowners or inheriting a slaveowner mentality were the second and sixth presidents of the United States, John Adams, and his son, John Quincy Adams, who were wealthy and powerful enough to be slaveowners. Upon further review, as examples, they shine even brighter, knowing that they refused to be subsumed by the social pressures of slavery and the influence it had on those closest to them. Even further, neither claimed to be a "friend" of the enslaved, nor did either use their social or political positions to alter, change, or alleviate the condition. Indeed, John Adams, in a letter to George Churchman and Jacob Lindley in January 1801, expressed in abundance benevolent indifference towards the institution of slavery and the condition of Blacks. He was clear in his opposition to slavery, yet he expressed no ambivalence towards the enslaved remaining so: "Although I have never Sought popularity by any animated Speeches or inflammatory publications against the Slavery of the Blacks, my opinion against it has always been known, and my practice has been so conformable to my sentiment that I have always employed freemen both as Domisticks and Labourers, and never in my Life did I own a Slave."²⁰³ He saved his ambivalence for the institution of slavery as he stood squarely and unquestioningly against the inhumanity of slavery, but his social and political position muted any thoughts of attempting to eradicate it, reasoning that abolitionist activities "produced greater violations of Justice and Humanity than the

²⁰³ "Adams, John, 1735-1826 to George Churchman and Jacob Lindley," to George Churchman and Jacob Lindley | Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc00921>.

continuance of the practice”²⁰⁴ (of slavery). In ameliorating his stance on slavery, Adams’s letter would raise a more pressing issue than resolving slavery. He shared with Churchman and Lindley that he had been “informed, that the condition, of the common Sort of White People in some of the southern states...is more oppressed, degraded and miserable than that of the Negroes.”²⁰⁵

Evidence of John Adams’ underlying precautions due to his political and social positions was made known through John Quincy Adams, his son, who learned well from his father, particularly on the issue of slavery: “But wherever his moral compass might have pointed, John Quincy Adams understood that any significant departure from the political orthodoxy of the day might put an end to his further political aspirations. And ambition for advancement he did have.”²⁰⁶ His political ambitions far overshadowed his conscience and any morality issues he may have had with the institution or that his father had towards the institution. What makes the Adamses compelling witnesses against the status quo of their time, which included capitulation to the slavocracy, both as legal influencers and potential slave owners, was that while they shared many of the attitudes, their gradualism approach to eventual abolition set them apart as acknowledging that slavery was, according to John Adams, “hateful as [it] is.” The Adamses are exceptional for their time, even given their complacency towards eradicating slavery among their peers. They stand as glowing examples of those who, like Thomas Jefferson, also shared in his “Notes on the State of Virginia” his reservations on the morality of the enslavement of Blacks,

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Michael Daly Hawkins, "John Quincy Adams and the Antebellum Maritime Slave Trade: The Politics of Slavery and the Slavery of Politics." *Oklahoma City University Law Review*, vol. 25, no. Issues 1 and 2, Spring and Summer 2000, pp. 12.

yet he equally harbored reservations about violence and unrest in a world in which Blacks were free. None make clear whether the violence they foresaw would come from Blacks exacting revenge for two and a half centuries of death and degradation or from recalcitrant whites' malcontent because their world and worldview had suddenly been overturned. Jefferson also shares in his "Notes" reservations pertaining to racial differences between whites and Blacks, but history records and reflects that those differences had little effect on his personal life. A Deist, Jefferson may have had social, moral, and political reservations, but his personal beliefs expressed a more certain diagnosis:

"Indeed I tremble for my country when reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever...The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest. The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave rising from the dust...the way I hope preparing, under the auspices of heaven, for a total emancipation...in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation."²⁰⁷

While the Adamsses were indeed the contemporaries of the other founding fathers socially, politically, and even religiously, principally as Deists, they held a different view of owning human beings. When examining prevailing attitudes towards slavery, there are glaring exceptions, if only in the view of slave ownership, amongst those who imbibed wholly the belief in slavery as the natural order of the universe by God's edict. In a complicated setting for the period, their conspicuous abstention was a solid departure from a wholesale belief in the intrinsic value of slavery in the social fabric amongst those in their social class. However, "it becomes difficult to argue that the founding fathers acted liberally within their own moral universe" when we take into consideration that it was not only the Adamsses, who never themselves owned

²⁰⁷ Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia", Query XVIII, "Manners: The particular customs and manners that may happen to be received in that state?" <https://kdhist.sitehost.iu.edu/H105-documents-web/week07/Jefferson1787.html>, accessed January 15, 2025.

slaves, but “small slave owners up and down the Virginia coast were freeing their slaves”²⁰⁸ during this same period. This is notable because the small slave owners faced greater financial jeopardy, given that owning slaves in America’s plantation economy was one of the chief measurements of wealth. And if there were others “up and down the Virginia coast” manumitting slaves, the long-held, oft-applied excuse of a lack of responsibility or culpability due to being “a man of his times” runs afoul of these numerous examples who also happened to be “men of their times.” That given, there remains one other egregious example of one who defied past and current logic that suggests slave-owning was simply the reality against which the era's most powerful men were rendered powerless. This flawed but exceptional human was not merely a peer to George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, George Mason, and any others in their orbit – this man was one to whom they all looked up and admired. His name was Robert Carter, III. Like them, he was a Deist, a politician, a member of the American colonial aristocracy; like them, he was a Virginian. Due to his vast wealth, Carter’s plantation, Nominy Hall, stands out for many reasons. First, amongst his neighbors was Mount Vernon, the plantation of George and Martha Washington, but second, Nominy Hall was not his only estate as he also had plantations in the counties of Westmoreland, Richmond, Frederick, Loudon, and Prince William. Third, as “the richest of them all...[Carter] held more slaves than [George] Washington and [Thomas] Jefferson combined.”²⁰⁹ So adroit and central was Carter amongst his elite class of friends that he sometimes did things that defied conventional thought and behavior. On one occasion in the year 1776, he asked of Richard Henry Lee, who was both his neighbor,

²⁰⁸ Levy, Andrew. “The Anti-Jefferson: Why Robert Carter III Freed His Slaves (And Why We Couldn’t Care Less).” *The American Scholar*, vol. 70, no. 2, Apr. 2001, pp. 15–35. *EBSCOhost*, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=4422136c-e7a9-35f7-bd44-08abbca3c69b.

²⁰⁹ Oberty M. Hendricks, Jr. *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of the Teachings of Jesus and How They Have Been Corrupted* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 185.

like Washington, and also busy as a prominent delegate to the Constitutional Congress happening in Philadelphia, the menial task of fetching for Carter “two sets of curls for my daughters Priscilla + Nancy” upon his return to Virginia and, for good measure, Carter enclosed “Samples of hair and measure.”²¹⁰ On another occasion that same year, when Thomas Jefferson penned the Declaration of Independence, 1776, “Carter sent his collection agent with a bill for an unpaid loan,”²¹¹ which later correspondence affirms Jefferson did repay. No action, however, of Carter was more astonishing and culture-rocking than his Deed of Gift issued on September 5, 1791. Carter, the elitest of the elite, a political mentor and friend to many of the Virginia slavocracy, started in 1791 what would eventually become the largest manumission of enslaved persons, second only to the Emancipation Proclamation, which came seventy years later. This manumission by Carter was unrivaled and unsurpassed in history as an individual eventually freeing over five hundred enslaved persons under his ownership. Carter wrote that he had “...for some time past been convinced that to retain them in Slavery is contrary to the true principles of Religion & Justice, that therefore it was my duty to manumit them if it could be accomplished without infringing the laws of my Country...”²¹² Carter would continue by making the necessary exceptions based upon a new law that had been passed by the General Assembly for the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1782, making it illegal for individuals to manumit the enslaved. In other words, it was a colonial measure to prevent individuals from “slave-shaming” their neighbors. Carter’s extenuation signaled that he had not gone rogue against his country nor

²¹⁰ Levy, 18.

²¹¹ Ibid. 18.

²¹² Frank Overton Brown, Jr. "Robert Carter III, Emancipation, and the Arc of the Moral Universe." *Virginia Lawyer*, vol. 65, no. 5, February 2017, pp. 28-31. *HeinOnline*, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.barjournals/valaw0065&i=292>.

turned against his neighbors who “objected vociferously to his manumission of slaves,”²¹³ declaring the actions of someone so socially and politically vaunted to be setting a dangerous precedent. This act signaled that he had made a turn against a principal institution held dearly by his friends and neighbors. Here, the unraveling and deletion of his page in American history as a founding father is found, and it is strikingly pertinent to my examination of both the impact of Black religious thought upon positive Black self-identity and, simultaneously, the brand of Christianity ascribed and shaped in America.

Raised in an Anglican household, Carter would later adopt Deist beliefs. Among the pertinent beliefs of Deists as it relates to this examination of its adherents are beliefs that God is benevolent but that God is distant and is too majestic and holy to interact with humanity. They believe that miracles, prophecies, and divine portents are superstitions, and that the Bible itself is not the revealed word of God. Notable among their beliefs was the denial of the divinity of Jesus as demonstrated in *The Jefferson Bible*, where Matthew 27:60 is the last verse saying that after Jesus was laid in the borrowed tomb, “he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed.”

During the lifetime of the founding fathers, in the 17th and 18th centuries, Deism emerged as a product of the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment era. The details here are necessary because of the impact they had upon the hearts and minds of the founders of this nation, and whose beliefs have been maintained, yet the dominant narrative merged many of these heretic beliefs with Christianity. Therefore, they would later speak the language of Christianity yet hold fast to the tenets of a distant God unconcerned about the goings-on in humanity. It is in this nexus of understanding of Deism or, as Thomas Jefferson is referred to, “Christian Deists,” where belief

²¹³ Ibid.

systems are syncretized, rendering slavery nebulous and negotiable to the whims of human understanding.

However, “in June 1777, while suffering from what he later described as ‘a Fever Heat’ from a smallpox inoculation, Carter experienced what he called a ‘most gracious illumination’ of his spirit.”²¹⁴ Carter’s worldview began to shift, and as a result, so did his social standing. Carter experienced a personal revelation that would change his view of his faith as well as his view of humanity, particularly the downtrodden and the enslaved. It would diminish the impact of the significance of his shift if it did not include his speaking up and out on behalf of poor whites, but he did. His shift was total and complete. Carter’s shift was one towards a greater and richer humanity. As a Deist, he denied the divinity of Christ and, more conveniently, the involvement of God in the daily affairs of humanity, but post-illumination, he would in 1778 write to his friend Thomas Jefferson, “I do now disclaim it and do testify that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that through him mankind can be saved only.”²¹⁵ Carter did not merely unite with the Baptist church, but he financially supported and engaged with its institutions. He was reported to travel by horseback, sometimes hundreds of miles, to hear different Protestant ministers speak.

It was that same year, 1778, that Carter would be baptized and unite with the Morattico Baptist Church, where he worshipped alongside other free whites and free and enslaved Blacks, which was indicative of the era of American religiosity marked by the onset of the Second Great Awakening in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Andrew Levy posits that “What Carter learned from hearing black preachers, and receiving communion alongside his own slaves, what

²¹⁴ Hendricks, 186.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

he learned from a thousand small exchanges with his slaves, must surely have catalyzed the Deed of Gift.”²¹⁶ There are two important points to note in Levy’s assessment. First, the impact of Black preaching upon his understanding of not only who the enslaved were but who he was in the eyes of God. Second, the impact of that preaching and his interactions with Blacks on equal footing in the eyes of God convinced him that God was intricately involved with the actions of humanity. By 1791, Carter would grow disenchanted with the Baptist church in Virginia as, like others, the church itself began to move away from the equality he was hearing and experiencing in the Bible, and it began to adopt more earnest positions that advocated the perpetuation of slavery, towards which he was vehemently opposed. In his personal and spiritual grappling with the issue of slavery in the year he would issue his Deed of Gift, he would also leave his adopted spiritual home in the Baptist Church, writing to “John Rippon, a Baptist elder...that “tolerating Slavery indicates great depravity” and later that “the Situation of the Blacks here, is my greatest difficulty...& it appears to me Judgments will follow us so long as the Bar is held up.”²¹⁷ This fear of “Judgement” from God was not isolated to Carter only, but similar queries were plentiful in the writings of men like Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. Carter’s earlier speaking out against slavery was graduated as he, like the Adamses and others like them who mustered up the courage to speak out and believed slavery to be wrong; however, the safety valve remained in place, holding that freeing the enslaved was impractical. Carter’s faith, however, would not allow social and financial conventional strictures to occlude, impede, or distort what he believed to be the will of his God. In *The Politics of Jesus*, Obery Hendricks would add that “Carter’s conversion went beyond words and pious posturing” ...Carter’s conversion was internal and

²¹⁶ Levy, 23.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 19.

external, allowing what he believed to shape and determine his actions and behaviors toward others. His actions exacted a tremendous toll upon his financial position but also on his social standing, having suffered physical attacks and mob violence because of his Baptist beliefs and eventually he would be forced to relocate from his beloved Virginia to Baltimore, where he died in 1804. Frank Overton Brown, Jr. applied the words of Congregationalist minister Theodore Parker in 1810, a mere six years after Carter died, to Carter's life and legacy: "Robert Carter III looked at the facts of the world in his days and beyond, determined what he believed was his duty, and took positive actions that most of his peers did not, and, as a result, many individual lives and subsequent generations were improved."²¹⁸ In other words, the great sacrifice of one altered forever the futures and lives of many...based upon the actions motivated by his belief in his God.

Given the social, political, and financial strength of the Southern Baptist Convention, a national and international predominantly white Christian Baptist Convention, the example of Robert Carter, III seems particularly poignant. As noted above, Carter would leave the Baptist church because of its broadening kinship with slavery, and this dovetails seamlessly with historical records showing a shift in the Second Great Awakening away from equality towards a more profound institutional attachment to slavery and white supremacy. The turn within the Second Great Awakening away from the scriptural notion of equality in God towards white supremacy was dominated by beliefs of a hierarchy in God that placed whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom. A sign of the times, Enlightenment thought bent towards reason and what could be proved versus what was merely believed. Of particular note is the thinking and the writing of Emanuel Kant. Though Kant in no way invented the concept or the idea of race, his

²¹⁸ Brown, Jr., 31.

writing, for many, concretized and legitimated the notion of white superiority, dominance, and favorability in the eyes of God. One of his most enduring contributions was in his positioning of whiteness, where he “deracializes the white race so that it can be the perfect bearer of perfect racial identity.”²¹⁹ It is this deracialization by Kant and those who have followed him, prioritizing and absolving whiteness of the remotest potentiality of racializing, that establishes whiteness as base.

It is this legacy of thought in whiteness being base where the hearts and minds of the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention were groomed, shaped, and molded. It was within this era that episodes of racial parity, if only in worship, prevailed during the Second Great Awakening. In retrospect, there appears to be a direct correlation between the Second Great Awakening being curtailed and the entrenchment of slavery and white supremacist ideals as God-ordained by the church in the early 19th century. Simultaneously, there was a near-universal negation and de-emphasizing of the contradictions inherent in the same gospel that emphasizes equality in the family of God. They were indeed “men of their times” in that they capitulated to the social mores of their day, and in the process, rather than dismantling the oppressive systems, they reinforced, perpetuated, and scripturally justified those systems as instituted of and by their god. While the “Redeemers” era would not officially be recognized and labeled as such until post-Civil War, the crux of their thinking was supported and undergirded by the sermons and preachments of leading ministers and founders of the Southern Baptist Convention. It is equally important to recall the adage that “the North may have won the war, but the South [definitively] won the narrative (and the peace),” ultimately meaning that “Southern” was transformed from a “region” to a national identity. Again, the pertinence of these ministers and their teachings as

²¹⁹ J. Kameron Carter, *Race*, 93.

they apply to Black self-identity is found in the saliency of Black religious thought that transformed messages of worth and value as property from white ministers to messages of worth and value as children of God. Black religious thought provided inspiration that was antithetical to the messages of innate white superiority over and against irrefutable Black inferiority. At a time when Black acceptance was erroneously prescribed as only being found in white permissiveness of the practice of Christianity, John Hope Franklin in *From Slavery to Freedom* revealed a hypocrisy in that “Slaves who had found refuge and solace in the religious instruction of the white clergy had reason to believe that they were now trapped by an enemy who had once befriended them.”²²⁰ Although illegal in most quarters, Black literacy began to increase. As they acquired the ability to read and comprehend for themselves, particularly the ministers, what the scriptures taught in that feeling of betrayal was not necessarily revealed as a “surprise,” but instead a revelation of the truth they knew could not remain hidden forever.

Black self-identity, not necessarily “positive,” shaped during slavery had some natural, but harmful effects. While a minority of the community of the enslaved, there were voices who, as their mode of survival, chose the path of least resistance, mentally yielding to the reason and rationale for their enslavement. In their own personal and communal meaning-making, the enslaved’s life setting gave way to white understandings as to the “why” behind their enslavement. One such case is that of Jupiter Hammon, who lived his entire life as a slave, but he learned to read and write. In his “Address to the Negroes in the State of New York” Hammon mimicked the apologist rationale for slavery heard all too often amongst staunch defenders of the institution: “One great reason that is given by some for not freeing us, I understand, is, that we should not know how to take care of ourselves, and should take to bad courses; that we should be

²²⁰ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans, Eighth Edition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 154.

lazy and idle, and get drunk and steal.”²²¹ Hammon learned to read and write, which, in a manner of living, made him quite privileged, but while his thinking may have been a minority perspective, he was not alone. Even amongst those who were illiterate, the sense of hopelessness was manifest in the words of those like the formerly enslaved John Bates who remembered: “My uncle, Ben, he could read de Bible, and he allus tell us some day us be free. And Massa Henry laugh, “Haw, haw, haw,” and he say “Hell, no, yous never be free. Yous ain’t got sense ‘nuf to make de livin’, if yous was free.”²²²

Hammon was an example of one who, despite his natural abilities, resigned himself to the lot assigned him in life as an enslaved person. He was recorded as having shared that though he did not desire to be free, he found ways to make his existence meaningful. Out of his expressions there was a glimpse of peace in his circumstances: “...for many of us are grown up slaves, and have always had masters to take care of us, should hardly know how to take care of ourselves; and it may be more for our own comfort to remain as we are.”²²³ This resignation of spirit to a less-than status was not reserved for social rationalizations. Deep within his rationalizations about life, in general, and about himself are spiritual misgivings that emanated from the teachings of the dominant white Christian theology, belief, and worldview. A man of deep faith, he accepted the prevailing interpretations of scripture that subjugated Blacks to servanthood and, thus, understood the world from that perspective, justifying – as had been done undoubtedly many times over – that slavery was of God. Not satisfied simply stating the case, he used white theological understanding to substantiate it: “It may seem hard for us, if we think

²²¹ Milton Sernett, *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness, Second Edition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 42-43.

