1-1-2019

Economic Liberation from the Margins: The Power of Racial Politics in Social Change

Joshua Sherman Bartholomew

University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd

Part of the African American Studies Commons, Other Economics Commons, Other Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons, and the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/1554

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu,dig-commons@du.edu.
Economic Liberation from the Margins:
The Power of Racial Politics in Social Change

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology
Joint PhD Program
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Joshua Sherman Bartholomew
March 2019
Advisor: Miguel A. De La Torre
ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a meta-ethical research study of the relationship between economic justice and racial equality within the United States and its transnational range of influence. It critiques the Eurocentric foundations of capitalist economic paradigms, and supplants them with community-oriented strategies of anti-racist self-determination from within the Black Panther Party’s socialist praxis. By highlighting the praxis and significant intellectual contributions from arguably the most revolutionary example of racial politics for black liberation throughout the Black Power movement, this dissertation emphasizes the need for alternative economic models to capitalism that can support and build upon moral visions of collective racial liberation. This study employs a Womanist methodology to offer a constructive ethic of resistance for a just global society that builds upon principles of black socialism and offers an alternative to capitalism that is missing from black liberationist and Womanist discourse.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express his sincere thanks to the members of his committee, Miguel De La Torre, Jennifer Leath, George DeMartino, and Sandra Dixon, for their invaluable guidance, which has made this project stronger than it otherwise would have been.

Many others helped in the completion of this dissertation. In particular, the author would like to thank Andriette Jordan-Fields, and the rest of the Ethics Doctoral Seminar Group in the Joint Doctoral Program (JDP) for being pleasant conversation partners. The author would also like to thank Lauren Benke, whose proficient and generous editing towards the end of the project greatly improved the readability of the manuscript. A special thanks also to Bianca Williams for their encouragement, support, and for pushing the author to think more clearly.

Finally, and importantly, the author wishes to express his love and gratitude to the Bartholomew Family for their generosity and patience during the long months of drafting and revising and for helping to sharpen the ideas and improve the arguments contained herein by listening and responding with unconditional love, wisdom, and grace.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1  
  Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1  
  Literature Review ......................................................................................................................... 8  
  Research Methodology ............................................................................................................... 12  
  Chapter Outline ......................................................................................................................... 15

Chapter Two: Economic Liberation from the Margins ......................................................... 18  
  Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 18  
  Capitalist Political Economy ...................................................................................................... 23  
  Black and Womanist Theologies as Constructs of Racial/Social Justice .......................... 30  
  Latina/o Ethics as a Model for Theo-ethical Action and Racial Collaboration .................. 38

Chapter Three: The Power of Racial Politics ........................................................................ 48  
  Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 48  
  The Dawn of Black Power ......................................................................................................... 56  
  Revolutionary Services ............................................................................................................... 63  
  Economic Philosophy ............................................................................................................... 72  
  Forms of Repression .................................................................................................................... 79  
  Gender and The Panthers .......................................................................................................... 84

Chapter Four: Religion and Social Change ......................................................................... 93  
  Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 93  
  Religion, Knowledge, and Power ............................................................................................... 97  
  Christianity and Modern Race .................................................................................................... 107  
  Religion and Social Change ...................................................................................................... 111  
  A Vision for Black Liberationist Economic Programs .......................................................... 123

Chapter Five: A Just Global Society .................................................................................... 138  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 138  
  Black/Womanist Practical Guidance toward Collective Liberation for Global Poor .......... 142  
  Black/Womanist Practical Guidance toward Collective Liberation for Black Churches .... 148  
  Beloved Community: “To be a Christian means, at least, not being pro-capitalism…” ........ 158  
  Framing (Antiracist) Cosmopolitanism .................................................................................... 164

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................... 171
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Founded by James Cone, Black Liberation Theology as a platform for Christian social ethics has its roots in the United States Black Power movement of the late 1960s and 70s. While black liberationist ethics remains a radical response from black Christians to the mainstream of white religious history, its racial politics of liberation have not fully established an economic model of social justice that develops Cone’s initial theological formulations of Black Power. The struggle for racial and economic justice has been the main emphasis of black politics of liberation in a U.S. context.

---


4 As a fundamental aspect of social justice, economic justice is concerned with individuals and groups receiving a just share of the burdens and benefits of social cooperation, particularly as these pertain to allocation of resources, distribution of wealth, alleviation of poverty, and the right to participate in the economy (meaning to engage in meaningful work) without discrimination. Wylin J. Dassie, “The Interconnection Between Race, Religion and Economics: Black Christian Identity and Economic Justice in the Rural South” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2009), 108.

the context of Black Power, racial politics of liberation refer to economic and political self-determination for black people, and for all people around the world. The most revolutionary example of racial politics for black liberation during and after the Black Power movement was arguably the Black Panther Party. By highlighting the economic praxis of the Black Panthers and specific contributions from the works of their core affiliates—Huey Newton, Elaine Brown, Bobby Seale, and Angela Davis—this dissertation will show that the Panthers’ overall strategies of black self-determination for the sake of socialist, inter-communal economic collaboration would prove to be one of the most impactful precedents of racial politics in U.S. history. This understanding is necessary to inform liberationist ethics for the sake of praxis. By utilizing the economic model of praxis established by the Panthers, this dissertation will contribute a constructive ethic of religious resistance that builds upon principles of black socialism

6 According to sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant, racial politics, or racial projects, represent the building blocks of racial formation processes whereby ideas of race—a socially constructed concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies—tie bodies to value by organizing social structures along racial borders. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Racial Formation in the United States (Routledge, 2014).