²²² Mellon, 199.

²²³ Sernett, 39.

our masters wrong in holding us slaves, to obey in all things, but who of us dare dispute with God!”²²⁴ Hammon and those who thought similarly quickly point to Ephesians 6:8, only three verses removed from Ephesians 6:5, which says “Slaves obey your masters.”

In examining the impact of Redeemer theology, the theology of those who laid the groundwork for the post-Civil War civil religion of the Lost Cause also made the ground fertile for Black theology of liberation and uplift. Three points of departure bear noting up front concerning white theological justifications of slavery. First and foremost, slavocracy apologism must be dispelled, if only because they did not live in a vacuum; they lived amongst others who were never counted amongst the dreaded abolitionists, but they refused to perpetuate slavery, some by manumitting their enslaved, others by refusing to participate in the trade altogether. As was stated earlier, there were numerous shining examples of those who acted more courageously and manumitted enslaved people while the strength of the growing Baptist denomination clung to the southern ideals of white supremacy; this approach created a long-standing branch of slavocracy apologism that shielded them from criticism and, thus, making amends as one of their progenitors Robert Carter, III did in not only freeing his enslaved but “he made provision for their support during their transition to freedom (another departure from the Emancipation Proclamation), including giving them housing that had been built for whites and arranging for them to farm their shares on his plantations as he explained that his ‘present wish’ was to ‘accommodate the poor.’”²²⁵

Second, the scriptural comparisons surrounding slavery in the Bible and slavery in colonial America must be abandoned entirely. Slavery in the Bible was indentured servitude,

²²⁴ Ibid, 36.

²²⁵ Hendricks, 187.

which had an end and maintained the humanity of its subjects. Slavery in colonial America bore no such trademarks, as it became chattel, perpetual slavery that attempted to deny its subjects a place in the human family. In short, colonial American “slavery” is to Biblical slavery as ice is to water. The make-up is the same, two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, but like biblical slavery, something dramatic and drastic must change the molecular structure of water to make ice. American chattel slavery took what was as old as humanity and graduated it not merely to perpetual servitude as had never been seen or recorded before, but it reduced its subjects to subhuman status, or “three-fifths”²²⁶ of a human being when and where it benefitted the benefactors according to the United States Constitution.

Third, given the centrality and intrinsic nature of religion and faith for Blacks, the importance of biblical interpretation and application has left an indelible impact on Black self-identity and blackness overall. It is impossible to overestimate the impact of white theology upon the hearts and minds of a subjected people who were forced and conditioned to look to whiteness as the paradigm of human acceptance. White theology was inescapable, but it was not universally accepted even by those who could not read and write, contrary to the earlier examples. Howard Thurman, the American mystic theologian, spent much time with his grandmother while growing up in Daytona, Florida. Born enslaved, she could not read, so she often summoned young Howard to read scriptures, but she never had a tolerance for the letters of Paul. He would one day muster the courage to reverently ask her “why,” to which she replied:

“During the days of slavery the master’s minister would occasionally hold services for the slaves. Old man McGhee was so mean that he would not let a Negro minister preach to his slaves. Always a white minister used as his text something from Paul. At least three or four times a year he used as a text: ‘Slaves, be obedient to them that are your masters...as unto Christ.’ The he would go on to show how it was God’s will that we were slaves and how,

²²⁶ Edward S. Corwin, *The Constitution and What It Means Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 7.

if we were good and happy slaves, God would bless us. I promised my Maker that if I ever learned to read and if freedom came, I would not read that part of the Bible.”²²⁷

The goal of white theology was to elevate whiteness and white supremacy to levels befitting lordship while completely debasing blackness as a utility of whiteness, and otherwise valueless. This study now shifts to look at some of the leading voices of the Southern Baptist Convention in uncharted ways. According to R. Albert Mohler, Jr., a well-known scholar, administrator, and current President of the Southern Baptist Convention Theological Seminary: “So far as I can tell, no one has confronted the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Southern Seminary with the brutal reality of what they were doing, believing and teaching in this regard...how recently were these sins recognized as sins and repented of?”²²⁸ Mohler penned an article in Baptist Press in the aftermath of a racially motivated massacre of nine worshippers at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, clearly making a direct correlation to the foundational teachings of his predecessors in the Southern Baptist Convention in the debasing of Black lives and the elevation of whiteness. While not upbraiding the founders, he argued that many of their beliefs were heretical. Because of its staunch and broad appeal he admonishes that Southern Baptists bear both a burden and a responsibility in this history: “The Southern Baptist Convention was not only founded by slaveholders; it was founded by men who held to an ideology of racial superiority and who bathed that ideology in scandalous theological argument...an argument that reflects such ignorance of Scripture that it could only be believed by those who were looking for an argument

²²⁷ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 31.

²²⁸ R. Albert Mohler, “First Person: Racial Superiority - Confronting The Truth.” *Baptist Press*, 23 June 2015, www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/first-person-racial-superiority-confronting-the-truth/.

to satisfy their prejudices.”²²⁹ The strength in his resolve is impressive and, if sustained, can shift white theology towards Christian theology. Still, the same silence and capitulation to the social mores of the antebellum period have once again claimed as casualties those who know better but are rendered powerless to do better. My aim is not to confront the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention, but to examine components of their ideology towards slavery in the preaching, teaching, and thinking that are “a direct assault upon the doctrine of Creation and an insult to the image of God in which every human being is made.”²³⁰ This is done with the realization that the sole purpose and intention is to cement whiteness as dominant and godly and render blackness as subservient and evil – all as planned, willed, and ordained by God. Ambivalence and ambiguity toward human worth and slavery led to ambivalence and ambiguity toward God’s word. Their influence helped shape an enduring legacy of Biblical interpretation that has been hard to shake nearly two centuries later. A mathematical example serves to demonstrate the importance of their teachings. In 1953, the first woman in the Space Flight Division to co-author a published technical report, Katherine Johnson, worked at the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, which would later become NASA. She analyzed test flight data and helped calculate the trajectory of the first American manned space flight in 1961. Holding low confidence in the IBM calculations, Johnson calculated specific metrics of longitude and latitude to assure the Navy of the proper location to rescue an orbiting capsule in the ocean. Accurate measurements were essential because, contrary to popular belief, the Earth is not a perfect sphere, which skewed the results of the computers. Instead, the Earth bulges in the middle, shifting the metrics when figuring out re-entry and landing coordinates calculations.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

Being off even by one-millionth of a decimal point could be catastrophic. It is the difference between landing safely in the middle of the ocean or crashing into a crowded metropolitan city during the busiest time of the day. Likewise, careless and selfish errors in the interpretation and application of scripture, which guides people's thoughts, hearts, and actions, have had a similar impact to imperfect calculations on an orbiting capsule's reentry and landing. In this case, it not only resulted in the total and complete unabashed belief in the permanent subjectivity of an entire people based solely on their assigned racial identity, but, concomitantly, the complete unabashed belief in the God-ordained superiority of an entire people, with neither having a scriptural basis. The result has had catastrophic effects. Sustaining the myth of white superiority had to be accomplished to sustain the sanity of the people and their worldview.

Basil Manly, Sr. (1798 – 1868) and Richard Fuller (1804 – 1876) were two influential Baptist ministers who, I argue, laid not only the groundwork for the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, but they shaped a mentality of a generation who would give birth to the Post-Civil War faith that shaped the Lost Cause, the unspoken *national* myth. This examination is not meant to castigate nor criticize these “fathers” of the Southern Baptist Convention. It is a serious critique of their lasting impact upon the theology (what we think) and religion (what we do) of whites that has led to intransigence and a legacy of blatant obfuscation of truth to such an extent that the “sons” of the legacy stand quietly, idly, and complicitly by as witnesses to the fracturing of innocent biblical truth just as happened in the justification of slavery and the dehumanization of Blacks. Inherent here is the elevation of whiteness as superior and the supplanting of blackness as inferior. Indeed, this was spoken more harshly at times and in various ways, but the most deadly and disruptive weapon of that dehumanization was not found in that which was verbalized. The most dangerous and toxic weapon against positive Black self-

identity was not what was heard in the vitriol and verbal berating, nor seen in the various ways blackness was demeaned. For example, there was the icing effect of public beatings of enslaved persons, or the raping of Black mothers and wives and daughters by white men for sexual gratification, or a well-known pastor fresh out of the pulpit on Sunday morning demonstrating to all who the true “master” was on Sunday afternoon. While dehumanizing and brutalizing, these examples don’t rank at the top. The most terrific examples were found in the basic, unquestioned assumptions of Black inferiority that infected nearly all whites.

The centrality of Manly, Sr. and Fuller lies in their substantial individual contributions and the cumulative impact of those contributions towards reifying and concretizing the Southern Way of life, whose centerpiece was slavery. The North’s ambivalence – not towards slavery, which many Northerners protested as wrong – compounded the cumulative effect of their contributions. Undergirding this ambivalence was the North’s at-best subaltern status with which they held and treated Blacks and their desire to assuage Southern sensitivities effectively promulgating the Southern Way of life, which became the American way of life.

The Redeemers

The Architect of Secession: Basil Manly, Sr.

Basil Manly, Sr. was a southern gentleman’s southern gentleman. He was a leading statesman across the South and even nationally in Baptist circles. Like many Baptists of his era, Manly had strong Calvinistic leanings, particularly the bedrock belief in the sovereignty of God. He went to great lengths to reconcile conflicting “truths” to preserve his inherited institutional religious thinking. In a twist of fate, Manly, who had many dealings in secession, on one occasion to salvage Baptist unity in a dispute between the North River and the Tuscaloosa

associations of Alabama over human free will and God's sovereignty, preached a sermon entitled "Divine Efficiency Consistent with Human Activity." He deftly declared that "no final contradiction exists between divine sovereignty and human responsibility...never [identifying] human responsibility with free will."²³¹ His expressed purpose was to go to extreme lengths to mete out a reasoned, theological explanation to salvage unity amongst Alabama Baptists, avoiding "diminishing one truth for the sake of the other."²³² His still-revered impact and influence stretched far and wide, reaching deep into the hearts and minds of Southern Baptists. It is within the realm of his impact and influence that his voice is magnified on the issue of Black inferiority and its injurious effects on Black self-identity.

Manly was born in North Carolina at the close of the eighteenth century, in 1798, but he would eventually make his way with his family to South Carolina, where his Baptist fingerprint would prove indelible in the annals of the Southern Baptist faith tradition. Manly would pastor several influential Baptist churches in South Carolina and Alabama. His preaching prowess was on full display at the Edgefield Revival, which spread across the state of South Carolina and into the state of Georgia, impacting thousands as the Baptist faith continued to flourish on the heels of the Second Great Awakening, vastly overshadowing Methodism and Episcopalianism. Manly would be firmly established as a force to be reckoned with across the South. His influence would not be unifocal as it spanned the religious, educational, political, and cultural arenas. In the academy, he was instrumental in founding institutions of higher learning, such as Furman University and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was also instrumental in rescuing the University of Alabama from unrest, serving a successful tenure as president from 1837 to

²³¹ Thomas J. Nettles, ed., *Southern Baptist Sermons on Sovereignty and Responsibility, with a Biographical Sketch of Each Author* (Harrisburg, VA: Grand Books, Sprinkle Publications, 1984), 8.

²³² Ibid.

1855. His administrative abilities were on full display as he reorganized the offices and the classrooms, recruiting reputable people he could trust in both arenas. So successful was he that “his continued desirability among Baptists in the South [was] seen from offers extended to him to accept the presidency of Mercer, Furman, Howard and at least two other schools.”²³³

What is known broadly is that Basil Manley, Sr., played a central role in the founding and establishing the Southern Baptist Convention. While it may seem or sound controversial, his role in the founding and establishing the Confederacy is less well known. Manly’s central role in both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Confederacy provides the foundation and legitimacy to label him a “secessionist” at heart. He was unquestionably the architect of the Southern Baptist Convention’s secession from the Triennial Convention. The same can also be said for the Confederacy as he drafted the initial resolution that would precipitate Alabama’s secession from the Union which once under way was captured by A. James Fuller’s expression of Manly’s sentiments: “In Manly’s eyes, the Confederacy was the culmination of God’s plan for the world.”²³⁴ Fuller would continue by saying that Manly’s declaration at the 1860 Alabama State Baptist Convention “was believed by some to have done ‘more to principate the secession of Alabama than any other cause.’”²³⁵ It is important to highlight here the assumption of “God’s plan for the world” and not merely God’s plan for the South. God’s sovereignty, in his heart and mind, favored not just the South, but it was God’s stamp of approval on the Southern way of life, whose crown jewel was the enslavement of Africans.

²³³ Nettles, 7.

²³⁴ A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 1.

²³⁵ Fuller, 227.

The justification for this is exemplified in Manly's mentality to protect Southern gentility and honor by any means necessary. Both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Confederacy met the ideal worldview of Manly. He found pride in all things Southern, and anything that threatened what he understood as the South's honor and integrity had to be met head on and dismantled. Slavery and honor were the bookends of the schism amongst Baptists and the breach of differences between the North and the South. For this reason, Mandy E. McMichael collapses the two secessions in which Manly played an outsized role by noting that "both secessions were religious matters, and both secessions were political matters."²³⁶ In this, McMichael accomplishes two things: first, she brings to bear two seemingly polar opposite spheres, the political and the religious, united in the architect of both, and second, she dismantles modern notions of complete separation between the two. To miss the connection between Manly's Alabama Resolutions effectively establishing the Southern Baptist Convention in May of 1845 in Augusta, Georgia, is also to underestimate the role as a religious leader in his subsequent resolution fifteen years later in the Alabama State Baptist Convention which stated: "The call of proper authority in defense of the *sovereignty* and independence of the state of Alabama, and of her sacred right as a *sovereignty* to withdraw from this union."²³⁷ (Italics added by me for emphasis) Not a full year later, on January 11, 1861, Alabama would vote 61-39 in favor of secession from the United States. Revealing his prominence in the founding of the "new South" as the Confederate States of America was where he would be found at its inception. It was Basil Manly, Sr., who would serve the Confederacy as the chaplain of the Provisional Congress. As

²³⁶ Mandy E. McMichael, "'We Must Go out of This Union:' The Two Secessions of Basil Manly Sr." *Baptist History and Heritage*, vol. 52, no. 2, June 2017, p. 8. *EBSCOhost*, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=7344a9bf-bb02-3918-bcb8-e5d32a4874d8, 15.

²³⁷ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1998), 105-106.

Jefferson Davis stood to be sworn in as President of the Confederacy, Manly would offer the prayer. In a testament to his long-held secessionist leanings, Basil, Sr. would write in a letter to his son, Basil, Jr.: “I thank God sincerely that I have lived, *after 30 years of waiting*, to see this result.”²³⁸ (Italics added by me for emphasis) This, in and of itself, is proof positive that from his formative years, the thought of maintaining the Southern way of life at all costs was his driving motivation undergirded by his understanding of the sovereignty and supremacy of God *and* white men.

Without question, the centerpiece of maintaining the Southern Way of life was slavery, which, as a young man, Manly thought to be wrong. In the year he would graduate from South Carolina College (later the University of South Carolina), 1821, Manly’s address titled “On the Emancipation of Slaves” would hold that “Slavery is an evil under which the country has long groaned” and that it was “utterly repugnant to the spirit of republican institutions.”²³⁹ Like many white evangelicals of his day, Manly would later shift towards the more culturally and socially accepted understandings of slavery, relenting that though “repugnant,” he would echo the tried and presumptively true ruminations of the masses who came before him in that “no practical policy of emancipating slaves could be devised.”²⁴⁰ So certain was his one-hundred-eighty-degree shift that he would later craft and deliver a sermon entitled “Duties of Masters and Servants” in which he would cement once and for all his stance that “God established slavery as the permanent condition of Africans after the flood.”²⁴¹ Couched theologically and religiously

²³⁸ McMichael, 15.

²³⁹ Basil Manly Sr., “On the Emancipation of Slaves” (1821), Basil Manly Sr. Papers, Special Collections, James B. Duke Library, Furman University.

²⁴⁰ Mohler, 13.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

within the rubric of the sovereignty of God, to substantiate his claims, Manly would employ one of the white evangelicals' foundational operationalized texts to justify slavery, Black inferiority, and permanent servitude. Manly was handed down an erroneous, unexamined understanding of what evangelicals have long referred to as the "Curse of Ham" (also known as the "Hamitic Curse"). Like those before him, it was the law that he and others would pass on for generations beyond as a bedrock text to support the biblical mandate for the perpetual enslavement of Africans. So convincing was the theological rationale that, nearly two centuries later, what supported that kind of preaching and teaching continues to resonate. The scriptural explanations have since been socially "polished," but the underlying attitudinal rationale and life applications remain. The "Curse of Ham" reference is to a story in Genesis 9:18-29 of the episode when Noah got drunk, drinking the fruit of the vine he planted in his vineyard on the eve of reconstruction. When he awakened, "he knew" that Ham had seen him naked, and the text reveals the most egregious error in their interpretation of the story: Noah cursed "Ham." A cursory reading of this episode reveals that Noah never cursed Ham; Noah cursed Canaan, Ham's son, and he did not do that until after he was drunk. And while the naming of the curse might be arguable since it is still Ham's son who was cursed, what is more prescient is the convenience of that biblical interpretation in that it suited perfectly their social reckonings based upon white supremacy which supposed that three sons from the same two genealogical parents could somehow be of three different "races" (Jews, Europeans, and Africans). And the passing down of that version omits noting that many, if not most, of the earliest known civilizations of the time were founded by the descendants of Ham! Not to mention the incorporation of some of these descendants into the Israelite family tree.

Much about Manly's complicated story suggests that the more one studies it, the more complex it becomes. While one day walking through a corn field, Manly was led to Christ by an elderly enslaved Black man who cried out to God on behalf of "Mas Bas." Manly's opinion of Blacks was complicated, as was the case of many in his lifetime, in that it never quite fit nicely into any particular category. His interaction with Blacks depended on the setting in which the interaction occurred. "Like many other Southerners, Manly would think of his slaves as part of the family, a conception that grew out of his belief in God's order for the world and out of his own experiences as a Christian father, a patriarch, to those who were the same color as the man who had led him to Christ in a cornfield."²⁴² Unless it was explicitly called for, like his sermon "Duties of Masters and Servants," seldom did Manly or many other evangelical pastors explicitly speak about Africans in derogatory terms – it was understood that they were, in a sense, "children of a lesser god" – from the Sunday pulpit. Yet, he was also one who shifted intuitively when the setting changed to a question of value and authority. Though he was not often inclined to sell "slaves" due to family relations, he once admitted that, due to his inherent right to do so, "I had no more doubt or compunction than in pocketing the price of a horse or anything else that belonged to me."²⁴³

Manly was the white masculine ideal archetype, and his reach is abiding. He had wealth, intellect, influence, and power. He was the epitome of a contributing fellow "architect," though of Adolph Hitler's Third Reich, Carl Schmitt, whose opening salvo in the aforementioned *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* devised and laid bare the preeminence and importance of the "sovereign." This reiteration of Schmitt's influence and

²⁴² Fuller, 13.

²⁴³ Ibid, 222.

intellect lent to Hitler's organization, which eventually helped lead to the extermination of six million Jews, can be likened to Manly's influence, which would contribute mightily to the establishment and furtherance of Black suppression post-Civil War through the Redeemers. His steadfast belief in the supremacy of whiteness based on his interpretation of scripture greatly contributed to what would become the religion of the Lost Cause, "the story of the use of the past as the basis for a Southern religious-moral identity, an identity as a chosen [sovereign] people."²⁴⁴ It was his cause that the South would pick up as a mandate, first to resist any movement that would upset the established balance of white supremacy, and second to return to the revolutionary ideals of independence and freedom, just not for Blacks.

The Apologist: Richard Fuller

Though explicitly written about William Bullein Johnson (1782 – 1862), the inaugural president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the phrase "Giant in the Land" is more aptly applied as "*Giants* in the Land." Johnson was undoubtedly one of those giants, as was Basil Manly, Sr. However, it would be a grave omission not to include their friend and another of the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention, Richard Fuller. Fuller was a different type of dominant personality from the person of Manly, Sr., but no less important. He was a Southern gentleman who was also an intellectual and a dynamic personality who commanded the stage when present. Like Manly Sr., Fuller was not raised Baptist; he came to the faith from an Episcopalian background. Like Manly Sr., Fuller did not hesitate to draw a line in the proverbial sands where differences may have been or were inferred, particularly where "respect" and "honor" were at stake; both Manly Sr. and Fuller worked tirelessly toward the end that was unity

²⁴⁴ Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 1.

among Baptists. This was demonstrated in his sermon at the General Missionary Convention in 1841 entitled “The Cross” when he admonished, “I exclaim, with equal confidence, who, what shall separate us from each other, united as we are by this love? What shall separate us? Shall persecution? No, that will only bind us closer...[shall] sectional jealousies, political rancor, and party malignity?”²⁴⁵

Fuller’s impact on Black identity is manifold, as he was not only one of the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention but also one of the leading voices against reuniting with the Triennial Convention post-Civil War. Where others, like Manly, at least superficially struck a more conciliatory tone following the devastating and demoralizing defeat by the North over the South, Fuller remained recalcitrant. The struggle that America has today with the staid forces of white supremacy owes much to the staunch efforts of men like Richard Fuller who laid the groundwork for the retrenchment of Black rights (amongst them the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments in post-Reconstruction) and the resurgence of white vitriol and expressed hatred against Black life.

In the same vein as Manly, Sr., Fuller’s position was defensive against efforts he believed were unfairly demonizing those who were proslavery. A deft intellectual with the Bible in his hands and his head, he was quick to both refute others’ claims while justifying his own beliefs. His arguments went beyond the theological arguments – though he did not abandon them – but he also spoke to the cultural, economic, and practical aspects of slavery, more specifically, the abolition of slavery. He often reflected on questions like “If by some means slavery could be abolished, would slavekeepers be compensated? Would freedpeople be compensated? If so,

²⁴⁵ Fuller, 100.

who would pay?”²⁴⁶ As was harbored in the hearts and minds of many whites in his era and before, the great fear was retributive violence against whites following Black liberation. The echoes of Nat Turner’s rebellion still rang loudly and clearly in the hearts and minds of slaveowners, and humanistically self-preservation played a part in the occlusion of scriptures bent in support of slavery. Naturally, if God ordained slavery, then those who upheld and maintained it were godly, and abolitionists who sought to dismantle slavery were likewise deemed ungodly. Coincidentally, the desires of Fuller, Manly, Sr., and other pro-slavery Southerners for the Triennial Convention were not for the Northerners to change, but for everyone to be allowed to do as they pleased without the North casting aspersions against the South for their cultural and social milieu. In other words, the South wanted to be left alone without the encumbrances of Northern isolation or its judgments. This sentiment of free will and control over Blacks would be a key part of founding the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. It would end with the Civil War defeat of the South, but it would win the day politically in the Compromise of 1877, which, as detailed earlier, gave Rutherford B. Hayes the presidency in a contested election while removing federal troops from the South. Both events conditionally ended Federal Reconstruction and restored the South’s ability to “deal with the Blacks” in their own way. Politically, Fuller also leaned on the Constitution, which had no provisions against the institution of slavery, noting that “If the Constitution did not forbid the institution, and biblical text could be mustered to affirm its legitimacy, it was not only permissible; it was divinely sanctioned.”²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Keith Harper, “Elephants in the Room: The Francis Wayland, Richard Fuller Correspondence on Slavery as a Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Baptist Hermeneutics.” *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 48, no. 3, Dec. 2021, pp. 281–96. *EBSCOhost*, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=c13536cd-b4ad-38e6-a98e-b2c8076b6f33, 288.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 289.

Fuller's interpretation of scripture further ingratiated him with white evangelicals, meeting them in those vulnerable places and filling them with scriptural mandates supported by rationalizations that allayed spectral fears of abolition. His reputation as a hard-charging intellect preceded him as he read and interpreted scripture far more literally in ways that supported slavery and maintained Southern social order while discrediting abolitionists, thus perpetuating the South's honor code. "Southern honor [was] the linchpin of Southern self-definition"²⁴⁸ and inherent in that was the biblical mandate of perpetual Black subservency and inferiority. His sermons are rife not with abject racism but subtle innuendo that leaned heavily upon the "economy of justice" as he "conceived of order – specifically *white* order – as something next to godliness."²⁴⁹ Like so many other white evangelical preachers, Fuller's credo included paternal racialism, speaking of Blacks as helpless damsels saved only by the "great goodness" of whiteness. He held fast to an enduring ethos of the evangelicalism of white saviorism in that "by virtue of owning slaves, whites inhabited the best possible society, and by virtue of simply living in white society, slaves lived immeasurably better than they would have in their homeland."²⁵⁰ In this, regardless of the condition of either the slaveowner or the enslaved person, what was suitable for one was good for the other by equilibrium in the cosmos.

Fuller read the Bible with Southern sensibilities that contoured with Southern cultural norms and "Even more, [the institution of slavery] provided social stability through order and a

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 288.

²⁴⁹ Richard Fuller, "Lord, To Whom Shall We Go?", *Sermons by Richard Fuller* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publications Society, 1877), 316.

²⁵⁰ Todd, Obbie Tyler. "'Forbidding Us to Speak unto the Gentiles': The First Southern Baptist Convention (1845) in Its Moral and Theological Context." *Baptist History & Heritage*, vol. 55, no. 2, June 2022, pp. 48–72. *EBSCOhost*, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=5e7f280c-0fbf-3b30-8ffc-669fb62a0234, 60.

sense of one's 'place'."²⁵¹ Indeed, his interpretation of the Bible reasoned that slavery was not just good for the slaveowners, it was also good for the enslaved person through divine intervention: "the great goodness of God in transferring them [slaves] from the thick darkness of their own land to the privileges they enjoy in ours."²⁵² In short, it was the greatest common good and the highest and best use of enslaved people owing to the capaciousness of white grace. Fuller's total and complete belief in the justification of the institution of slavery through scripture unveils the dangers of proof-texting the Bible to suit one's advantage. Even in his letter exchange debates with Francis Wayland, who objected to Fuller's reading and interpretation of the Bible, Wayland cogently argued for a more ethical interpretation that was neither bound to one's lived circumstances nor that serves to maintain the status quo. Yet even his personal views taint the debate. While he personally disagreed with proslavery arguments, biblical or otherwise, he was still burdened beneath the enormous weight of his belief in Black inferiority, and he struggled as did Fuller and others with how, if, and when liberation should happen. And, ultimately, at the end of the debate, Wayland's indifference to the plight of Blacks left whiteness as normative on the eve of the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention. Harper summarizes Fuller's interpretation best in "Elephants in the room": "When one's theology is piecemeal in order to reach or maintain a missionary consensus, pragmatism is the inevitable result, and mission becomes an end, a theology to itself."²⁵³ Fuller's intellect provided a platform for him to influence many through interpretations that did not challenge them to grapple with their understanding, but it affirmed for them things irreconcilable with scriptural truth. Unlike Manly,

²⁵¹ Harper, 295.

²⁵² Todd, 60.

²⁵³ Harper, 296.

who shifted his opinion on Blacks at the close of the Civil War and sought a presidential pardon to protect his wealth, Fuller would continue to pastor and advocate for the divisions between the Southern Baptist Convention and the Triennial Convention.

Given that many, if not most, of the influential men of the cloth in this period believed staunchly in the “free agency” of men, the employment of biblical teachings that tested those beliefs placed them in a spiritually tenuous position, one that Manly, Sr. learned to navigate skillfully. As alluded to earlier, Manly longingly desired a “return to revolutionary ideals, to religious purity and reform,” harkening back to the reasons and the necessity of fighting the American Revolutionary War against England, becoming in many ways his own antebellum cry to “Make America Great Again.” A testament to the mentally and spiritually challenging nature of this period is revealed in an alleged exchange by Whitelaw Reid regarding Fuller. Reid reported on an alleged conversation between Richard Fuller and Maryland Governor Augustus Bradford, post-Civil War and emancipation. The Governor asked Fuller about the impact of emancipation of Blacks on Fuller’s personal fortune, which could have been as much as \$150,000 (nearly \$2,500,000 adjusted for inflation today), to which Fuller replied “Yes, I presume it did, but then, Governor, it took over a hundred and fifty thousand pounds of iron off my conscience,”²⁵⁴ a weight he left future generations to carry.

For obvious reasons, the examples of men like Robert Carter, III, of record are few; there may be more men of lesser consequence related to wealth and political influence but given the prominence of Carter’s position relative to those whose names grace the history books (men like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, et al) the absence of “lesser” men is not surprising. If Carter could be erased, lesser men were of no consequence.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 294.

Perhaps it is the respect he commanded amongst his contemporaries that there does not appear to have been a concerted effort to deface him or his name. He was simply written out of a history in which he was a major contributor. On the opposite end of the spectrum, while men of the stature of Basil Manly, Sr. and Richard Fuller were not a dime a dozen, they were in the overwhelming majority of those who held unabashed beliefs in a social and divine hierarchy wherein whites were perched at the top and Blacks were firmly supplanted at the bottom, carrying with it the belief that to rebel against their lot in life was to rebel against God.

The perpetuated fallacy is that this was a “Southern thing,” that it was in the South where this thinking was predominant. What is true about this fallacy is that slavery was a part of the very fabric of the Southern way of life, but what is not true, and misleading, is to confine the belief of Black inferiority to the South. The attitudes and beliefs of Black inferiority were as ingrained and intrinsic in the North as they were in the South. Indeed, even “The Great Emancipator,” the one who in refusing to give in during the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, thought slavery to be wrong, but his personal beliefs about Black inferiority as compared to whites could not be differentiated from his arch nemesis, Jefferson Davis. In his debates with Stephen Douglass, Abraham Lincoln said, “There must be the position of superior and inferior, and I, as much as any other man, am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.”²⁵⁵ This prevailing racial attitude extends beyond the social and political to include the religious, in that it was not merely Black churches in the South that started because of racism in the church. In many places across the length and breadth of this nation, you will seldom find a

²⁵⁵ “Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln. Volume 3 [Aug. 21, 1858-Mar. 4, 1860].” *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln. Volume 3 [Aug. 21, 1858-Mar. 4, 1860].* | *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* | University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln3/1:20.1?rgn=div2&view=fulltext. Accessed 10 Feb. 2025.

“First Baptist Church” that is majority Black, unless there was the absence of a white First Baptist Church, or the Blacks somehow took over what had previously been a white church. In nearly every instance, the Black church separated from the white First Baptist Church, where they were treated as second-class citizens, to become, in many cases, the “First *African* Baptist Church” or another name that distinguished them as different from the white church. This was not only the case with Baptists, but there is also the African Methodist Episcopal Church because the white Methodists of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia in 1787 refused to accept Black Methodists as equals either in Christ or in the church. Add Catholics, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and other predominantly white churches to the list to make the case that the steadfast belief in white superiority permeated and superseded denominational allegiances.

The post-Reconstruction era represents the period for Blacks and Black identity development when the pendulum swung from control towards extermination. Many of the forces undermining blackness were supported by erroneous beliefs rife with misinterpretations based on eisegesis, or the reading of one's own ideas into scripture. Influential ministers of the Southern Baptist Convention shaped and legitimized a version of the gospel that supported the Southern way of life. Men like Basil Manly, Sr., and Richard Fuller, among others, were instrumental in establishing a mindset in the white church that birthed a movement, the Lost Cause, that would lead to the glorification, celebration, and memorialization of the Confederacy. Simultaneously, ministers and groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy would coordinate in writing out of history books men like Robert Carter, III, whose “Deed of Gift” in 1791 still stands as the largest individual manumission of enslaved persons in the United States. Still, Blacks did not succumb to the untoward pressures attempting to dislodge meaning and value in blackness.

They persevered and relied upon their own contextual readings and exegetical interpretations (allowing meaning in the text to speak for itself) of scripture to help them relinquish and refute an imposed and ascribed hermeneutic of inferiority to become their own successes and symbols of resilience.

CHAPTER 5:

The Resiliency of Blackness – “Details and Symbols”

“Black Power is the power first to be Black. But it is also “a culture, a way of feeling, a way of living, that is replaced with a culture, feeling, way of living and being, that is black, and, yes, finally, more admirable.”²⁵⁶ - James H. Cone

This chapter introduces the concept of “BRASH” and provides a more in-depth look at the details and symbols of blackness that served the dual purpose of instilling in Blacks a hope that superseded the degradation experienced daily, while simultaneously planting in the heart and minds of the people that better was not only possible, but imminent. Lerone Bennett captures the essence of this feeling in *Black Power U.S.A.: The Human Side of Reconstruction*:

“A mood, frightening in its intensity, oozes up from restless black people who are moving aimlessly now through the streets. What shall we name this mood? Defiance? Desperation? Joy? The mood is made of all these, but most of all it is made of hope. In their revolutionary innocence, these people actually believe that all things are going to be made new.”²⁵⁷

It is the instrumentality of BRASH that outfits Blacks with some core essential ingredients in the development of positive Black identity. Those who exemplify these qualities, as noted earlier, are not limited to demonstrating the characteristics assigned here. Either of them could justifiably fit any of the other characteristics and serve the same purpose. While it is not necessary to counter the Redeemers of the previous chapter, they provide a counterweight

²⁵⁶ James H. Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 132.

²⁵⁷ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Black Power U.S.A.: The Human Side of Reconstruction, 1867-1877* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1967), 4-5.

balance that demonstrates that they were not alone in standing fearlessly for the disinherited.