9 Praxis refers to revolutionary social practices. According to Christian social ethicist Miguel de la Torre, praxis is concerned with what people do to bring about social change (Miguel A. de la Torre, Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins: Revised and Expanded (Orbis Books, 2014), xiii). Therefore, this dissertation will be a deliberation on the ways in which economic theories have been and can be utilized to generate action pathways of racial justice in a globalized world order. While formulations of black liberation have been and continue to be sites of contestation over what strategies and tactics for self-determination would be more practical in bringing about meaningful social change (i.e. DuBois/Washington debates over “The Negro Problem,” or Black Freedom/Black Power debates that involved “integrationist/nationalist” solutions), this dissertation asserts that ethicists can only consider the effectiveness of praxis when they situate black and Womanists theologies in the context of economic analysis.
and offers an alternative to capitalism that is missing from black liberationist and Womanist discourse.

This dissertation is concerned with the relationship between economic justice and racial equality in the U.S. and its transnational range of influence. What follows is an examination of the political orientation and praxis of the Black Panthers and their coalition of allies during the 1960s and 70s Black Power movement in the U.S. The ideology of the Panthers’ Black Power politics invokes a social challenge to the capitalist status quo; Black Power represents a form of anti-colonial, political struggle that utilizes Marxist thought. The politics of the Panthers’ Black Power engage Marxist thought by primarily offering correctives to it, carving out community-oriented political definitions and articulations of black economic self-determination in a racialized society.

Therefore, this dissertation will examine the works of anti-colonial/anti-imperialist thinkers and leaders in the Black Power struggle who identify with black liberationists’ existential concern for economic justice. The Black Panthers share two key positionalities with Black liberationist ethicists that lead to similar reflections on the struggle against racism. First, both groups consider poor individuals and black people as the center of

---

10 “Black Power and postcolonialism found inspiration in the anti-colonial resistance movements for African independence, popularized in the works of Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and others.” (Elonda Clay, “A Black Theology of Liberation or Legitimation? A Postcolonial Response to Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power at Forty.” *Black Theology* 8, no. 3 (2010): 313). In many ways, this dissertation is a project of decolonization, serving as point of reference for anti-colonial/postcolonial economic analysis that will engage thinkers like Antonio Gramsci and Kwok Pui Lan, who will all be discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

liberating activity in the world. Second, both the Panthers and black liberationists signify “liberation” within the context of black economic empowerment, an assertion that has global implications for what it means to be a human being in a just, inter-connected world. The Panthers rejected the belief that capitalism can improve the lives and conditions of all people, especially black people. Black liberationists’ concern for the experience of poor persons and disenfranchised communities reflexively suggest liberative praxis as social transformation of economic structures. Black liberationists and the Black Panthers align their struggles for liberation with third world and developing countries around the world. Addressing the Panthers and Black liberationist ethics alongside one another facilitates a stream of discursive continuity, whereby themes of racial equality through community-oriented economic empowerment ground visions of a just global society.

---

12 This dissertation understands capitalism first to be a mode of production whereby wealth appears as an “immense collection of commodities”; capitalism is a systemic mode of production based especially on private ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of the labor force Marx, Karl. Capital, Volume I: A critique of political economy. Vol. 1. Courier Corporation, 2011, 125. Capitalism is an economic and political system in which a country’s trade and industry are controlled by private owners and corporations for profit, rather than by the state or a cooperatively owned entity. Mish, Frederick C., ed. Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary. Merriam-Webster, 2004. Political Philosopher Karl Marx defines the capitalist as capital personified and with consciousness and will; one who subjects her/himself to ‘objective’ laws that govern the accumulation of capital. The capitalist aims at the unceasing movement of the process of accumulating wealth. Although Marx used the term itself to define in a literal way those who own means of wealth (see Marx, Karl. Capital, Volume I: A critique of political economy. Vol. 1. Courier Corporation, 2011, 254.), the colonial history of capitalists’ exploitation and expropriation of human beings vis-à-vis the Transatlantic slave trade unforgottably tarnishes the application of capitalism as a social system based on private ownership. Williams, Eric. Capitalism and slavery. UNC Press Books, 2014. A more thorough description of capitalism will be explored in Chapters 2 and 3.


The larger objective of this dissertation is to provide a critical analysis of Eurocentric models of economic justice. In the context of social justice, critical analysis mandates scrutinizing factors such as race, class, gender, and religion as key elements of systemic oppression.\textsuperscript{15} It focuses on the study of moral agency and development as it is driven by the need for empirical research to undergird constructive ethics.\textsuperscript{16} As it relates to economic justice and racial equity, critical analysis of social theories foster reflection and action directed at the transformation of oppressive structures. In doing so, critical analysis makes space to consider the ongoing economic exploitation and political subjugation of people of color as well as subsequent legacies and reconfigurations of colonial logics and practices. Although there are various critically analytical approaches that seek to analyze and recover experiences from different geo-political contexts, this dissertation focuses on perspectives on moral agency, beginning with the Black Power movement of 1966 in the U.S.

Further, this dissertation views Black Power not only as a form of political struggle, but also as a form of critical analysis that focuses on the impact of oppressive sociological factors and systems that regulate identity on human and cultural agency. Because Black Power refers to the development of black diasporic political praxis that challenges institutional racism as colonialism,\textsuperscript{17} this dissertation’s critical analysis of black liberationists and the Black Panthers reveal anti-colonial sentiments. While James

\textsuperscript{15} Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, \textit{Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics} (Pilgrim Press, 2006), 2.