Bennett describes this sentiment in the amazement of whites during Reconstruction:

...“suddenness with which...[local leaders] emerged from the anonymity of slavery to become directors and counselors for their race...Almost none of them came from the small group who had been free before the war. Such men, as barbers, artisans, or small farmers, had depended too long on the favor of the whites for the maintenance of their existence.”²⁵⁸

Facing unrelenting opposition from a world dominated by white supremacy and America’s unique brand of Christianity in every facet of communal life, the inevitable question arises: “Why did Black people just not give up?” The very Christianity to which many Blacks were devoted seemed at odds with the Christianity of whites, yet whites had the power. This question of “why did Black people not give up?” hovers “over the face of the deep” in this examination thesis when one considers that Blacks in America came initially just as other indentured servants did, with the promise of freedom and full participation in the life of a burgeoning nation. After the progress experienced in Reconstruction, “Why did Black people simply not waive the white flag of total and complete surrender?” Why were there not more “Jemmys”^v, Gabriel Prossers, Charles Deslondes, Denmark Vecseys, Nat Turners,^{vi} or others to rise up and rescue the people? After such a long and arduous trial, had the people’s courage dissipated...had freedom lost its luster? Had Blacks finally realized that whites were indeed superior and they themselves compelled to acquiesce in resignation to their own inferiority? Had they finally realized that whites were God’s elect, and that God Godself was white, and with this, at last, submit to the dreary prospects that hope unborn had died? Would a descendant of this beleaguered people, James Baldwin, be correct in *The Fire Next Time* when he wrote on the one-hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in “My Dungeon Shook”: “The limits

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 82.

of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being”²⁵⁹ or when later in the same letter he warned that “The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you.”²⁶⁰ If positive Black self-identity was contaminated in the mid-twentieth century during the time of Baldwin’s writings, it was a mere shadow compared to the damage wrought during post-Reconstruction.

Baldwin, a former minister, imbued with Black religious thought and hermeneutics, had the uncanny ability to capture and present the Black plight in America juxtaposed and supplanted beneath the suffocating effects of whiteness upon the Black heart and mind. A complex figure not only was he a descendant of those who suffered through slavery, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction, but his was a clarion voice that pierced the conscience of the nation. His letter to his nephew quoted above strikes at the heart of positive Black self-identity. He seized upon every opportunity to make fertile the grounding of Black people’s personhood and to pour “somebody-ness” into Blacks, helping to buoy them in the mid and latter twentieth century. However, his interpretation of the dilemma of blackness in America has its roots in this period of post-Reconstruction under examination. Gayraud Wilmore in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* explains further that “Blacks had never been content in their bonds, and that from the beginning of slavery they had made a persistent effort to free themselves.”²⁶¹ The resilience of

²⁵⁹ James Baldwin, *Collected Essays: Notes of a Native Son, Nobody Knows My Name, The Fire Next Time, No Name in the Street, The Devil Finds Works, Other Essays* (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 293.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 52.

blackness in this “nadir” of race relations is testimony to a communal hope of a freedom it had never seen and was doubtful whether it ever would.

The Black church emerged from a resistance to the oppression of White Christianity, advocating a gospel that is both centered on Christ and a liberation in Him that extends beyond the mere “spiritual” sins of this world, and the mortal sins of slavery, oppression, and objectification. As noted in Chapter 1, the Black church did not originate *from* the white church; instead, it was birthed as a necessary corrective to restore a gospel of mutual love and equality in the eyes of God. The Black church provided spiritual formation and laid a spiritual foundation for a people who were beaten and beleaguered but never defeated. It offered hope amid overwhelming hopelessness, a reason and rationale that endured and triumphed over fear, as well as personal and collective exhaustion. In *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, Warnock adds:

“Through the nineteenth-century Black church’s primary function as refuge – providing a spiritual respite and safe harbor from the violence and terror of white supremacy – and through its antislavery efforts, among Black Baptists, for example, at the level of the local congregation, association, and denomination, it embodied, in my view, what James Cone identifies as the threefold task of the church. First, it proclaimed the reality of divine liberation...Second, [it] actively participated in the struggle for liberation... Third, [it] did provide ‘a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality.’”²⁶²

Similarly, James Cone’s seminal work *Black Theology and Black Power* posited that “The Black church was the creation of a Black people whose daily existence was an encounter with the overwhelming and brutalizing reality of white power.”²⁶³ In reality, the Black church was a refuge from a mean, cruel, and demoralizing world that held whiteness next to godliness and blackness as utilitarian solely for the betterment and natural accoutrements for the comforts

²⁶² Warnock, 27-28.

²⁶³ Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, 92.

of whiteness. Though the Black community held belief systems across a broad range of religions, it was the Christianity of the Black church, or as Howard Thurman terms “the religion of Jesus,” that was the dominant voice for Blacks. Even within the dehumanizing constraints of chattel slavery, the Black church, which arose from the hush harbors, was a beacon of light amongst those who saw in it a God who met them in their decrepit predicament. While being demeaned, the indomitable spirit in Blacks refused to relent or surrender their abiding grip on hope. Against daunting odds, Black identity development would find in the Black church the belongingness it needed to help the people withstand the onslaught of personal and communal denudation they faced. Wilmore defined it this way: “Born in protest, tested in adversity, led by eloquent and courageous preachers, the Black church was the cutting edge of the freedom movement during most of the nineteenth century.”²⁶⁴ There was something transformative in the Black church that spoke to the very core of the being of the people, and it drew them. The presence of the Black church was not merely physical, but it spoke to the very spirit of the people and the community. Not everyone in the community “went” to church, but most everybody “belonged” to the church, whether physically or relationally. The church buoyed the people, who during the week suffered the demeaning effects of whiteness in nearly every arena of life. But, all of this could be eased, and even erased, by coming to church to “sing the Lord’s songs in a strange land” and to hear Black sermons that brought alive a dead, operationalized gospel that had been used to subjugate and distance them, validating them as equal members of God’s family.

The songs and the preaching worked inseparably in unison to fix the people's gaze not on that which sought to undermine them, but that which imbued them with a sense of worth and

²⁶⁴ Wilmore, 121.

value. The complex nature of both the songs and the sermon was at once a reminder of their present circumstances, but infused with the “but if not” faith of the Hebrew boys in the Old Testament book of Daniel, filled with great expectation. Obery Hendricks describes Gospel music this way: “At its core, then, Gospel music embodies the classic apocalyptic feeling of powerlessness to forestall the oppressive forces of this world, accompanied by a sense of resignation to continued social misery at the hands of wielders of unjust power until the apocalyptic ‘day of the Lord.’”²⁶⁵ The songs of the Black church had the power to transport congregants away from the despair and dejection ever-present in the struggle of being Black to a place of serenity and safety in the arms of the God of the oppressed who, in the Black vernacular, “may not come when you call Him, but He’ll always be right on time.” Du Bois captures the essence of this music wrenched from the indomitable spirit of those who made up the Black church: “Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope – a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence.”²⁶⁶

The preaching moment in the Black church represented a moment to hear directly from God through one of his chosen servants as the preachers were adept at massaging the pressure points in the hearts and minds of the congregants; he spoke boldly building the faith and confidence of the members to go out knowing that more of what drove them there was waiting when they returned. Cut from a different cloth, Du Bois said “The [Black] Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a

²⁶⁵ Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. *The Universe Bends Toward Justice: Radical Reflections on the Bible, the Church, and the Body Politic* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 28.

²⁶⁶ W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: The Modern Library, 1996), 264.

‘boss,’ an intriguer, an idealist - all these he is...”²⁶⁷ He was, according to Cleophus J. LaRue, one who in those perilous times regardless of setting 1) preached messages about “crucial events and circumstances” that affected the lives of Black people, 2) they applied the gospel in meaningful ways that spoke to the circumstance the people faced, 3) they balanced “the pastoral and the prophetic”, and 4) they preached “...an unshakable faith in the power of God to bring about in their lives what no other power could do. This belief in the mighty sovereign, conjoined with their everyday struggle for mere survival, is the seedbed of Black creativity and insightfulness in Black preaching.”²⁶⁸ The preachments of the Black church elevated the Black preacher in the eyes of the community to such a degree that, as happens in any arena, the aggrandizement can at a certain point hurt as much as it is intended to help. However, in the grand sweep of Black preaching, it has served as an engine to connect a people facing innumerable struggles based solely upon the color of their skin to biblical figures who likewise suffered beneath the iron fist of oppressors. The irrepressible messages of redemption by Black preachers to their congregants transformed the stigma of Black skin in a white supremacist society from a badge of shame to a badge of honor. *In Preaching with Sacred Fire*, Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas elucidate it this way: “Preaching for Black identity is preaching to construct and reconstruct humanity and dignity, and to enhance the self-esteem of Blacks. The experience of slavery and its ideological justifications functioned to assault Black identity and personhood.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 191.

²⁶⁸ Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 67.

²⁶⁹ Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas. *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 10.

It is essential to note that slavery did not represent the nadir of Black self-esteem and self-identity largely due to the influence of the Black church. Even during slavery, two and a half centuries after arriving on these shores, there was significant pride in their African heritage. They named their emerging denominations “African Methodist Episcopal (Zion),” and by emerging from the shadows of white churches, they labeled their congregations across denominations as “First African Baptist Church,” among others. These institutions were not founded immediately after the arrival of the first Africans in 1619; they were established nearly eight generations later. Despite many well-reasoned, scholarly debates over the years, such as the Herskovitz-Frazier debates, Africans maintained – if not physically, then mentally and spiritually – various material, cultural, and spiritual aspects of their ancestors from the continent of Africa. Self-hate did not alienate them from their identity or their native land, and where it may have seemed so, it was almost always not attributable to Africa but rather used as a means of survival.

Slavery was not the lowest point, nor was Reconstruction the nadir. Reconstruction was an era of Black progress that ignited intense backlash and hatred against Blacks, leading to a thrust toward extermination. Undeniably, the successes of Blacks freed from slavery showcased clear evidence of their progress. In hindsight, Rutherford B. Hayes, the “beneficiary” of the Compromise of 1877, who initially sought to heal the rift between North and South, wrote in his diary the day after he believed he had been defeated in the election: “I don’t care for myself; and the party, yes, and the country, too, can stand it; but I do care for the poor colored men of the South...The result will be that the Southern people will practically treat the constitutional amendments as nullities, and then the colored man’s fate will be worse than when he was in

slavery.”²⁷⁰ Hayes would later lament the compromise, as it left Blacks vulnerable to the unprovoked violence and vitriol of whites.

This intense post-Reconstruction personal and communal persecution came in the aftermath of suffering chattel slavery, followed by brand-new liberties and protections along with opportunistic growth during Reconstruction. Henry Mitchell declared that in post-Reconstruction, for many reasons and in many different ways, “Blacks learned how not to love themselves.”²⁷¹ Indeed, the intensity of the persecution following Reconstruction thrust some into the shadows of shame in their blackness and desires to forego their blackness either to curry favor with whites or in the hopes that whites would relent if in blackness there was no perceived threat. Despair arose in some quarters under the white-hot pressures of the extermination of Blacks. In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, James Cone applies the thoughts of Soren Kierkegaard, who describes the depth and breadth of despair as “not willing to be oneself” or even “a self, or lowest of all in despair at willing to be another than himself.”²⁷² Cone concludes, saying “When people do not want to be themselves, but somebody else, that is utter despair.”²⁷³ However, this has seldom been the final analysis with those suffused with the buoyancy of Black religious thought. Blacks refused to relent in their quest for full personhood and freedom, and they were not fooled by thinking things would get better without specific measures. Blacks understood fully what was at stake and from where the potential obstacles were to come as shown in the Rev. Garrison Frazier’s response to Abraham Lincoln’s Secretary of War, Edwin

²⁷⁰ Logan, 15.

²⁷¹ Emil M. Thomas and Henry H. Mitchell. *Preaching for Black Self-Esteem* (Abingdon Press, 1994), 28.

²⁷² Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 21.

²⁷³ Ibid.

Stanton, when asked how post-emancipation Blacks thought best for them to live – amongst whites or alone. Frazier responded with authority and clarity, saying, “I would prefer to live by ourselves, for there is prejudice against us in the South that will take years to get over.”²⁷⁴

Nineteen of the twenty ministers and leaders present concurred with Frazier, and only one, the Rev. James Lynch, believed Blacks should live together with whites. While there was no further exposition on the “why” behind Lynch’s response, it was likely tinged with the belief that separate and apart from whites might ignite greater ire against Blacks. That meeting was on January 12, 1865, but the circumstances underlying Frazier’s response and reasoning would continue to haunt and stultify race relations in this nation unabated.

Herein we see prime circumstances behind the need for positive Black identity for both the individual and the community. Tests, like the meeting in Savannah, would come increasingly, with a significant exception...the coming tests during post-Reconstruction would not be in a controlled environment such as the meeting with Stanton and Sherman in a question-and-answer session; they would come through hostility and attacks aimed directly at Black personhood and livelihood. During the period of post-Reconstruction, there were attempts first to destroy any vestiges of blackness. In slavery, Black lives had value as white property and white means of wealth. The Black progress and uplift during Reconstruction elevated attempts to exterminate Blacks, and when extermination proved to be a great challenge, it would graduate towards integrating Blacks by assimilating them into *white* society; it was “the destruction of Black identity through assimilation.”²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like A River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 28.

²⁷⁵ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 39.

Through the test of time human nature, regardless of race, creed, or color has grappled with meaning-making and in this vein Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* suggests that "Theology is the community's continued attempt to define in every generation its reason for being in the world";²⁷⁶ a particular community attempts to see itself whole in the world. While the Black church was the incubator for Black Christianity, it was the academy that would years later excavate some of the finer points of Black theology from beneath the rubble of American white exceptionalism and election in theological understanding. But to be clear, Black theology shaped and fashioned Black identity and thought long before the inception of the Black or white intelligentsia's identification of Black theology as a "thing." It was a part of the personhood transported within the bosoms of Africans during the Middle Passage. As noted in chapter 1 in the words of John Mbiti "where[ever] the African is, there also is his religion." Emerging as a tool for liberation, "Black Theology is a theology of liberation because it is a theology which arises from an identification with the oppressed Blacks of America, seeking to interpret the gospel of Christ in the light of the Black condition."²⁷⁷ White theology is a poor instrument for Blacks to use to craft positive Black self-identity because at the center of white theology is whiteness and the entitlement of its presumed election. In other words, Cone summarizes that "Black religion and Black people can never become what they ought to be (a religion and a people unreservedly devoted to the emancipation of all Blacks) as long as the content of religion is a distorted reflection of the religion of the enslaver."²⁷⁸ At the heart of Cone's argument is that a tainted religion, regardless of who its adherents are and the power they may believe they have,

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 30-31.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 23.

²⁷⁸ Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, 130.

is still false if it does not have the liberation of all people at its core. The gospel is valid whether the masses believe it or whether it is believed by none -- it remains the gospel. Cone elaborates:

“Since white theology has consistently preserved the integrity of the community of oppressors, we conclude that it is not Christian theology at all...In order to be Christian theology, white theology must cease being white theology and become Black Theology by denying whiteness as a proper form of human existence and affirming blackness as God’s intention for humanity.”²⁷⁹

Shaping and developing positive Black self-identity is not predicated upon being well adjusted nor “successful” by white standards; it is predicated upon the individual’s ability to be uniquely who and what God created them to be without the encumbrances of dominant, oppressive social forces that misshape it, even when the individual is unaware of the collateral damage inflicted. It also bears noting that the development of positive Black self-identity is independent of political ideology and socially accepted standards of being the person one was created to be.

Given the tremendous hurdles over which Blacks had to strive, specifically the hurdle of “W₂0” (two parts white supremacy and one part Christianity), and its impact on the hearts and minds of those who justified civil religion and errant nationalism as Christianity. Of mention in this instance, given the depth, width, and sheer breadth of their reach, are those of the Southern Baptist Convention, whose impact was and continues to have a lingering effect on the Christianity of its adherents. But while these forebears of the Southern Baptist Convention provided the majority opinion on Black inferiority, Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians provided concurring opinions in support of the majority in different but substantively contributive ways, holding in place conventional wisdom of the day.

²⁷⁹ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 32-33.

In this concluding chapter, I highlight some of the clarion voices of those who exemplified and fueled the uplift of positive Black self-identity and became symbols of encouragement for a people clinging to the hope of a better and brighter day as what they had historically faced was “enough to make any Black person lose faith and roam in a blues-like way, trying to find meaning in an absurd world of white supremacy.”²⁸⁰ To do this, I employ the critical symbols of Belongingness, Resistance, Agency, Syncretism, and Hope in any attempt to develop positive self-identity, precisely one which has endured incessant attempts to subdue or eliminate it. Arranged as an acronym these five symbols appropriately become “BRASH,” an accurate representation of what positive Black self-identity became in the eyes of whiteness as Blacks refused to acquiesce to and mimic the caricatured, simpletons’ whiteness created to vouchsafe fragments of its own fictitious identity. In the white vernacular words like “uppity” sufficed to capture what I am labeling as “BRASH.” Black progress to whiteness was (and is) brash,^{vii} it was offensive, particularly to those whose very existence was inextricably tied socially and economically to Blacks. Black progress symbolized for whiteness a lack of restraint and discernment; it was aggressively self-assertive, bumptious (presumptuous), obtrusive...it was Blacks who forgot their place and in doing so challenged the “religious” worldview of whiteness evoking existential questions of exasperated hopelessness like “if you ain’t better than a n*@@#r who are you be better than?”

While not all-encompassing, these five symbols provide more than adequate grounding for reflecting on the prevailing question given the preponderance of historical evidence supporting Black inferiority in white eyes and the concomitant signs and symbols of Black powerlessness in white and Black eyes, on the heels of ubiquitous Black accomplishment and

²⁸⁰ Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 28.

achievement during Reconstruction followed by the immediate onset of extreme darkness in post-Reconstruction “why did Black people simply not give up?” Acquainted with insufferable grief, why not follow the lead of those who sang “and before I be a slave I’ll be buried in my grave?” Already, it had been the great white expectation of Black violent backlash if ever freed, so why not meet those low expectations with the force expected? Why did Blacks not give up? Quite naturally, it was the never-say-die, “hold to God’s unchanging hand” tenacity of spirit consistent with Black religious thought made manifest through the lived lives of men and women whose impact gave a resilient people an uncommon optimism and pride despite their oppressive circumstances. We can explicate this tenacity and resiliency, this failure to give up, with the use of the acronym BRASH: Belongingness, Resistance, Agency, Syncretism, and Hope.

“BRASH” Explicated

Brash can be defined in many ways. On the one hand, it can be defined as “self-assertive in a rude, noisy, or overbearing way,” and on the other, “strong, energetic, or irreverent.” Depending upon context, it can be offensive and distasteful, or it can be seen from a “bottom-up” perspective that transforms “what was meant for evil” for the good. Here, BRASH is an acronym devised to 1) demonstrate essential qualities displayed by Blacks during the post-Reconstruction era that defied white conventional wisdom of the time and 2) to operationalize a term typically deployed negatively, highlighting the disdain with which whiteness viewed Black humanity and Black achievement.

BELONGINGNESS

Belongingness is to be understood as an innate human need to belong to something greater than oneself; it is the inherent and innate desire to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships. In short, belongingness is a measure that provides a sense of self-value and “somebodiness” as a part of a group or a whole; it is a fundamental human motivation that can affect emotional patterns and cognitive processes. Belongingness safeguards against an overwhelming sense of aloneness in a world where the dominant narrative closes in on the one constantly defined as an “other.” In “What Negroes Want” Frederick Douglass explains the critical nature and impact of belongingness for Blacks: “Men are so constituted that they derive their convictions of their own possibilities largely from the estimate formed of them by others. If nothing is expected of a people, that people will find it difficult to contradict that expectation.”²⁸¹ Conversely, history in the post-Reconstruction era has recorded that there are times when external expectations of a people have been so turned against them that they defied the odds.

Belongingness requires a connectivity of like hearts and minds in community that helps aggregate a meaningful existence, at times from disparate parts. Randall Robinson in *Quitting America: The Departure of a Black Man from his Native Land* explains the toll a lack of belongingness can take upon personhood when that connectivity either does not exist or has been stripped away completely: “but he had not been told his story, thus he believed, unlike the people of other races, that he had no story to be told, no tapestry of ageless accomplishment.”²⁸² For Blacks, Black Christianity is the connective tissue that knits and holds Blacks together in the

²⁸¹ Frederick Douglass, “What Negroes Want,” in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, vol. 4, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: International, 1955), 159-60.

²⁸² Randall Robinson, *Quitting America: The Departure of a Black Man from his Native Land* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 20.

community, and it does so through faith. Simultaneously, by standing guard and keeping watch, Black religious thought knit together a belief system that withstood an onslaught of degradation and dehumanization at the hands of whites and whiteness. In turn, the Black church became an institution of both a refuge from the harsh realities of blackness in a world dominated by whiteness and a bastion of Black creativity spiritually, culturally, politically, educationally, economically, and socially.

RESISTANCE

Resistance is more than the mere refusal to accept or comply; this definition is sufficient, yet not altogether accurate. This generic description is absent an essential ingredient that enables one to withstand and resist seemingly impossible odds. Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III, calls this “resistant soul force.” Resistant soul force does not merely resist; it is “the power that thwarts the complete domestication of the spirit for purposes of subjugation, domination, and annihilation.”²⁸³ This form of elevated “resistant soul force” is required, particularly given the nature of the beast Blacks faced post-Emancipation, particularly during post-Reconstruction. The hatred of blackness and the potentiality of its upward thrust (and its humanity) posed a direct threat to the value in whiteness. In *A Curse Upon The Nation: Race, Freedom, and Extermination in America and the Atlantic World*, Kay Wright Lewis quotes an article in the *New York Times* which aptly summarized the tenor of the moment: if emancipation was “carried into effect, the blacks remaining intermixed with the whites....will induce a war of *extermination*.”²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III, *Black Spirituality & Black Consciousness: Soul Force, Culture, and Freedom in the African-American Experience* (Trenton: African World Press, 1999), 2.

²⁸⁴ Lewis, *A Curse Upon The Nation*, 178.

(italics added by me for emphasis) Drawing upon and applying the inherent nature of resistance in true Christianity had a transformative impact upon Blacks under seemingly untenable circumstances. Yet, a steadfast belief in the God of “somehow” made Blacks frustratingly resilient to untoward taunts and attempts to “exterminate” them.

Resistance is part and parcel of what it means to be Black in America. Resistance fuels what has produced the very best in blackness in America. Nothing has come as of right, nor has it come easily, and, at times, it has had to come against the very systems and laws meant to protect and to support; said another way, Blacks have progressed more against the system than with the system’s intended aid or support. For Blacks, resistance was not something they employed from time to time; it was instead a movement in which blackness contemplated, strategized, excelled, and incredulously flourished...resistance was a way of life. By definition, resistance is the refusal to accept or comply with something or the attempt to prevent something by action or by argument. Blacks resisted attempts to denude, remove, or delete them from the human family. Every act of compliance in the face of ruthlessness was an act of resistance, an act of “satyagraha” or soul force. For Blacks, resistance has been far more “by action” than by argument because argument has so often proven futile in the face of an unrelenting and obstinate whiteness. To properly highlight the power and prominence of resistance for Blacks, it is essential, first, to understand resistance as a movement rather than an isolated action against any perceived injustice, and second, one must highlight the underlying reasons for the resistance.

AGENCY

Agency underscores the power and substance of one’s self-determination; it is the ability to choose one’s fate despite the obstacles or the optics. In relation to Blacks during post-

Reconstruction, agency was not merely topical nor superficial, but it was a deep spirituality that defied conventional wisdom and recognized the finitude of Blackness inculcated by the infinity of its all-powerful God. Given the condemnation of blackness, Steward adds that “Black spirituality has thus enabled African Americans, as despised and rejected, as the devalued outcasts of American society, to create a hermeneutics of existence, a soul culture, a living archive of soul force empowering them to interpret, decode, recode, translate, and ritualize social terror, oppression, and adversity into creative and meaningful liturgies of human experience.”²⁸⁵ Given the nature of the oppressive forces suffocating Black existence, it would have been understandable (yet a tragic loss) for Blacks to succumb to the threats, the harassment, the denuding, and the abject cruelty and be reduced to the less-than-human status whites sought to inject. Defying tremendous odds and low expectations, Black refused to allow the unprovoked circumstance of chattel slavery to hinder the possibilities God had planted in the fertile soil of their spirits. Du Bois’ aptly named *Souls of Black Folk* demonstrates the agency in blackness when he reports that

“The census of 1890 showed nearly twenty-four thousand Negro churches in the country, with a total enrolled membership of over two and a half millions...There is an organized Negro church for every sixty Black families in the nation, and in some States for every forty families, owning, on an average, a thousand dollars’ worth of property each, or nearly twenty-six million dollars in all...since Emancipation.”²⁸⁶

This demonstration of gut-wrenching resilience and accomplishment by Blacks shines through its most valued institution, the Black church. Under the tyranny of white oppression and

²⁸⁵ Steward, 17.

²⁸⁶ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 195-196.

manipulation socially, economically, and politically during post-Reconstruction, Black agency, undergirded by Black religious thought and belief, led them not to die but to multiply.

SYNCRETISM

Syncretism for Black religious thought is a form of bricolage; it is a compilation of a “little of this and a little of that” spurred by the necessity of meaning-making in a society shaped and angled to be at odds with Black humanity. In *Slave Religion*, Raboteau sets out by reminding readers that “Africanisms” transported to America have continued to develop as living traditions within the shores of North America, melding and mixing with other established and developing customs. He continues, “Adaptability, based upon respect for spiritual power wherever it originated, accounted for the openness of African religions to syncretism with other religious traditions and for the continuity of a distinctively African religious consciousness.”²⁸⁷ ...“*Candomblé* in Brazil, *santería* in Cuba, *shango* in Trinidad and *voudou* in Haiti, all attest to the vitality and durability of African religious perspectives.”²⁸⁸ Far from being the “opiate of the people,” Black religion and Black religious thought provided a worldview that saw beyond the intentional shadows cast over blackness as, at best, utilitarian and, at least, incapable of redemption. Viktor Frankl describes this redemptive scenario by positing that “in some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning.”²⁸⁹ Finding meaning amid the midnights and madnesses for some meant a cobbling together of systems of belief that met the mental and spiritual needs of the people. It is both the intentional and the unintentional blending

²⁸⁷ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 4.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 16.

²⁸⁹ Frankl, 135.

by taking what is good and dispensing what is bad, regardless of where or from whom it originates. E. Franklin Frazier adds in *The Negro Church in America* that

“In providing a structured social life in which the Negro could give expression to his deepest feeling and at the same time achieve status and find a meaningful existence, the Negro church provided a refuge in a hostile white world. For the enslaved people who worked and suffered in an alien world, religion offered a means of catharsis for their pent-up emotions and frustrations.”²⁹⁰

Even within Black Christianity, there was syncretism of rhythms and worship styles that deviated from the stilted and stiff worship they witnessed in the white church to simulate the lively, celebratory, and festive atmosphere handed down from Africa complete with participatory elements of “call and response” and music that Du Bois characterized as “plaintive rhythmic melody” which “still remains the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American Soil...[s]prung from African forests.”²⁹¹ Then there was transported from those same forests expressions found in what he described as “the Frenzy of ‘Shouting,’ when “the spirit of the Lord passed by, and, seizing the devotee, made him mad with supernatural joy, was the last essential of Negro religion and the one more devoutly believed in than all the rest.”²⁹² The authenticity of Black religion and even Black Christianity across denominations is fused and infused with elements of African Traditional Religions as well as with religious components collected from the oppression that is White Christianity.

HOPE

For whites, Black hope was a weapon of controversy that cut going in and coming out. The *sine qua non* of hope in Blacks buoyed by memory and promise sustained the beleaguered

²⁹⁰ Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*, 44-45.

²⁹¹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 192.

²⁹² Ibid.

but not beaten people. Hope was an irreplaceable trait in continually shaping and developing positive Black identity. Lerone Bennett, Jr. addressed Black hope in this way:

At a superficial glance, it seemed that not much had changed with the overwhelming majority of black people who still lived in one- and two-roomed huts and followed the sun, working from first light to dusk. For the many, life was still hard. But then, life had always been challenging, and now, for the first time, there was hope. The yeast of power was lifting the top and bottom layers of the black group. One observes the intense exhilaration among the black people of that era. They felt that they were presiding at a new era in the history of man. They felt the millennium was around the next turning. They could see facts (Black governors, Black sheriffs) that justified the hardness and sacrifices of their lives. Materially poor, they were spiritually rich, for there were no boundaries to their hope.²⁹³

In a society preoccupied with instantaneously minimizing and extinguishing any perceived humanity in Blacks, it was an enduring and unquenchable hope, a cultivated culture of expectancy that sustained Blacks, and it maximized their ability to cope with the dehumanizing effects of white supremacy. Memory, looking backward, harbored hope yet unborn. Promise, looking forward, embodied an antiquated spirit that held fast to the belief that “God will make a way somehow.” Memory and promise combined with a strength that mustered a deeply ingrained, intergenerational spirit of hope that refused to give up despite the relentless opposition that at times mercilessly and violently attempted to wrench from Blacks any semblance of humanity; for as long as there is no humanity, there is no existential possibility of equality.

According to the New Testament book of Hebrews, in chapter eleven, in the very first verse, the writer notes that “faith is the substance of things *hoped* for, the evidence of things not seen.” In the eyes and minds of white supremacy, the substance of Black humanity and Black identity was, indeed, the evidence of a “thing” that had to be controlled at all times and all costs. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Reconstruction pitted demoralized white

²⁹³ Bennett, Jr., 300-301.

Southerners smarting from a hard-fought defeat against the newly freed Blacks motivated by a hope unfettered, unseen, and untraceable; for if it could have been seen or traced, it would have been abruptly destroyed. The incomprehensibility of white consideration of the innate humanity of Blacks aroused within them uncontrollable suspicion and fear of Blacks, which was made manifest in abject hatred. Just as white supremacy is a strange internal abnormality that distorts reality, Black hope, too, proved to be a formidable and inexplicable internal power that enabled the “set-upon” to see what their oppressors either could not see, refused to see, or were too afraid to see. The notion that Blacks could no longer be controlled legally by whites through slavery birthed measures that sought to disfranchise Blacks socially, educationally, politically, and beyond. Below, I feature a Black leader during post-Reconstruction whose role was not only to exemplify one of these five virtues, but also for their outsized contributions, which proved to be commiserate opposition to the hate inflicted upon Blacks by whites.

The Liberationists

Shirley Chisholm was a great American on many fronts. Her crypt is adorned with the words “Unbossed and Unbought,” which she used as a campaign slogan in her historic run for the United States House of Representatives, becoming the first Black woman to serve in that legislative body. This slogan, “unbossed and unbought,” fits the group of Black leaders who fit the bill of being labeled “liberationists.” Liberationists are those similar in many ways to the Judges of the Old Testament (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, and others) who were not so much “judiciary” but were freedom fighters. Raised up by God to free their people, these liberationists set the tone for those who, during the post-Reconstruction era, ascended to unprecedented levels of influence both among Blacks and, in some cases, among

whites. Such is the case with Frederick Douglass, the Henrys (Henry Highland Garnet and Henry McNeal Turner), Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Booker T. Washington, and Anna Julia Cooper, who exemplified the apex of Black pride and leadership that commanded followship. Five of the six were born into slavery, and the sixth, Turner, though born free, lived and worked among the enslaved. They were authentically Black in that they were *of* the people, *by* the people, and *for* the people, and each in their own distinguished and distinct manner.

The task here is to apply each letter of the acronym to one of these leaders in a way that displays that characteristic. This is not to say, however, that their leadership is limited to this characteristic. While I have chosen to highlight each liberationist with respect to a specific characteristic of BRASH, either of these chosen others could have justifiably demonstrated each characteristic. This demonstrates a couple of things: first, it demonstrates the multivalent skillset of the selected liberationists in an era that defied white definitions of Blacks as inferior and incapable; and second, it demonstrates that while these individuals were chosen to highlight here, there were many other liberationists who were not highlighted but were indeed worthy.

BELONGINGNESS: Frederick Douglass

Born in 1818, the son of a Black woman and a white slaveholder, Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, personified for Blacks a belongingness that defied the circumstances under which he was born and lived. Born into slavery, Douglass' spirit would not allow him to languish in subjectivity. Douglass made clear the inhumanity of the condition of chattel slavery through the example of Mr. Austin Gore, whom he characterized as "His savage barbarity was equaled only by the consummate coolness with which he committed the grossest and most

savage deeds upon the slaves under his charge.”²⁹⁴ Like nearly every other enslaved African, the desire to live free, though muted, was alive and well. Like nearly every other enslaved African, the inevitability of doubt creeping into the conscience at times arrested his spirit: “I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed.”²⁹⁵ Rather than making him an exception or unrelatable, these moments of doubt, equaled by moments of reconciling himself to his lot, humanized him in the eyes of others....he could relate to them, and they could relate to him. He was a man of the people, and in freedom, this would serve him as his most valuable asset as the leader in him was beginning to blossom. Douglass, never allowing the hunger and thirst for freedom to be satiated while enslaved, shares that “on the third day of September 1838, I left my chains and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind.”²⁹⁶ He would stop short of telling the exact details of how he escaped the suffocating tentacles of slavery for fear that making his route and plans public might preclude another from following in his footsteps. He was known to refer to the Underground Railroad as the “Upperground Railroad” because it was so widely and publicly known.

Early in his quest for liberation and full citizenship, née belongingness, of his people, Douglass was a member of the “freedom church,” a moniker carried by the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ). He was particular in his choice of Christianity and made a “heart differentiation” that acknowledged a difference between the Christianity that justified his

²⁹⁴ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York: A Signet Classic, 1997), 37.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 54.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 109.

enslavement and the Christianity of Christ (or, as Howard Thurman would later call it, “the religion of Jesus”):

I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I, therefore, hate the corrupt, slave-holding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial, and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling this religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels.²⁹⁷

With respect to belongingness, Douglass would become the leading spokesman for his people still in bondage, from local civic clubs to regional conferences and conventions to the ear of the President of the United States. He became the agitating voice in the ear of Abraham Lincoln, calling for Black equality before the Civil War through emancipation and Reconstruction, but his advocacy did not stop there. He believed earnestly that Blacks did not need to be separated, but merely given an equal chance to prove that they belonged. In his speech “Self Made Men,” which Douglass would deliver some fifty times honing it with each delivery and setting, he was adamant in his demand to “Give the Negro fair play and let him alone...It is not fair play to start the negro out in life, from nothing and with nothing, while others start with the advantage of a thousand years behind them.”²⁹⁸ Indeed, he continued his pressure campaign post-Emancipation by noting perceptively that “Slavery has left its poison behind it, both in the veins of the slave *and* in those of the enslaver.”²⁹⁹ Aware that true and complete emancipation required equal footing, Douglass understood that the removal of physical

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 118.

²⁹⁸ Frederick Douglass, ““Self-Made Men,”” *Frederick Douglass Papers: Speech, Article, and Book File, 1846-1894; Speeches and Articles by Douglass, 1846-1894; Undated; “Self-Made Men,” Address before the Students of the Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, Pa., Manuscript, Typescripts, Fragments, Printed Copy, and Correspondence, Including Le*, (speech, n.d.), <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1187900531/>.

²⁹⁹ Robert S. Levine, *The Failed Promise: Reconstruction, Frederick Douglass, And The Impeachment of Andrew Johnson* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2021), xxi.

shackles alone was insufficient to achieve Black freedom. Never disillusioned to believe that equality with whites would be realized in the Emancipation Proclamation, Douglas understood fully that social equality could only be achieved through political equality, admonishing William Lloyd Garrison of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1865 with the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation that “Slavery is not abolished until the Black has the ballot.”³⁰⁰ In *The Failed Promised* by Robert S. Levine, Douglass offered in “bold and blunt words: Slavery is not abolished until the black man has the ballot.”³⁰¹ Douglass was adamant that for victory Blacks had to have the franchise. Therefore, to “enfranchise” Blacks meant their active inclusion, creating a space of belonging through the political process just as Whites participated. To “disfranchise,” then, meant to “disinherit” Blacks by not only effectively removing their right to participate in the very government vacillating on their “freedom,” but it was also to dehumanize, condemn, and excommunicate them. Douglass’ relentless efforts demonstrated a clear understanding of the dire need to establish a true sense of belongingness socially and politically amid a shifting culture and society that specialized in deracinating and denuding blackness through an ideological binary relationship of inherent and implicit white superiority and, simultaneously, inherent and implicit inferiority in blackness.