\textsuperscript{16} Floyd-Thomas, \textit{Mining the Motherlode}, 12.

Cone’s Black Theology was not an outright disavowal of Christianity; it was a critique of Eurocentric colonial Christianity; therefore, black liberationist ethics entails a strand of anti-colonial critical analysis. For the Black Panthers, the concept of Black Power as a form of anti-colonialism specifically emerged in the works of Elaine Brown, Bobby Seale, Angela Davis, and Huey Newton during and after the Vietnam War. It served as a key moment in which Black racial politics challenged the Eurocentric hegemony of global colonialism. Accordingly, these authors are products of a major anticolonial political moment in U.S. history and are part of a larger project of decolonization that requires breaking colonial patterns of binary thinking, rejecting cultural dominance, and advancing anti-racist methods of economic justice.

This dissertation agrees with the major overlapping claim of both black liberationists and the Black Panthers: in the context of suffering caused by racism, black humanity has been negatively defined by whites. Therefore, liberation from white racism means an opting of black life through a concrete, material negation of social injustice. The theme of liberation serves to bridge motivations behind the praxis of both black and Womanist theo-ethicists and the Panthers. Furthermore, the racial politics of Black Power is a black spiritual manifestation of both religious and secular liberationist principles.


With a critically analytical reading of economic models of racial justice in mind, this dissertation aims to achieve the following objectives. First, it will provide a description of the modern intellectual and conceptual history of black liberationist ethics and the Black Panthers using texts from James Cone and correctives from Womanists, as well as primary resources from the Black Panthers and their four core affiliates: Brown, Seale, Davis, and Newton. Second, it will contribute to the field of Christian social ethics by studying the Black Panthers’ economic impact in a racist society. It will critique the analytical foundation out of which economic ethicists construct meanings of social justice. It will also suggest a moral vision based upon communal principles of freedom and democratic rights, relating it to tactics adopted by the Panthers’ core affiliates and fashioned in their praxis. Third, this dissertation will investigate the differences and similarities between theological liberation for the black community and the Black Panther Party, including ideological and practical limitations, strengths, and weaknesses. The connection between black liberationist ethics and the Black Panthers has implications for religious literacy, which this dissertation will also explore in later sections. Lastly, this dissertation seeks to develop an economic model of praxis for Black Theology. By first mobilizing the intellectual resources in the works of the Black Panthers and, second, evaluating the colonial bias in their work and within the works of Christian theo-ethicists, this dissertation will extend anti-colonial insights of social justice as it relates to Western epistemic privilege and discourse on economic liberation.
Literature Review

Four major areas of study are closely related to this dissertation: Christian Social Ethics, Black Theology, Black Feminism/Womanism, and Social Theory. The tradition of U.S. Christian social ethics stems from a branch of Western philosophy that deals with concepts of right and wrong behavior from a theological perspective of love and justice. Both theologians and philosophers have played important roles in the construction of social ethics as a field and as a discursive process towards creating a more just society. This dissertation, however, focuses on doing Christian ethics from the margins of society.\(^{21}\) As an academic field of study, Christian social ethics is becoming more attentive to an assortment of voices within a modern society that continues to perpetuate mechanisms of oppression. Historically, Christian social ethics has not always focused on dealing with “how the disenfranchised struggle against societal mechanisms responsible for much of the misery they face.”\(^{22}\) The field of Christian ethics in the U.S. began to address social (read: political) dimensions of human life at the turn of the twentieth century with the onset of the Great Depression, World Wars I and II, and the United States’ reaction to the rise of the Communist Soviet Union.\(^{23}\) It was not until the emergence of the Social Gospel movement that theological ethics began to take on a significant social character: “The term ‘social justice’ gained currency in the literature of


\(^{22}\) de la Torres, *Doing Christian Ethics*, 5.

rising Socialist and union movements” in the early 1900s. During this time, Christian theologians would begin to stress that society is a whole that includes an ethical dimension. These theologians helped coin terminology such as “social sin” and claimed that the existence of poverty and unearned wealth were structurally linked, not just to individual lives, but to the body of society more generally.

Although life in the U.S. has always included an inherent social dimension, which reflects multiple consciousness within black experience, James Cone was part of the first academic generation of Christian theologians who would take seriously existential issues of social injustice, specifically racism. Before academicians like Cone, American Christian racism had no standing as a theological topic. In Cone’s experience, academic discourse did not account for the embeddedness of white supremacy within its operational structure. Cone grew up in the context of the Civil Rights movement, and

---

24 Dorrien, Social Ethics, 1.

25 Theorists of the Social Gospel movement, such as Walter Rauschenbusch, who observed the Great Depression of 1893 from the vantage point of Hell’s Kitchen and lived through The Great War, were a precursor to the explicit accounts of racial, economic, and gender injustices within the field of Christian social ethics. For example, Rauschenbusch critiqued the Industrial Revolution and economic disparity of his time by arguing that the purpose of Christianity was to transform human society into the Kingdom of God: “In past history religion has demonstrated its capacity to evoke the latent powers of humanity, and has in turn gained a fresh hold on man and rejuvenated its own life by supporting the high patriotic and social ambitions of an age...If Christians would now add its moral force to the social and economic forces making for a nobler organization of society, it could render such help to the cause of justice and the people as would make this a proud page in the history of the Church for our sons to read” (Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the social crisis (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1907), 273-274). Later, one of the most influential thinkers who contributed to the end of the Social Gospel movement, Reinhold Niebuhr, lived through both World Wars, experiencing both the Depression and the rise of fascism, and focused much of his work on issues of economic justice. His brand of ethics was called Christian realism. Man, Moral. “Immoral Society.” (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons 1932).

lived through the assassinations of both Martin Luther King, Jr and Malcolm X.\textsuperscript{27}

Therefore, the context of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements were the social milieu out of which Cone felt inspired to do theology from a different modality.\textsuperscript{28} For Cone, racism is embedded in thought forms; therefore, Christian theology had to break from the theological anthropology of Eurocentrism and intersect with a more radical appreciation of racial politics.