Douglass’s insistence on continuing to fight was symbolic of the fact that while Blacks did not choose, prefer, or desire the opposition, its presence not only shaped and wrought steely Black hope, but opposition became an integral part of Black hope. While discussing Carl Schmitt’s “friend-enemy” grouping, Catherine Keller contributes a salient point in this discussion on shaping Black identity when she posits that “Social identity is formed as a unity achieved

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 62.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

through conflict.”³⁰² In essence, in a perverted justice, Blacks needed whites to keep being who they were as it propelled Blacks towards full, yet unrealized, citizenship. Thus, emancipation was imperative for Douglass, but it was not the goal. Douglass’s “us” in his essay, “The Work Before US”, written to endorse the Republican ticket of 1868 on the heels of the tragically failed presidency of Andrew Johnson, was misunderstood. The work before “us” was not merely referencing the work Blacks needed to do as was supposed. The work of emancipation was but the first step in a long, winding journey for Blacks, for Whites, and for America. In the essay, Douglass advised that the work belonged to “every loyal man and woman in this country...the connection of the present with the past [could neither] be ignored nor forgotten.”³⁰³

Here, the dangers of transculturalization and disidentification play a pivotal role in uprooting one’s personal identity in the desperate hopes of the disappearance of difference. At this point, the equating of difference with ‘less than’ has been absorbed. When the personal connection is to a community other than one’s own, the grounds are set for an intense, even if subconscious, identity search. Douglass is the personification of Black belongingness, circumventing the temptation to bow to the dominant narrative and refusing to acknowledge and treat punitively identities that deviate from the determined normative. Robert Levine, in *The Failed Promise*,” notes that “America had been a slave culture and would remain a slave culture until Americans honestly confronted the history and legacy of slavery,”³⁰⁴ concluding that the

³⁰² Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Republic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 23.

³⁰³ Levine, 217.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

history of race relations in this country over next two centuries “sadly confirm Douglass’ status as one of the nation’s prophets.”³⁰⁵

RESISTANCE: Henry Highland Garnett & Henry McNeal Turner

Just as we examined one white preacher (Basil Manly, Sr.) who led two secessions – the Southern Baptist Convention from the Triennial Convention, and the South’s secession from the Union – here we examine two Black preachers who favored *emigration* of Blacks back to African, mainly due to the prejudice and racism supported by White Christianity. Three preachers, a Baptist, a Presbyterian, and an African Methodist Episcopalian, and two distinct versions of the nature of God. Basil Manly, Sr.’s Calvinistic views of sovereignty, not just God’s but white men’s, were also opposed to the views of Henry Highland Garnet and Henry McNeal Turner.

According to Gayraud S. Wilmore in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* regarding the condition of the enslaved, “it was left to the radical abolitionists and a few Black preachers such as Henry Highland Garnet and Henry McNeal Turner to make the American public aware, before the end of the nineteenth century, that Blacks had never been content in their bonds, and that from the beginning of slavery they had made a persistent effort to free themselves.”³⁰⁶ Turner, a Presbyterian minister, “pointed the way to a unique, blackenized form of the Christian faith that went far beyond anything that had developed out of the African American church thus far – a

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 52.

reinterpreted belief system that was essentially radical in both its analysis of the Black condition and its programmatic solution to racism and oppression.³⁰⁷

Born into slavery on December 23, 1815, in Maryland, his family and he would escape to Pennsylvania and then on to New York, where he would immediately set about educating himself. Ironically, at the end of his life, he would find his final resting place on the continent he believed was best for Blacks, much the same as one of his successors in the movement for Black rights, W.E.B. Du Bois, who would die in Ghana.

Garnet's life and ministry brought to bear the thick tension between African colonization and emigration and the truth that African Americans had earned the right of full citizenship given the two hundred forty-six years of chattel slavery. This tension was eloquently and succinctly captured twenty-one years after Garnet died in Liberia by Du Bois in 1903 in *Souls of Black Folk* when he intimates that "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."³⁰⁸

At an early age, Garnet learned that struggling was a necessary part of life, but so was the necessity of being radical to survive. He understood that the North and the South shared some essential commonalities regarding paternalistic attitudes and the inferiority of Blacks. The only difference between the two was location. "Garnet was motivated by an understanding of Blacks as valued creations of God and having rights by birth."³⁰⁹ This belief was not over and above whites, nor was it against whites; he believed that Blacks were equal creations of God. He spoke

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 199.

³⁰⁸ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folks*, 5.

³⁰⁹ Joan Salmon Campbell, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," by Henry Highland Garnet." *American Presbyterians* 66, no. 4 (1988): 251–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23330873>.

with force and conviction that, at once, inspired some and alarmed others. Speaking to the enslaved in 1843 about overcoming the recalcitrance of slavery in his “Address to the Slaves of the United States of America,” he admonished them to play an active part in attaining their freedom. In Buffalo, New York, Garnet’s highly anticipated speech strongly urged those in attendance: “Your condition does not absolve you from your moral obligation...it is your solemn and imperative duty to use every means, both moral, intellectual, and physical, that promise success...You had for better all die – die immediately, than live slaves and entail your wretchedness upon your posterity.”³¹⁰ Some have argued persuasively that Garnet placed too much responsibility upon the enslaved for their condition on the one hand. Still, on the other hand the question became “was his proverbial ‘wakeup call’ just what the people needed.” Garnet had strong ties to Haiti, and lurking in the corridors of his heart and mind was the success of the Toussaint L’Ouverture-led revolt. Garnet was keen on the enslaved playing an active role in attaining their freedom, and he refused to allow that their present predicament and condition to inhibit their creativity, overcoming this evil: “Slavery has done much to ruin us, and...If it is in our power to destroy these evils, and we do not, then much of our own blood will be found on us.”³¹¹

In attendance at the convention was Frederick Douglass, who often found himself at odds with Garnet, whose speech that day (and others as well) he viewed as too radical and dangerous. Douglass declared emphatically that the speech was filled with “too much physical force” and that “It would lead to an insurrection.” Never one to back down to anyone, Garnet immediately

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Henry Highland Garnet, *Past and the Present Condition, and the Destiny of the Colored Race: A Discourse Delivered at the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Female Benevolent Society of Troy, N.Y., Feb 14, 1848.* (Miami, Florida: Mnemosyne, 1969), 18.

arose and angrily retorted to Douglass' comments: "Maybe the slaves ought simply to ask for their liberty since the masters would surely let them have it."³¹² Douglass introduced a resolution to pursue abolition by "moral suasion," a resolution that nullified Garnet's approach. It should be noted that Douglass's resolution won the day, but only with one vote over Garnet's. And while Douglass' resolution narrowly won the vote, Garnet's address won the day. The aftermath of Garnet's address was as eventful as the speech itself, which was derided as incendiary and dangerous by some, while praised as "true eloquence" by others. The *Albany Argus* demanded Garnet's imprisonment, and *The Liberator* called it "inflammatory, treasonous, provocative, and a flight of fancy."³¹³ On the other hand, was an unsuspecting response approving the speech. Important to note is that the positive review came not from an abolitionist publication but *The Cincinnati Daily Chronicle* which observed "with his jet Black skin," and his "finely molded, almost Caucasian head" and his "thrilling eloquence," proved that "some of the Negro race, if not all, are by nature fully equal to whites."³¹⁴

Garnet's call for liberation and his care and concern for the less fortunate did not rest solely with Blacks, as he also called for restraint against the powerful on behalf of struggling Irish in their quest for liberty, as well as Mexicans in their dispute with America over the Texas boundary. But there should be no mistake that his first and primary concern was with the plight of his people, Black people in their struggle for personhood and freedom in the long, dark night of slavery. Like the Black church of which he was a part, he embodied what he would compel the enslaved to do:

³¹² Martin B. Pasternak, *Rise Now and Fly To Arms: The Life of Henry Highland Garnet* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 47.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

“Brethren arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and the hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. Rather die free men than to live to be slaves. Let your motto be resistance! Resistance! RESISTANCE! No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance...Brethren, adieu! Trust in the living God – Labor for the peace of the human race, and remember that you are four millions.”³¹⁵

Not since David Walker’s *Appeal in Four Articles* in 1829 had there been such a radical call for slaves to revolt against slaveowners. Similarly, both Garnet and Walker’s appeals to the enslaved to summon internal fortitude to resist their enslavement rested upon what they took to be indisputable inherent citizenship of Blacks in this country that the white power structure had heretofore denied.

Henry Highland Garnet was a model of positive Black self-identity shaped and molded by his circumstances, from being born into slavery to being a celebrated official looked up to and admired by many. Even those who warred verbally and publicly with him, like Douglass, warred with him because of his radical approach, not because they did not respect him. His ability to speak uplift in the people was a function of the uplift he felt in the very fiber of his being as a created being of God. Historian George Washington Williams glowingly proclaimed Garnet to be the “equal in ability to Frederick Douglass, especially excelling in logic and terse statements.”³¹⁶

RESISTANCE, TOO: Henry McNeal Turner

He was born on February 1, 1834, although he was not born enslaved. Even still, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner faced the harsh realities of blackness in prejudices and racism as he was

³¹⁵ Ibid, 46.

³¹⁶ Joel Schor, *Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), xii.

forced to work alongside the enslaved amongst whom very little difference between them and him could be apprehended. He was licensed to preach at 19 but grew frustrated that the Methodist Church would not ordain him as a Black, so he departed for a deeper, more meaningful fellowship in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1858. Having distinguished himself early on, he was commissioned by then-President Abraham Lincoln to the office of Chaplain of the Union Army in 1863, making him the first African American to hold the position and the title in any branch of the military; he would shortly thereafter serve in the same capacity with the Freedmen's Bureau. Later, he was elected to the Georgia Legislature in 1868, until shortly after the Civil War, when whites disqualified African Americans from holding office.

Bishop Turner recruited African Americans away from the white Methodist Church during post-Reconstruction. His influence as a Bishop of the AME church provided him with a broad platform on race, politics, lynching, and many other issues that negatively impacted Blacks. These struggles led to his advocacy for African emigration, which was summarily panned by many other Black leaders of his day, except for Henry Highland Garnet. He firmly believed the best place for Blacks was African colonization which would provide a "respectable civil and Christian Negro nation."

Bishop McNeal's impact on African American culture is enduring as he laid the groundwork for Du Bois' "cultural nationalism," Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement, the Civil Rights movement, the Black Power movement, and even James Cone's Black liberation theology for it was Turner's "God is Black" that Cone picks up and carries forward. He rejected Booker T. Washington's accommodationist views as well as Frederick Douglass' desire for integration of the races because of the pervasive hatred and violence of whites against Blacks. Like Garrison

Frazier of Savannah at the close of the Civil War, the worsening plight of Blacks post-Reconstruction drove Turner to believe that there could be no co-habitation of Blacks and whites, but not because of Blacks – Blacks had long ago made peace with the volatile white presence, but because of white prejudices and racism. Realizing that something had to change, on January 4, 1883 on the pages of *The Christian Recorder* McNeal wrote “This much the history of our world establishes, that races either fossilized, oppressed or degraded must emigrate before any material change takes place in their civil, intellectual, or moral status, otherwise extinction is the sequence.”³¹⁷ Turner realized that the core of blackness “through many dangers, toils, and snares” was still intact, much due to the centrality of the people’s theology of an unchanging God, but something had to be done before the inevitable happened...either the physical extinction of Blacks where Blacks disappeared altogether or the mental and spiritual extinction where the exoticism of Black skin remained but beneath the flesh everything the inside was white, which Black vernacular has longed referred to as an “Oreo.” For many reasons, McNeal’s staunch belief in the preservation of blackness for a beleaguered people has had a lasting effect. Even when there appeared to be nothing in blackness in the eyes of others, McNeal saw value. His vision of the future and the importance of cultivating leaders speaks to the intrinsic value of strong, positive Black self-identity. On January 25, 1883, he wrote, “And till we have Black men in the seat of power, respected, honored, beloved, feared, hated, and revered, our young men will never rise for the reason they will never look up.”³¹⁸

While a central figure in the post-Reconstruction period on many fronts, there are few examples offered that rival the implications of his declaration that “God is a Negro” in the era.

³¹⁷ Sernett, 290.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

No more significant demonstration of his importance as a “God-man” on positive Black self-identity exists as he held emphatically that for a people of God for whom God is central, the God implanted in their hearts and minds must never be of the oppressor. The God they internalized must be a God of familiarity. Turner explicated this notion in ways that liberated Blacks from the confinements of a white God and infuriated whites who found the very idea of a Black God offensive. McNeal was derided for his declaration that God is a Negro by *The Charlotte Observer*. The paper acknowledged him as “one of the ablest men of his race”...maybe “of his race” was the qualifier meant to say that he was one of the ablest of the least able which still made him less than the weakest white man, but, regardless, Turner rejected their rejection of his declaration retorting “we have as much right biblically and otherwise to believe God is a Negro.”³¹⁹ Ever confident in his ability to stand firm on his ability to communicate effectively, his response to *The Observer* was firm and resolute, writing “For the bulk of you, and all the fool Negroes of the country, believe that God is white-skinned, blue-eyed, straight-haired, projecting-nosed compressed-lipped and finely-robed white gentleman sitting upon a throne somewhere in the heavens” sounds eerily like a forerunner to Malcolm X’s, and the Nation of Islam’s “blonde-haired, blue-eyed devil.”

McNeal understood the multivalent layers of damage wrought by whiteness on the psyche, mind, and heart of Blacks and his point was to make God accessible to the ones white Christianity made inaccessible. He also understood that the damage was so long in the making that there were those amongst Blacks who had taken ownership of untoward thoughts about themselves and their striving towards what they termed “success” was, indeed, a striving towards

³¹⁹ Andre E. Johnson, ed. “God Is a Negro.” In *The Speeches of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner: The Press, the Platform, and the Pulpit*, 185–86. University Press of Mississippi, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.130877.35>.

whiteness. His response would conclude in the way that provided a platform for Blacks as a resource for developing and maintaining positive Black self-identity:

“This is one of the reasons we favor African emigration, or Negro nationalization, for as long as we remain among whites, the Negro will believe that the devil is Black and that he (the Negro) favors the devil, and that God is white and that he (the Negro) favors the devil, and the effect of such a sentiment is contemptuous and degrading, and one-half of the Negro race will be trying to get white and the other half will spend their days trying to be white men’s scullions in order to please the whites; and the time they should be giving to the study of such things will dignify and make our race great will be devoted to studying how unfortunate they are in not being white...We conclude these remarks by repeating for the information of the *Observer* what it adjudged us demented for – God is a Negro.”

AGENCY: Ida Bell Wells-Barnett

“It is with no pleasure I have dipped my hands in the corruption here exposed.

Somebody must show that the Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen to me to do so...The Afro-American is not a bestial race. If this work can contribute in any way toward proving this and, at the same time, arouse the conscience of the American people to a demand for justice to every citizen and punishment by law for the lawless, I shall feel I have done my race a service.”³²⁰

Born in 1862 in Holly Springs, Mississippi, three years before the end of the Civil War and slavery, Ida B. Wells-Barnett was a picture of dogged self-determination and incredible courage. Facing myriad obstacles in her upbringing, she overcame each of them to become a journalist, an anti-lynching activist, a women’s suffragist, and one of the early civil rights leaders. Her story navigated the intersection of class, gender, and race...the less fortunate, women, and, as she would call her people, Afro-Americans. For Wells, there was no existential

³²⁰ Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases, The Red Record, Mob Rule In New Orleans, Lunch Law in Georgia* (Columbia, SC: Made in the USA, 2024), 3.

“either/or” binary. Instead, it was “both/and.” As Wells-Barnett observed, the task was not merely to put fires out; the task was to fight the battles that needed fighting; she did not have the option of choosing which battles to fight. Given the enormity of the obstacles and the odds against her and her people, it would have been easy, née understandable, to be paralyzed into non-activity, or at the least backed into a proverbial corner of having to decide which evil needs to be attacked first. Wells-Barnett, nor the people to whom she belonged, had never been afforded this luxury. She was “active within women’s rights issues, balancing her concerns as a Black feminist with the sphere of white feminism and the social issues plaguing African Americans.”³²¹

Wells-Barnett's approach to dealing with issues that disproportionately and negatively impacted those with whom she shared a common bond was multifaceted. As a feminist, she captured the needs and desires of women, including white women who faced their own oppression, particularly on the political front in voting. She stood and marched side by side with white women even when it was not advised, but she also challenged them to stand up on issues they may not have thought were particularly germane to their personal struggles. Linette Park details this intertwining of issues when she speaks about Wells-Barnett’s rejection of the myth of Black male rapists. She says, “Not only did Wells-Barnett spark a huge controversy when she dared to claim that many of the sexual liaisons between white women and Black men were, in fact, consensual, she indicted white men as the actual perpetrators of crimes of sexual violence both against African American men (lynching) and against African American women (rape).”³²²

³²¹ Arlisha R. Norwood, “Biography: Ida B. Wells-Barnett,” National Women’s History Museum, accessed November 4, 2024, <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/ida-b-wells-barnett>.

³²² Linette Park, “Whence Disinheritance Holds: On Ida B. Wells and America’s ‘Unwritten Law.’” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture & Society* 22, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 11–23. doi:10.1080/10999949.2019.1712128.