The intersectionality\textsuperscript{29} of Cone’s work also grew into a more conscious effort to acknowledge voices of oppression, even within the black community itself. For example, patriarchy is as prevalent within the black community as it is within the white community. Cone’s original works reflect a tone of sexism in addressing human life as representative of \textit{mankind}; however, womanist thinkers such as Alice Walker and Delores Williams offered theo-ethical correctives for Cone’s oversights.\textsuperscript{30} Womanism\textsuperscript{31} is

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Formally, liberation theology emerged in the USA in the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., but there were glimmerings of it in modern America’s greatest liberation movement, the civil rights movement…Cone and Mary Daly [who established feminist theology] were the originators in the USA.” Dorrien, \textit{Social Ethics}, 390.
\item James H. Cone, \textit{Martin and Malcolm and America: A dream or a nightmare} (Orbis Books, 1992).
\item According to critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality is the study of how overlapping or intersecting social identities, particularly \textit{minority} identities, relate to systems and structures of oppression, domination, or discrimination, and should constantly be reminders that oppressions are interlinked and cannot be solved alone. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Intersectionality and identity politics: Learning from violence against women of color,” (1997).
\item One of the first public critiques of Cone’s black liberation theology came from a woman named Jacquelyn Grant who claimed that black women are invisible in black theology. “In examining black theology,” she writes, “it is necessary to make one of two assumptions: either black women have no place in the enterprise, or black men are capable of speaking for [black women]” (Jacquelyn Grant, “Black Theology and the Black Woman,” in \textit{Black Theology: A Documentary History}, vol. i, 1966–1979, eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 420.
\item Ethicist Katie Cannon marked the first generational wave of womanism, with her dissertation turned book: \textit{Black Womanist Ethics}. Cannon’s work shows how “black women live out a moral wisdom in their
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the branch of theological ethics that accounts for both the feminist and racial dimensions of black theology. Womanists like Katie Cannon, Emilie Townes, Keri Day, Jacquelyn Grant, Barbara Holmes, and Kelly Brown Douglas explore the ways in which spirituality intersects with social issues through theo-political analyses that reveal critiques of patriarchy that are crucial for Black liberationists’ language of racial justice. Both Womanism and Black Theology underscore the experience of black people and oppressed people who share in similar realities. The social elements of their analyses have shifted the mode of thought forms present within theological ethics, placing emphasis on experiences from the margins of society.

Because this dissertation is concerned with the praxis of economic liberation from the margins, an engagement with questions of Social Theory forms a major area of analysis. Social Theory deals with analytical frameworks that help to explain social realities. Both black liberationists’ and the Black Panthers’ theoretical frameworks include forms of social theory, but from different analytical viewpoints. Conian Theology critiques racism as a social sin, and condemns monopoly capitalism, sexism, and imperialism.\footnote{David Batstone, Eduardo Mendieta, Lois Ann Lorentzen, and Dwight N. Hopkins, eds., \textit{Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity and the Americas} (Routledge, 2013), 212.} Black liberationists and Womanists further develop this explanation of inequities present within economic structures, practices, and systems by using Biblical and theological interpretations of black experience for social change. The Black Panthers, on the other hand, were social theorists who utilized Marxist thought and the study of real-livered context that does not appeal to the fixed rules or absolute principles of the white-oriented, male structured society” (Katie Cannon, \textit{Black womanist ethics} (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 4). A more thorough definition of Womanism will be presented in Chapter Two.
resistance and liberation from a social movement perspective.\textsuperscript{33} For social theorists such as Angela Davis, Elaine Brown, Huey Newton, and other leaders who lived through the Black Power movement, Marxist thought offered one of the most useful theoretical approaches to using economic ideas for creating a just society.\textsuperscript{34} According to social theorist and scholar-activist Cornel West, “black theologians and Marxist thinkers are strangers.”\textsuperscript{35} By highlighting racist practices around the world, West contends that Black theo-ethical liberationists failed in “linking these [racist] practices to the current mode of production.”\textsuperscript{36} Both West and Cone have insisted on a dialogue between Black liberationist ethicists and Marxist thinkers for the sake of praxis.\textsuperscript{37} This dissertation is the first systematic project that builds specifically upon their invitation.

**Research Methodology**

As Womanist scholars argue, “If the people who are the most dispossessed in our society – namely black women – are liberated and lifted up then surely everyone else will


\textsuperscript{34} This was even true for James Cone. In *For My People*, Cone explains: “The Christian faith does not possess in its nature the means for analyzing the structure of capitalism. Marxism as a tool of social analysis can disclose the gap between appearance and reality, and thereby help Christians to see how things really are” James H. Cone, *For my people: Black theology and the Black church*, vol. 1 (Orbis Books, 1984), 187.


\textsuperscript{37} James H. Cone and Michael Harrington, *The black church and Marxism: What do they have to say to each other* (Institute for Democratic Socialism, 1980).
This dissertation addresses the political consciousness of black women in order to highlight and develop economic models of racial justice for praxis. In considering the politics of black liberation as a source for constructive ethics, emancipatory metaethnography constitutes a key methodology. This approach aims to present and embrace the experiences of black people. Because this dissertation understands Black Feminism/Womanism to be an invaluable corrective for Conian theology and for black liberationist ethics more broadly, black women’s perspectives represent a model of epistemological privilege that can help describe, analyze, and empower all oppressed people in order to create positive social change. Therefore, the methodology of this dissertation is a metaethnography undergirded with Womanist ethical sensibilities.

This form of emancipatory metaethnography “takes seriously the task of liberation for the entire black community by examining its most subjugated class – black women.” It focuses analysis on black women’s ethical formation and aims to demystify the inappropriate social scientific study of black women by regarding them as subjects,

38 Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 98.

39 Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 90.

40 While there is a distinction between Black Feminism and Womanism—the latter emphasizing more of the spiritual elements of a black and feminist identity—this dissertation holds these social theories together in order to reclaim liberationist perspectives of both secular and religious thinkers.

41 Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, xiii.

42 Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 65.
not objects. It is intended to assist a project of recovery or unearthing whereby the researcher regards as valid each and every voice’s particularity as the reality of all women. As Floyd-Thomas articulates, “the goal of emancipatory metaethnography must be linked to analysis that makes central the agency for black women to affect social change.” In the case of this dissertation, this change occurs through a sense of religious and political authority. It critically analyzes black women’s truth claims by asking, “What are obstacles that have prevented their goals or dreams?” Further, it confronts systems that subjugate black women: “Within this context, critical analysis yields knowledge that effectively addresses the various social barriers that must be engaged and dismantled.” Emancipatory metaethnography leads to the process of rendering prescriptive ethics within which black women can actualize positive life chances. In this way, critical analysis leads to spiritual empowerment, pinpointing a spiritual outlook—a call to action that may range from the modest rethinking of the role of religion in moral formation to more direct engagement that includes political activism—that will help to transform social consequences that black women face.

This dissertation will critically analyze the signifier “Black Power” from the radical subjectivity of black female spirituality to formulate prescriptive, anti-colonial models of economic justice. The following key texts serve as the focus of this research: Black Theology and Black Power by James Cone; Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of The Black Panther Party by Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, Jr.; A Taste

——

43 Floyd-Thomas, Mining the Motherlode, 92.

44 Floyd-Thomas, Mining the Motherlode, 96.
of Power by Elaine Brown; The Angela Davis Reader by Joy James; and More than Chains and Toil: A Christian Work Ethic of Enslaved Women by Joan Martin. These texts in general and related works of Womanists and social theorists will be put in conversation with those of black liberationist ethics to develop an economic model of racial justice.

Chapter Outline

Chapter Two asserts that black liberationist and Womanist ethics must incorporate an analysis of capitalism that generates praxis as its socioeconomic alternative. The first section addresses the historical significance of Black Liberation Theology and Womanism in contemporary world ethics. Through a description of black liberationist and Womanist ethics, this section covers a genealogy of the conversation between Christian social ethics and theological models of racial justice. This section aims to show that, while capitalism is the social context out of which black liberationists and Womanists construct ethics, an economic model of racial justice and moral agency for black lives does not yet exist. Chapter Two will also explain the fundamental problems associated with moral agency for marginalized communities within a capitalist system. It will consider themes such as racial justice, political economy, capitalism, and a just, global society as central factors determining the outline of the dissertation. The goal of this chapter is to affirm the need for more integrated visions of economic justice that include experiences from racialized communities and that lean heavily upon action-oriented paradigms for social change.

Chapter Three argues that the Black Panther Party provides alternative economic models to normative Eurocentric paradigms that politicize and perpetuate structures of transnational, racialized oppression. The purpose of this chapter is to show how the
Panthers addressed economic disparities in the world through a commitment to both negate capitalism and create a new world for all people, not just black people. The first section describes the historical impact of The Black Panther Party. The following section describes the Panthers’ revolutionary social programs, which were undergirded by an anti-racist economic philosophy, as a way to recover a model of doing justice from the margins that shares common possibilities with black liberationist and Womanist ethical visions of a just global society. This chapter will most importantly be critical of the Panthers’ patriarchy, by highlighting the experiences of black women in the Black Power movement. As a contrasting result, the chapter will further reveal ways in which Eurocentric emancipatory projects that neglect the politics of race in its analyses of economic problems and injustices fail to deal in any substantive way with the social realities of inequality, discrimination, and oppression generated by the capitalist system. The formation of the Black Panthers was a response to these realities.

Chapter Four puts black liberationist and Womanist ethics in conversation with the Black Panthers. This chapter discusses the racial politics associated with agency within both approaches to social justice. This chapter argues that religious literacy is a necessary component for embracing the ways Christian ethics and secular racial justice movements develop praxis for the liberation of black lives. This section aims to develop constructive visions of economic justice by bolstering the need for praxis that reflects upon structural forms of privilege in its struggle for economic and racial change along the axis of moral freedom. A major takeaway from this chapter will be the philosophically religious connections across visions of economic and racial justice in the West, as well as ways to account for domains of knowledge and power for the sake of reworking Christian
liberationist ethics toward socioeconomic racial collaboration. Black Feminist/Womanist sensibilities guide this chapter’s engagement with racial politics of liberation.