Losing both parents on the same day at the age of sixteen, leaving her as the caretaker to her seven siblings could have crushed her ambitions; indecision on where and with whom she and her siblings would live resulted not in the destruction of the family, but her decision to take a job teaching so she could support her family. The internal fortitude to withstand any obstacle thrown her way was endemic to the strength and courage she would display for the rest of her life as a woman, an Afro-American, an Afro-American woman. Unafraid to stand her ground in 1884, she was accosted by a train conductor and dragged out of the train after she paid for a first-class ticket. Wells-Barnett noted that the white passengers "...stood on the seats so that they could get a good view and continued applauding the conductor for his brave stand."³²³ Given the frequency with which similar incidents happened to other Blacks, it was an antecedent of an event that would occur some seventy years later to Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama, sparking the Civil Rights Movement, of which Wells-Barnett must be considered a progenitor. Rosa Parks, in the spirit of Wells-Barnett, would take a different stance of defiance and inequity that would launch changes across the spectrum of fundamental human rights, eventually resulting in the passage of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964.

Wells-Barnett's writing would take a turn in focus and intensity in 1892 with the lynching of her dear friend Thomas Moss, along with Calvin McDowell and Henry Steward, who were owners of the People's Grocery store in Memphis, where she was living. Her investigation of their lynching and the subsequent reporting of it caused a tremendous clamor for her life amongst whites, causing her to relocate to Chicago, where she would continue her quest to expose the truths of lynching. Her shift in locale did not temper her pursuit of justice through publishing and publicizing the effects of lynching not only on Black people, but on the nation.

³²³ Norwood, "Biography".

With a background that included constant setbacks, and threats to her life, there were many ways she could have disappeared seeking self-preservation. Still, an earnest and inexplicable desire buried in her heart and subconscious would not allow injustice to her or her people to go unnoticed or unanswered. Perhaps the profoundly religious and upright spirit of her mother, Lizzie Wells, took root in her and drove her to press forward even when, in others' eyes, stepping back and away from the spotlight would have been the better part of valor. The indomitable spirit within Wells-Barnett had no quit in it, and it was noticed and noted by one of her well-known and respected contemporaries, Frederick Douglass, upon the publishing of her pamphlet "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases:"

"Brave woman! You have done your people and mine a service which can neither be weighed nor measured. If American conscience were only half alive if the American church and clergy were only half Christianized if American moral sensibility were not hardened by persistent infliction of outrage and a crime against colored people, a scream of horror, shame, and indignation would rise to Heaven wherever your pamphlet shall be read."³²⁴

Ida B. Wells-Barnett was results-driven, and her motivations came from within. Her legacy of courage in taking on the giants of lynching, women's suffrage, as well as taking time to raise her own family stands as a testament to why a strong sense of self and positive Black self-identity are essential, particularly during a time when the earth appeared to be crumbling beneath Black people's feet. Her agency undergirded her advocacy for her people, which was much more akin to Henry Highland Garnet in that she did not desire consensus nor was she interested in waiting for anyone else's approval. While she enjoyed but did not request or require Frederick Douglass' support until he died in 1895, Wells-Barnett's relationship with others was not as convivial, particularly given the rise in popularity of Booker T. Washington and his accommodationist philosophies. Washington's approach did not match up with her mentality of

³²⁴ Wells, *Southern Horrors*, 30.

speaking truth to power. The same went for many other Afro-American groups, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which snubbed her as one of the forty founders of the organization, even though her work was well known and respected nationally. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was outspoken, determined to succeed, and focused on dealing head-on with the issues that disproportionately and negatively impacted her people. Her motivations were driven by her agency and not by external stimuli and her contributions to developing positive Black self-identity through example make her one of the most enduring, shining examples of agency in post-Reconstruction Black life.

SYNCRETISM: Booker T. Washington

Though Booker T. Washington has never been considered a “God-man” as Garnet or Turner are, his religious beliefs were integral to his navigation and negotiations in and with the world. His Christian beliefs always hovered just beneath the surface and sometimes boiled over in his commitment to achieving the greater good in the uplift of his race. He would write in his autobiography of his devotion towards shaping the students of Tuskegee socially and spiritually:

While a great deal of stress is laid upon the industrial side of the work at Tuskegee, we do not neglect or overlook the religious and spiritual side to any degree. The school is strictly undenominational, but it is thoroughly Christian, and the spiritual training of the students is not neglected. Our preaching service, prayer-meetings, Sunday-school, Christian Endeavour Society, Young Men’s Christian Association, and various missionary organizations, testify to this.³²⁵

Born in April 1856, Booker Taliaferro Washington was a giant whose life, like Frederick Douglass, began in the dregs of slavery. Though he had the penchant to paint a rosier picture of social conditions, Washington occasionally found ways to express emotions shared by many of

³²⁵ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: The Autobiography of Booker T. Washington* (Middletown, DE: Made In The USA), 117.

his contemporaries: “My life had its beginnings amid the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings.”³²⁶ At nine years old freedom would come, and for Washington, not merely freedom from the strictures of slavery, but freedom that would allow him to rise from being valued at \$400 as a five-year-old to become “the most powerful Black man in America”³²⁷ by forging relationships with whites who could assist him in developing institutions and opportunities that would aid in the uplift of Blacks.

Washington’s worldview, his development and the formation of his identity came under the strong influences of two white men: General Samuel Armstrong, founder of Hampton Institute, while he was a student and William Baldwin, a railroad executive upon whom he relied heavily for advice and guidance in running Tuskegee and on his role as a racial leader. Here, we find the basis of his syncretism aggregating and melding what he determined to be the most desirable transferable white qualities for the social uplift of Blacks. Washington embodied syncretism as he successfully amalgamated what he acquired from his mentors with his own fierce determination to do whatever was required to succeed. The impact of these specific influences made Washington a product of his environment and his era, which he desired to implant in the hearts and minds of Blacks. There are a couple of inherent ironies that bear mentioning: first, Baldwin publicly renounced “black social equality and his acceptance of disfranchisement”³²⁸ of Blacks was known broadly likely leading to some of the criticisms Washington received from Blacks and, simultaneously, the praises he received from Whites;

³²⁶ Robert J. Norrell, *Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 19.

³²⁷ “President Roosevelt To The Negro Students.” *The Atlanta Constitution (1881-1945)*, Oct 25, 1905. <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/president-roosevelt-negro-students/docview/495976779/se-2>.

³²⁸ Norrell, 168.

second, the opportunities afforded Washington and his subsequent successes lend themselves to his determination as mentioned above, but also to the notion that as “their chosen one” he was the least offensive in his gradualism which they exercised measurable control. So influential was Armstrong, with whom Washington grew enamored as “the noblest, rarest human being that it has ever been my privilege to meet,”³²⁹ that some speculated he “might have represented for Booker the white father who had never claimed him.”³³⁰ Armstrong would impart admonitions like “Command the respect of your neighbors by a good record and a good character...Cultivate peaceful relations with all.”³³¹ Washington would take these and similar maxims to heart, and they became the fabric of the tapestry of his life, shaping how he would negotiate race relations for the betterment of Blacks and a too-close-to-call second of American society. Because Washington took wholesale the perspectives of those who influenced him greatly for Blacks to emulate, Martin Luther King, Jr. would later characterize Washington’s noble but errant tactic as “patient persuasion.” King, empathetic to Washington’s approach deduced that his “error was that he underestimated the structures of evil...his philosophy of pressureless persuasion only served as a springboard for racist Southerners to dive into deeper and more ruthless oppression of the Negro.”³³² King’s opinion of Washington was not new, but it is worth noting that his popularity amongst Blacks at the end of his life was more favorable than King’s amongst Blacks at the end of his life.

³²⁹ Washington, 42.

³³⁰ Norrell, 32.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 129.

While Douglass represented hope and determination, Washington's importance to the development of Black identity was one of accommodation and replication of whiteness as a means of gradually "earning" equality. It was not a repudiation, but much more so a syncretization. Washington's move away from redressing wrongs directly in Douglass' style did not sit well with many: Washington's "efforts to conciliate the white South to reduce racial tensions seemed to some northern Blacks only cowardice, when what they wanted was a protest lion like Douglass."³³³ He believed earnestly that Black equality was to be earned and not merely by what he called a "fiat of law" that magically eliminated barriers and elevated blackness; hard work, the development of skills, excellence, and patience would combine to allow worthy Blacks the opportunity to elevate socially and economically through a self-determination that whites could not refuse. His achievements mark a time of positive Black identity development that resonates even today. Benjamin Elijah May's in *The Negro's God* would recount the words of Washington:

"The mere fiat of law cannot make an ignorant voter an intelligent voter; cannot make a dependent man an independent man; cannot make one citizen respect another. These results will come to the Negro, as to all races, by beginning at the bottom and gradually working up to the highest possibilities of his nature. In the economy of God there is but one standard by which an individual can succeed; there is but one for the race."³³⁴

These thoughts notwithstanding, Charles Darwin would echo sentiments directly opposed to Washington's best intentions for Blacks. In 1871, Darwin, another contemporary of his, opined, "At some future point, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of

³³³ Norrell, 6.

³³⁴ Benjamin E. Mays, *The Negro's God: as Reflected in His Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1969), 142.

man will almost certainly *exterminate* and replace the savage races throughout the world.”³³⁵

Alternately, Washington would declare that “Friction between the races will pass away in proportion as the black man, by reason of his skill, intelligence, and character, can produce something that the white man wants or respects in the commercial world.”³³⁶ While it is here where Washington’s accommodationist pursuits overreach in that his sentiments place far too much of the onus of race relations upon the shoulders of Blacks, the core of his message was one of hope that continued to sustain Blacks.

Max Weber would call Washington a “Christian pragmatist,” one who blended or syncretized cultural values with Christian piety and capitalist productivity. Indeed, he boasted that he never gave a speech without first praying to God for the knowledge to speak in a way that God would be pleased with him, while subscribing to the belief that whites would not be able to resist Blacks who in their eyes had proven worthy of white respect.

A realist, Washington privately and vicariously struggled with notions of white acceptability he knew were far-fetched and, at worst, completely unachievable. Norrell’s aptly named *Up From History* reveals that “Booker must have seen the larger truth: whites were most fundamentally committed to stopping black men from consorting with white women, because such association represented equal power to white men. *But he remained too practical to acknowledge that truth openly.*”³³⁷ (*italics added by me*) Indeed, while Washington’s approach to dealing with whites and whiteness was a product of all of the forces in his life, his private and confidential struggles are only visible through retrospective reasoning. Given his tough and

³³⁵ Norrell, 83-84.

³³⁶ Ibid, 98.

³³⁷ Ibid, 414.

determined public persona, it was (and has been) impossible for admirers to come to grips with his humanness in the face of tremendously evil odds of white supremacy and, simultaneously, unrelentless Black criticism. Facing what he faced under the conditions in which he faced them, his chosen method of “slaying the dragon” of white supremacy may not have been universally accepted, but it enabled him to make significant contributions while his internal nemesis haunted every step he took and every goal he attained. Norrell concludes that “His was a precarious existence, and his survival depended on never forgetting that white men could end it on a whim.”³³⁸ Amongst his many accolades, Washington faced much scrutiny during his lifetime, but it would be a gross omission not to mention the overwhelming support he received from the Black community and the stature he enjoyed. According to the venerable Gardner Calvin Taylor, his parents respectfully and admirably referred to him as “*OUR* Mr. Washington.”

HOPE: Anna Julia Cooper

Anna Julia Cooper was, too, a “giant in the land.” She engenders the indomitable hope of the old Black preacher who sermonically opined that “hope is faith standing on tiptoe.” Her life symbolizes the hope that inspires males and females, old and young, rich and poor, learned and learning that barriers are only opportunities we have yet to overcome. Born into slavery seven years before the end of the Civil War and the beginning of emancipation, Anna Julia Cooper was born in Raleigh, North Carolina. Life as a Black woman and the halls of academia sharpened a prodigious and deft acumen in social, educational, cultural, and religious analysis and assessment. Living to the ripe and mature age of one hundred-five years old, her life spanned a century that saw Black people move from chains to chances, from the Civil War to the Civil

³³⁸ Ibid, 114.

Rights Movement, and from the long, dark nights of slavery, through the exterminations by lynching, a re-creation of Black identity in the Harlem Renaissance and new Negro eras, to the birthing of Black Power. Most who recognize her name know her as a leader, an educator, an activist, and a womanist, locating her advocacy at the intersection of race, class, gender, *and family*. She embodied an indefatigable agency and a prevailing yet-alive hope. She was relentless in her pursuit of justice for the inclusion of Black women's voices in the narrative of her people and the nation historically, civically, and educationally.

A devout Episcopalian, Cooper's faith was central to her advocacy in race and gender activism, consistently pressing the comfortable on the basic elements of the humanity of all people. She was a lifelong educator and most especially a proponent of Christian education. Like other great Black women of this post-Reconstruction era – amongst whom are counted Nanny Helen Burroughs, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Julia Foote, Harriet Tubman, Maria W. Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett – she stood ably and equally over against the untoward efforts of groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Daughters of the American Revolution who sought to sustain white superiority and suppress Black progress through various efforts including the perpetuation of the Lost Cause myth of Confederate redemption. Though she does not stand alone, she is one whose clarion and fearless voice summoned a courage unmatched by many men whose names provoke immediate recall, but her mission remained the uplift and betterment of her people holistically. One of her most enduring statements come from *A Voice From The South, By A Black Woman Of The South* as signature Cooperian: "Only the black woman can say 'when and where I enter,' in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and

there the whole Negro race enters with me.”³³⁹ In this, Cooper operationalizes Martin Delany’s statement, whom she calls an “unadulterated Black man,” when he noted that whenever he was honored “when he entered the council of kings the Black race entered with him.”³⁴⁰ Cooper, at once, expresses a reversal of conventional wisdom and behaviors that privileged men and those considered authoritative when assessing the progress of her race. She asserts that in pursuing justice, voices which include hers, as a woman – and doubly as *Black* women – upon whose shoulders rested much of the progress made by Blacks must unequivocally become equal contributors across the spectrum. Indeed, she declared with unabashed clarity that the turnaround and shift from weakness and malformation amongst the Black race lies in recognizing that “the fundamental agency under God in the regeneration, the re-training of the race, as well as the groundwork and starting point of its progress upward, must be the *Black woman*.”³⁴¹ Too much weight and responsibility on the Black woman? Cooper takes great pains to demonstrate the God-presence with and in Black women as well as Black women’s centrality as she argues:

“She stands now at the gateway of this new era of American civilization. In her hands must be molded the strength, the wit, the statesmanship, the morality, all the psychic force, the social and economic intercourse of that era. To be alive at such an epoch is a privilege, to be a woman then is sublime.”³⁴²

And she situates it all at the feet of Christ:

“The idea of the radical amelioration of womankind, reverence for woman as woman, regardless of rank, wealth, or culture, was to come from that rich and

³³⁹ Shirley Moody-Turner and Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Portable Anna Julia Cooper* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2022), 18.

³⁴⁰ Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From The South, By A Black Woman Of The South, The Portable Anna Julia Cooper*, ed. Henry Louis Gates and Shirley Moody-Turner (New York: Penguin Books, 2022), 18.

³⁴¹ *Ibid*, 17.

³⁴² *Ibid*, 77.

bounteous fountain from which flow all our liberal and universal ideas – the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”³⁴³

Her faith, and the faith of her people in God, permeated every thought and approach she formulated for the betterment of Black people, beginning with Christianity as the foundation of her education model. She took great pains to note that there had unequivocally been hostile forces that beset Black people in this nation, but, for Cooper, regardless of the efforts of others, ultimately Blacks must rely upon their God and their own intuition to rise:

A stream cannot rise higher than its source. The atmosphere of homes is not rarer and purer and sweeter than are the mothers in those homes. A race is but a total of families...and yet, unless I am greatly mistaken, most of the unsatisfaction from our past results arises from just such a radical and palpable error, as much almost on our own parts as on that of our benevolent white friends.³⁴⁴

A realist and an optimist, Cooper recognized that there was no magic potion or secret ritual to right what had gone so wrong to Black people and in Black people. She confidently took on the opposing forces within the community and outside of the community, believing wholeheartedly that just as had happened during Reconstruction, Black people both could and would achieve, with or without the assistance of whites. Reading before the convocation of colored clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church at Washington, D.C. in 1886, she would note that “The Negro is constitutionally hopeful and proverbially irrepressible, and naturally stands in danger of being dazzled by the shimmer and tinsel of superficials. We often mistake foliage for fruit and overestimate or wrongly estimate brilliant results.”³⁴⁵ That hopeful spirit works against the white notion of Black retribution for the crimes and sins of whiteness against Blacks leading

³⁴³ Ibid, 10.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 18.

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 18.

up to and during this period. This hopefulness rests in the uplift of Blacks, devoid of the preoccupation with what has happened in the past.

Cooper issues a stinging rebuke and a takedown of white Christianity in the United States in her speech, *The Ethics of the Negro Question*, delivered at the Friends General Conference in Asbury, New Jersey, in 1902. In addressing the status of Blacks during the difficult days of post-Reconstruction but looking forward to the turn of the twentieth century, she details the need for America to be the America it professes to be in deed and word and to live up to its promises made to all of its citizens, including Blacks. She notes that this period, post-Reconstruction, is excessively difficult for Blacks in this country: “The colored people of America find themselves today in the most trying period of all their trying history in this land of their trial and bondage.”³⁴⁶ She notes regarding America’s peculiar brand of Christianity that “It is no fault of the Negro that he stands...as the passive and silent rebuke to the Nation’s Christianity, the great gulf between its professions and its practices.”³⁴⁷

Avoiding the pitfall of being a critic without solutions, Cooper relents that “Christ gave ideals not formulae. The Gospel is a germ requiring millennia for its growth and ripening”³⁴⁸ reminding both whites and Blacks that while history’s arc is long and winding “God is not dead neither doth the ruler of the universe slumber and sleep. As a Nation sows, so shall it reap. Men do not gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. To sow the wind is to reap the whirlwind.”³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question”, *The Portable Anna Julia Cooper*, ed. Henry Louis Gates and Shirley Moody-Turner (New York: Penguin Books, 2022), 177.