Chapter Five concludes this dissertation and argues that collective liberation is a thematic takeaway of racial justice that not only builds upon a concrete political program, like that of the Black Panthers, but also creates an existential source for black liberationist reflection and praxis. By aligning black and Womanist ethics with the priorities of collective liberation, this chapter addresses the originality of this dissertation’s thesis across four areas: 1) This dissertation is the first attempt to write a critical constructive relationship between Black Theology, Womanism, and the Black Panther Party. 2) Using a Womanist emancipatory metaethnography, this dissertation critiques capitalism and Eurocentric paradigms of economic justice and its relationship to the margins. There has been an absence for such a critical intellectual project. The critical dialogue between black and Womanist ethicists and economic social theorists will provide a future understanding of liberation in global contexts in general and Black Liberation Theology and Womanism in particular. 3) This dissertation also offers a basis for moving Christian ethicists away from Eurocentric models of economic justice that eschew experience and knowledge from the margins of the colonial world. 4) This dissertation offers a critique of capitalism and Eurocentric models of economic justice as a way to build a cosmopolitan racial politics in dialogue with various tendencies in Black Feminist/Womanist thought, including for instance various strands in postcolonial thought, social movement theory, racial formation theory, and raciology. To date, there has been no such attempt in relation to Black Liberation Theology.
CHAPTER TWO: ECONOMIC LIBERATION FROM THE MARGINS

Introduction

A paradigmatic shift from Eurocentric liberalism to a culturally diverse radicalism has opened the conceptual doorway for theologically different academic constructions of social ethics. Two thinkers who have contributed and led to the most penetrating analyses of the relations of race, class—and, consequently, gender—within Christian ethical discourse are James Cone and Miguel de la Torre. The insights of these thinkers have taken seriously racial politics across theologies of difference, making their ethical analyses an invaluable framework for why and how faith communities, particularly in the United States, do justice and live in ways that attenuate social and systemic inequalities.46

45 Race and class are “gendered” categories in the modern world. Race and class operate as power dialectics coded by hegemonic interpersonal relationships in society; therefore, sexism is part of (but not necessarily constitutive of) racism and classism grounded in modern Eurocentric structures of patriarchy.

46 One of the most influential theological ethicists of the 20th century, who engaged politics but rejected the idea that social groups should proactively change oppressive structures or would ever willingly subordinate their interest to the interests of others, was Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr’s conception of individuals and groups utilized a philosophical anthropology that viewed individuals as rational and groups as nation-oriented. Yet, pride for undeserved power and privilege was humankind’s greatest fault, according to Niebuhr. The paradox of human relationship, therefore, resides in the fact that the individual has the capacity to relinquish power, but because groups need to retain power in order to survive, it is impossible for a group to relinquish power, emboldening the difference between an individual’s capacity for morality relative to a group’s capacity for morality. Evil becomes the consequence of not accepting human finite nature, which mirrors pride. Love and justice, for Niebuhr, were impractical in society; nonetheless, he believed that “justice was the highest attainable ideal in politics, and Christians were called to secure justice; there was no grace in doing nothing.” For Niebuhr, people ought to work toward approximations of justice, which was also an approximation of love in society. Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral man and immoral society: A study in ethics and politics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

Throughout one of Niebuhr’s major works, The Nature and Destiny of Man, his main focus was on sin as an inevitable existential corruption for which human beings are morally responsible. The problem of justice within his formulation was a constant problem of how to gain, sustain, and defend a relative
balance of existential and political power. Niebuhr took for granted the socialization of power as the crucial condition for the justice he perceived. de la Torre critiques this conception of social justice: “The social optimism if the turn of the twentieth century advocated by Rauschenbusch’s social gospel gave way to the Christian realism of ethicists like Reinhold Niebuhr – a realism that seriously considered human opposition to God due to the ‘sin of pride.’ While ethical realism can be applauded for its incorporation of analytical tools to discern reality, still, in spite of Niebuhr’s claim that he based his thoughts on realism, it remains an excellent example of idealistic ethics. Why? Because his ethics lack the multiple consciousness required to perceive what constitutes realism, and how that reality operates to preserve and maintain the prideful status quo designed to privilege one group at the expense of others.” (Miguel A. de la Torre, *Latina/o Social Ethics* (Baylor University Press, 2010), 14.

By the conclusion of the Second World War, Niebuhr believed the United States held a moral responsibility to assume the role of world leadership over and against a Communism that was “a vivid object lesson in the monstrous consequences of moral complacency about the relation of dubious means to supposedly good ends.” This leadership role that the Anglo-Saxon race was to play in the world was God ordained, their manifest destiny, if you will. However, to assume that Niebuhr arrived at this view only after the carnage of the Second World War and the unstable world order that preceded the conclusion of the war masks how he also advocated U.S. imperialism before the war. When considering the alternatives to Nazism, Niebuhr believed Anglo-Saxon imperialism was the best possible option within a “realistic imperialistic” world order (de la Torre, *Latina/o Social Ethics*, 15).

Niebuhr based his moral reasoning on a Eurocentric, class-defined anthropology that basically views whiteness as a trait for all of humankind to imitate. Niebuhr made preferential options for a social order at the cost of certain inequalities. This is evidenced in his advice to African Americans in their struggle for civil rights during his lifetime: “In calling for boycotts against stores and banks that discriminate against African Americans, Niebuhr advises that ‘He [the African American] would need only to fuse the aggressiveness of the new and young Negro with the patience and forbearance of the old Negro, to rob the former of the vindictiveness and the latter of its lethargy.’ For Niebuhr, the Negro’s patience and forbearance are not due to religious virtue, but rather racial weakness” (de la Torre, *Latina/o Social Ethics*, 16). Such advice, as offered by Niebuhr, is couched in an understanding of black people’s placement at a lower evolutionary stage. This stage reflects an aspect of a colonial Eurocentric human order that remains complacent with social hierarchies that privilege whiteness as the totalizing standard of what it means to be a human being. Niebuhr reveals that his ethics are consistent within a tradition of Eurocentric thought that is congruent not only with the political and economic interests of U.S. Empire, but also racist white being. Niebuhr believed in moving toward justice slowly, so as to not disrupt the social order on which justice depends. His perception of human nature reflects an accurate analysis of those in power and privilege; however, this analysis may not apply to those who are oppressed because of the notion that oppressed peoples need power for the sake of inter-communal cooperation.

The ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr were divorced from actual life experiences of marginalized communities in the United States. Furthermore, they were predicated on a Eurocentric rationality of self-consciousness that was tied to a Western narrative of nation building. Following Jesus was a personal decision that, although it had political ramifications, was not a matter of social relevance for Niebuhr: “Niebuhrian realism arose as a response to Euro-American security crisis…it was Niebuhr who provided ‘the religious rationale for the military foreign policy that created the contemporary American empire and the policy of global intervention culminating in the war in Vietnam’” (Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making*, 249-289).
The implications for Cone and de la Torre’s ethics involve critiques of liberal models of social, signified as racial, justice for its lack of attention to difference, as well as of normative Eurocentric models of economics that endorse capitalism’s ability to improve the lives and conditions of all people. Because of the ways in which capitalism is complicit with the modern/colonial complex, theological models of social/racial justice use experiences from the margins to analyze oppressive economic conditions and call for alternative economic models that generate liberative praxis. This chapter argues that, while de la Torre has fashioned a mode of ethics that responds to realities of economic injustice for the Latinx community, black and Womanist liberationists have not developed a socioeconomic model of praxis as an alternative to capitalism.

47 “Theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed. For it is impossible to speak of the God of Israelite history, who is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, without recognizing that God is the God of and for those who labor and are over laden” (Cone, Black theology, 1). In this vein, all regenerative theories of social justice are theories racial justice.

48 Eurocentric refers to the particular historical and socio-cultural framework of modernity whereby the West experienced global integration based on commercialization and commodification: of land, labor, and capital; it does not necessarily mean European, Euro-American, or Euro-Christian. It is within the context of modernity that Euro-centrism imaginatively invented capitalism as an attempt to legitimize the current social configuration as the best of all possible worlds.

49 For example, “increasingly over the past decades applications of mainstream market economics on both the macro and micro levels have substantially improved economic conditions within the United States and around the world, and for persons from all levels of society” (John E. Stapleford, Bulls, Bears & Golden Calves: Applying Christian Ethics in Economics (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 33).

50 Alistair Kee and Ivan Petrella have critiqued black and Womanist liberationists for not primarily addressing issues of economics as the context for black subordination and liberation. According to Kee, black and Womanist theologians have principally ignored the issue of class because they avoid engaging with Marxism (Alistair Kee, The Rise and Demise of Black Theology (SCM Press, 2008), 175). Kee views the absence of a critical engagement with economic thought as a huge weakness for black theologies of liberation. For example, according to Kee, while Womanism claims to address the three interlocking oppressions of racism, sexism, and classism, it is “far from attempting to illuminate the oppression of poor Black women through an analysis of ideological class interests that reduces the description of oppression to the limited categories of sex and race” (Kee, Rise and Demise, 127). Kee’s critique of black liberationists questions whether Black Theology is equipped to understand the plight of poor persons of color through a well-developed Marxist critique of U.S. capitalism (Kee, Rise and Demise, 177). Ivan Petrella argues that
This chapter is concerned with the development of economic models for a just global society. By examining the social context out of which radical theological ethicists construct liberationist modes of justice, this chapter will highlight the problem of capitalism as a theological source for the experiences of marginalized communities. In doing so, this chapter will perform two critical tasks: 1) critique liberal models of social justice that do not incorporate the experiences of marginalized communities and, therefore, are not adequately critical of how capitalism politicizes and perpetuates structures of transnational, racialized oppression; and 2) suggest a need for black liberationists to offer practical guidance toward a preferable future for poor communities of color by connecting current manifestations of racism with economic exploitation and crafting an alternative socioeconomic model to capitalism. The goal of this chapter is to show that normative Eurocentric models of economics are morally bankrupt in contrast to liberationist modes of praxis. By building upon the example of Miguel de la Torre’s theological model for racial justice as social critique of normative economics, black and Womanist liberationists need to develop an analysis of economics that counters the ways in which capitalism reconfigured colonialism and its racist, patriarchal, and oppressive power relations, and initiates ethics of racial collaboration for a just global society.  

black and Womanist theologians have not engaged capitalism beyond interesting moral remarks. For Patrella, their poetic imagery replaces political analysis (Ivan Petrella, *Beyond liberation theology: A polemic* (Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2008), 84-110.