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 174.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 11.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 179.

With Christian education as its base, Cooper invoked the Social Settlement concept to uplift and sustain Black people and the Black community. In her pamphlet “The Social Settlement: What It Is, And What It Does,” Cooper describes the Social Settlement’s purpose as:

“to stimulate ambition, raise moral standards, strengthen character and develop capacity for self-help...it is an attempt to carry into the city slums the incarnate Word, the idea of better living, the ideal of higher thinking, embodied and energized in earnest and resourceful men and women who live there. It is the heart of sympathy, the hand of brotherly grip, the brain of understanding insight, of efficient and masterful goodwill indwelling in the midst of down-and-out humanity. It is the gospel of the good neighbor, the evangel of helpful sociability. It is a democracy that ‘levels up’ by throwing into the breach its best and its holiest, it is a creed that believes in the Christianity that can save society, a religion that interprets its commission ‘into all the world and to every creature’ to include also our own back alleys and the drunkard whom our laws and customs have helped to undo. It is set on fire with the conviction that all men are created with the divine right to a chance, and sets about hammering down some of those hideous handicaps which hamper whole sections of a community through the inequalities of environment, or the greed of the great. It sees a little child the most precious possibilities and at the same time the most awful peril of the universe; and it endeavors to promote, for his sake, a home, as seedling soil that cultures the best, with guiding lines and props and God’s own sunlight and the God-ordained change to grow up right.”³⁵⁰

Each of the above-mentioned concepts of **Belongingness** (and **Self-Esteem**), **Resistance**, **Agency**, **Syncretism**, and **Hope** play a pivotal role in how Blacks have overcome the effects of Amerianity, America’s peculiar brand of Christianity, particularly as it relates to developing positive Black self-identity. As discussed earlier, the Black church is not a monolithic entity or institution. While there are many shared ideals across the different variations that unify the Black church and give it a commonality that draws it closer in relationship to one another, there are some distinct differences that cannot and must not be overlooked or minimized. Many ties bind Black churches, notable are notions of salvation, liberation, and justice. They are unified behind these three distinguishing precepts in that their application is not reserved until the

³⁵⁰ Anna Julia Cooper, “The Social Settlement: What It Is, And What It Does”, *The Portable Anna Julia Cooper*, ed. Henry Louis Gates and Shirley Moody-Turner (New York: Penguin Books, 2022), 229.

“hereafter”; they stand on and hold a steadfast belief in salvation, liberation, and justice right here on earth. Racism, prejudice, and discrimination played significant roles in the Black church’s inevitable split from the socio-religious control and domination of white denominations.

Belongingness, Resistance, Agency, Syncretism, and Hope (BRASH) have all played and continue to play significant roles in shaping positive Black self-identity as a small but considerable force against an enduring dominant narrative that carries with it America’s greatest export, Black inferiority. Drowned out and overruled in the American court of public opinion, Black religious thought and Black Christianity remain America’s purest and greatest “hope” of redemption from an addictive past of its own making. White Christianity’s refusal to grapple with its sordid past is central to its clinging to an unspoken, insatiable “hope” to become again what it was. As stated earlier, while the highlight here has been on the thoughts and motives of the Southern Baptist Convention’s founding fathers and their principles, it should in no way be assumed that the Southern Baptist Convention had a corner on white supremacy or slavery. White supremacy breeds an erroneous belief in white superiority and, concomitantly, Black inferiority; indeed, in the dichotomy that is America, one feeds and rests upon the other.

In conclusion, the focus on the Southern Baptist Convention is due to its terrific influence and impact on American Christianity through two of its representative founders, Basil Manley, Sr., and Richard Fuller. The list could easily be broadened to include the names of William Bullein Johnson, John A. Broadus, James Petigru Boyce, R. B. C. Howell, James B. Taylor, and others, including the influential Richard Furman, founder of Furman University, as a forerunner of the convention. Birthed by the groundswell of a Christianity rife with white supremacy were movements like the Lost Cause and the Redeemers who sought to maintain and glorify the Southern way of life, Southern “gentility,” and Southern “honor.” Manly, Sr. and Fuller

demonstrate the depth and breadth of the tremendous influence the Southern Baptist Convention wielded in the nineteenth century, commandeering northern support from those who may have been their opponents regarding slavery, but hidden in their hearts were the same racist views predicated upon Black inferiority. The Christianity of the Southern Baptist Convention would grow beyond its initial regional limitations to become not merely the dominant voice on religion in America, but also the greatest arbiter of American culture and education. The impact and influence of the founders drew principally from interpretations they inherited and embellished in their own time. While many of those interpretations are recognized as non-biblical today, there has been no marked departure from them as inherent beliefs and practices. In fact, amid the post-Reconstruction severe repression of Blacks and blackness, in 1892 the Convention reasserted slavery's religious dimensions.

In 1995, under social pressures from internally and externally the Convention offered an apology for the role it played in slavery. There have been some topical redresses: in 2012, the Convention elected its first African American president, Fred Luter Jr., they organized conferences to discuss efforts to end racism, they adopted resolutions condemning white supremacy. However, more recently in the Donald Trump era there has been regression with a collective and inexplicable condemnation of a spectral Critical Race Theory revealing that there has been no apparent shift in theology or ideology. The founders seldom spoke deliberately about slavery from the pulpit, but their reliance upon white supremacist interpretations of scripture denoting God ordaining a celestial hierarchy placed whiteness next to godliness and cemented blackness in inferiority and subserviency was accepted as an unquestioned reality and categorical truth. Pre-Trump, longtime President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Robert Mohler, emphatically disagreed with the Convention's founders saying, "the separation of

human beings into ranks of superiority and inferiority differentiated by skin color is a direct assault upon the doctrine of Creation and an insult to the image of God in which every human being is made.”³⁵¹

It is the absence of overt racist speech in their pulpits on Sunday mornings that deadens the senses, the hearts, and the minds of listeners. Yes, it is harmful for whites, but detrimentally and injuriously so for Blacks. Mohler places the responsibility squarely upon those who have inherited the legacy of pragmatic scriptural interpretation that shifts and adjusts to fit the reader’s worldview rather than the worldview being shifted and adjusted by the scriptures. He says, “We must seek to confront and remove every strain of racial superiority that remains and seek with all our strength to be the kind of churches of which Jesus would be proud.”³⁵² This is to say, the legacy of paternalism found at the root of white Christianity, America’s peculiar version of Christianity, of which Jesus would not be proud.

In the meantime, the Black church and Black religious thought have made Black identity buoyant to the untoward attempts to thwart its positive development. More specifically, the impact of Black Christianity as an answer to the deleterious effects of white Christianity has sustained Black people, dispelling notions of a “celestial hierarchy” and God-ordained permanent servitude. Instead, imbuing Blacks with a resiliency undergirded by a Gospel of salvation, liberation, and justice “on earth as it is in heaven”; a Gospel that reminds believers from the lips of Jesus in John 8:35-36 that the incidence of slavery was never meant to be permanent since “a slave does not abide in the house forever” and “if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed”; a Gospel that reminds believers that we are mandated “To loose the

³⁵¹ Mohler, R. Albert. “First Person: Racial Superiority - Confronting The Truth.” *Baptist Press*, 23 June 2015, www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/first-person-racial-superiority-confronting-the-truth/.

³⁵² Ibid.

bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?”...all in the spirit of Jesus’ declaration that He had been anointed:

‘To preach the gospel to *the poor*;
He has sent Me to heal *the brokenhearted*,
To proclaim liberty to *the captives*
And recovery of sight to *the blind*,
To set at liberty *those who are oppressed*;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

And if commentary of Black inferiority and white superiority were the end of the story death, defeat, and destruction would have the last word, and believers would be confined to a designation of hopelessness as “Good Friday Christians”; indeed, it would be difficult to discern a path forward with so much dark and doom. However, none of these has the last word... Hope is the last word in...BRASH. The pinnacle of Christian faith and belief is not the death of Christ on the cross, it is as demonstrated any given Sunday in any “good Black Baptist church” that “early one Sunday morning Jesus got up with all power in His hands”...that’s hope; that’s hope that springs eternal; that’s the hope in positive Black self-identity that refuses to be undermined, either through manipulation that keeps others down or separation through the Exceptional Negro Syndrome.

Positive Black self-identity was not created during the post-Reconstruction era, but it was elevated through demonstrating a refusal to give in to the untoward forces of white supremacy. So vital is this fact that it would be a half century later from seeds planted in the fertile soil of what appeared to be the spoils of post-Reconstruction, out of this malaise would come the reprisal of Black somebodiness from the mind of an immigrant, Marcus Garvey, about whom Martin Luther King, Jr. would rightly say: “Marcus Garvey was the first man of color in the history of the United States to lead and develop a mass movement. He was the first man, on a mass scale, and level, to give millions of Negroes a sense of dignity and destiny, and make the

Negro feel that he was somebody.”³⁵³ From Garvey, this sense of Black nationalism came, breathing hope and a sense of connectedness amongst Blacks through his proselytes like the Baptist preacher Reverend Earl Little, whose influence spread to his son Malcolm Little, known to most as Minister Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam. Like Christianity, which was birthed from a Jewish man named Jesus, as a child of the Garvey movement, Malcolm was the one from whom the Black Power Movement would be inspired. From the womb of the nadir of race relations during post-Reconstruction, the Black Power movement would spring forth as a pinnacle period of Black self-expression, self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-discovery...and the source of whatever remnants of authentic Black self-expression that remains today. Indeed, there were tremendous oppositional forces, including a weaponized United States government (Federal Bureau of Investigations, Central Intelligence Agency, Justice Department, etc.), which allocated enormous resources to undermine and destroy the Black Power Movement from without and from within. Additionally, given the many tremendous benefits of the Civil Rights Movement, it, too, would be a force from within that helped to mute the impact of the Black Power Movement through its misinterpretation of “desegregation” as “integration” as assessed by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Integration weakened Black dependency upon one another with little-to-no tantamount infrastructure to support the community. One example of this is in education, where, despite having fewer resources, the education of Black children has suffered in integration.^{viii} In the eyes of the white establishment, the Black Power Movement, a proponent of Blacks schooling their own, was an eminent threat that undermined both the notions of Black inferiority and the notions of white supremacy.

³⁵³ Amy Jacques Garvey. *Garvey and Garveyism* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 308.

In his book *The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy*, Jim Wallis recounts how Bishop Desmond Tutu taught him the difference between optimism and hope: “Optimism...is based on a feeling or a mood – even a personality type...but different and deeper than optimism, hope is a choice, a decision, and one based on what we call faith.”³⁵⁴ Black Christianity is guilty of a steadfast adherence to a Gospel that has guided the Black church to shun revenge, to grant forgiveness, and to hope even at times over and against hope itself knowing that the time will come when the true Christian Gospel will rest, rule, and abide in all of Christianity -- Black or White, and America just might be all the better for it. There can be no better summation nor fitting close to this examination and investigation of developing positive Black self-identity through Black religious thought than the sage advice offered by Anna Julia Cooper in “The Ethics of the Negro Question”: “As for the Negro there can be no doubt that these trials are God’s plan for refinement of the good gold to be found in him. The dross must be purged out. There is no other way than by fire. If the great Refiner sees that a stronger, truer, purer racial character can be evolved from His crucible by heating the furnace seven times, He can mean only good.”³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ Jim Wallis, *The False White Gospel*, 239.

³⁵⁵ Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question”, *The Portable Anna Julia Cooper*, 189.

End Notes

ⁱ From Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech delivered on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. on August 28, 1963. The speech was entitled "Normalcy Never Again" by King for its urgency for social change, but subsequently the title was changed to the now infamous "I Have A Dream." King's reference in using this phrase was to compel America to make good on its promise of democracy for all Americans, in which he included Blacks. I operationalize this phrase to highlight the fact that King and others of the Civil Rights Movement greeted the nomenclature and the movement "with reservation." In *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community* in the chapter on Black Power, he reasoned that "The words 'Black' and 'power' together give the impression that we are talking about Black domination rather than Black equality."

ⁱⁱ Ironically, a couple of weeks later, I found myself in a round table discussion at a local Athens Pastor's Appreciation Luncheon at a white denominational church. I had attended at the personal invitation of the president of the local Christian college and, naturally, in the setting of this small college town, I was one of only a couple of other Blacks in the room, one of whom was a Black minister of Music at a local white church. During the course of the luncheon, one of the white pastors asked the conventional question that portends earnestly, desiring to know the answer: "Why is it so difficult to get Blacks to stay in his (white) church?" I say "portends earnestly" because he took the opportunity to ask in the presence of a Black pastor (me), yet regardless of what my answer was, two questions remain unanswered: 1) was he prepared to do what was necessary even if it upset his white parishioners? And 2) had there ever been a group or a committee assembled to consider what is wrong with the church rather than what is wrong with Blacks? He explained that he would get visitors, but few stayed or returned. I asked him if we were speaking freely and truthfully because though the setting was different from my talk in the previous example, the issue at hand was not. The answer was not quite as simple as it was two-fold. First, there existed in times past, and less so now, a psychic unity in blackness where church and community well-being were more united. Donald Mathews shared that during slavery, "Whites often preached to blacks, although fugitive slaves remembered such instances as lectures about behavior, rather than as sermons about salvation. But even whites who could genuinely move Blacks...could never establish the identity between congregation and preacher which was so important in Black religion." Due in part to the aforementioned "charity" of Blacks and in part due to the passage of time that psychic unity is not as strong as it was during slavery, but it still remains to a large extent. Second, I shared with him, like my conversation with the gentleman on campus, that those consistently in decision-making capacity about the ministry were white, and the one(s) in charge of setting the proverbial table for worship by way of "entertainment" are reliably Black. There is nothing inherently wrong with the pastor of a local white church being white, nor with those in decision-making capacity being white. The issue only arises when those blinded by and blind to white privilege back themselves into the proverbial corner of asking the questions of how they recruit, lure, or keep Black congregants when the systems of subjugation and repression are still present.

ⁱⁱⁱ The tenth edition of this monumental work cited: Franklin, John Hope, and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2022.

^{iv} 1 Maccabees 1:11-15 details Jews, who in order to "pass" (imitate) others, decided to adopt Helenisms, including removing their marks of circumcision without the benefit of anesthesia, so that they would not stand out in the nakedness of the gymnasium.

- *11 At that time, some renegade Israelites emerged. These people went against their ancestral laws and encouraged many other Jews to join them. They spoke up, saying, "Let's make an agreement with the Gentiles around us, because many horrible things have happened to us since we separated ourselves from them." 12 The proposal pleased their fellow Jews. 13 Some of them eagerly went to King Antiochus, who gave them permission to start living by the laws of the Gentiles. 14 Consequently, they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, following Gentile custom. 15 They even took steps to remove the marks of circumcision, utterly abandoning the holy covenant. They joined with Gentiles and gave themselves over to an evil course.* (Common English Bible)

^v "Jemmy" led the Stono Rebellion of 1739 which was the largest slave revolt in the 13 colonies prior to the American Revolution. On Sunday, Sept. 9, 1739, about 20 enslaved Africans under Jemmy's leadership grew to

over 100 as they rebelled and murdered whites in their quest for liberty. Many of them were seasoned soldiers trained in the use of military weapons of the day. The Colonists would eventually meet and overtake the rebels when many were executed, but some made it to St. Augustine, where under Spanish law they were free.

^{vi} Nat Turner, a Baptist preacher, led a bloody revolt on August 22, 1831, in Southampton County, Va. Turner's rebellion would include the murder of his slaveowner, and his wife and children. His rebels would reach about 70 armed enslaved Africans and free blacks would slaughter whites as they went from plantation to plantation before being stopped by white militia. His rebels would be caught in short order, but Turner would evade capture for nearly another month before being captured and sentenced to hang. It is recorded that after he was hanged, they garishly and gruesomely skinned his body and made souvenirs, and for a time, his head sat in the biology department at Wooster College in Ohio.

^{vi} Harris, Tene A., "Value, Networks, Desegregation, and Displacement at One of Georgia's Black High Schools, Athens High and Industrial School/Burney-Harris High School, 1913-1970." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2012. https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/eps_diss/95

^{vi} Sheddeur Sanders is a young, Black collegiate star quarterback for the Colorado Buffaloes preparing for the National Football League draft. Though at the writing of this dissertation, the NFL Draft has not yet happened, however, Mr. Sanders is projected to be one of the top two quarterbacks drafted. Incidentally, the other top quarterback, Cam Ward, is also Black, which is highly unusual for a league that long operated and continues to struggle with the belief that Blacks were incapable of playing the quarterback position. Sanders, the son of Hall of Fame football player Deion Sanders, plays with great confidence, and he excels at the position as his draft status represents. Sanders' confidence and self-assuredness rub some NFL executives and coaches the wrong way. Unaccustomed to Blacks dominating the position, as many do in the league now, the following statement was published in an article about Sanders on Foxsports.com on March 4, 2025, lending credence and applicability to this study: "One quarterbacks coach, whose team is picking in the top seven, claimed Sanders came off as *"brash"* and "arrogant," [according to NFL insider Josina Anderson](#). That was an assessment that Anderson disagreed with for various reasons, such as her interactions with Sanders, the way he behaved in his media session at the combine, and the evolution of college athletes." (italics and bold for "brash" added for emphasis by me)

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