Although this chapter positions the analyses of Cone and de la Torre among the most penetrating analyses of race and class intersectionality, it does not summarily dismiss the ideas of other thinkers simply because they do not deal with ethics in the same way. Like others within schools of thought similar to Cone and de la Torre, this dissertation will, however, critique the liberal tradition they uphold in spite of it being a platform upon which academia has been introduced to the broader language of social change.
What follows is an assessment of the insights and contributions made by black and Womanist ethicists to the field of theological ethics regarding racial politics of difference. This assessment focuses on the ways in which ethicists construct ideas of moral agency within the social context of capitalist relations. This chapter aims to highlight how liberationist influences started and carried forward a transformation to reshape the ground out of which Christian ethics understands and does ethics in the context of social and global difference. By describing the frame and modalities of Conian Theology and theological formulations of Womanism, this chapter will connect their analyses of capitalism to the need for a developed, alternative model of economic praxis. The work of Keri Day and Tim Murphy will be used to track the conversation of black and Womanist ethics and economics. Day provides discursive context for black liberationists’ relationship to political economics and transnational notions of justice, and Murphy offers a survey of how black theo-ethicists utilize capitalism as source, sin, and salvation. The methodological work of de la Torre will be helpful in this chapter’s discussion of how connections between Christian ethics and economic praxis inform the academic study of social justice. Lastly, this chapter will draw from critiques of normative Eurocentric models of economics when looking to stress the ways in which

---


53 Timothy Murphy, “The Influence of Socialism in Black and Womanist Theologies: Capitalism’s Relationship as Source, Sin, and Salvation,” *Black Theology* 10, no. 1 (2012): 28-48. Both Day and Murphy also provide insights into what can be done to develop black liberative models of economic justice for racial equality, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

54 This dissertation aligns with orthodox Marxist thought—which views the economy as a social system—for the following reasons: its implications for the origins of market systems, for the ways it presupposes the
racial politics offer a prescription to the traditional capitalist status quo. In order to begin
this study, a consideration of what is meant by the capitalist political economy and a just
global society is necessary.

**Capitalist Political Economy**

Political economy is concerned with the nature and exercise of power within the
material social context in which human beings live.\(^{55}\) In the modern era, capitalism\(^{56}\)
represents the particular sort and practice of power that defines the political economy.
Historically, when referring to the political economy, liberation theologians do not
address the technical questions that constitute modern economic theory; they are
“concerned with the broader issues of the way in which economic organization relates to

---

\(^{55}\) On a basic level, political economy refers to the relationship between politics and economics; however,
this definition presumes the ability to separate politics from economics. According to International Political
Economist Susan Strange, the political economy involves the inseparability or mutual influence of resource
mobilization and wealth-creation (the economic) and authority, power, and control (the political). Susan

\(^{56}\) While there are many modes of capitalism, of which the U.S. has experienced modifications or variants,
this dissertation concentrates on the capitalist axiomatic, which includes the production of commodities for
market exchange driven by a priority of private profit, where allocation is presumably governed by market
pricing, and surplus labor is pumped out of workers through the contract wage form. Some justifications for
capitalism emphasize the unchecked pursuit of self-interest as a timeless part of human nature (William
the historical experience of humanity in general” and to the value of people living in conditions of poverty to God in particular. Liberation Theology emerged to transform society as it viewed capitalism as a culture, not merely an economic system, whereby some societies do better than others in dealing with the maldistributive logic of the global market. In the U.S., black liberationists understand that patriarchy, racism, and poverty are not preordained; they are largely the outcome of specific institutional structures in a racialized society. The method supporting capitalism’s injustices, “human nature’s”


58 In the West, the first wave of Liberation Theologies occurred in the 1950s and 60s/70s and included Latin American Liberation Theology in South America, and Black Liberation Theology and Feminist Liberation Theology in the U.S. South. American Liberation Theology stressed the influence of economic analysis as a key part of Christian praxis. Latin American liberationists applied Marxism as a tool of economic investigation. Peruvian liberationist Gustavo Gutierrez declared that Christian theology needed to speak “of social revolution, not reform; of liberation, not development; of socialism, not modernization of the existing system” (Gustavo Gutierrez, “The Theologies of Liberation.” Reconstructing the Common Good: Theology and the Social Order (1990): 101). Argentine liberationist Jose Miguel Bonino proclaimed that the struggle for socialist transformation “concretely defines my (sic) Christian obedience in the world” Jose Miguez Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation (Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1975). The contextual factors associated with the emergence of Latin American Liberation Theology included a moral reaction to poverty and systemic injustices in South America. The onset of Latin American Liberation Theology has been discussed extensively in Smith, Christian. The emergence of liberation theology: Radical religion and social movement theory. University of Chicago Press, 1991. Other Liberation Theologies – Latinx Liberation Theology, Black Feminism, Womanism, and LGBTQ Liberation Theology – came later.


60 According to the Emerson and Smith, a racialized society is a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experience, life opportunities, and social relationships. This dissertation agrees with Emerson and Smith’s assertion that despite the legislative gains produced by the civil rights movement of the 1960s, race in the United States continues to be a factor — in some cases, a decisive factor — in determining the social rewards or penalties that individuals [and culturally diverse groups] reap or are assessed. Emerson, Michael O., and Christian Smith. Divided by faith: Evangelical religion and the problem of race in America. Oxford University Press, 2000, 8.
unchecked pursuit of self-interest is a historically contingent socio-cultural product of modernity.  

There are two main historical problems with the modern capitalist modality. First, it is highly individualistic. It confines all theories of agency to the individual as the ultimate entity in society, both neglecting inherent collectivism within racialized identities and facilitating a reductionist approach to what kind of decisions people can make within a free market. The second problem, which is related to the first, is the way modern capitalist relations make sense of the idea of freedom. Liberal, neoclassical economists believe that their conception of a free market will solve social ills. To them, a free market entails freedom to decide what to do with a monetary budget; people are equally free to make their choices given the budget constraints that they face. However, this understanding does not include a consideration of race, class, gender, and differing sets of opportunities within a free market. Instead, its view of freedom consists of

---

61 The philosophical anthropology of capitalism centers individuality; it does not presume collectivism of racial communities as a starting point of agency.

62 For example, Milton Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom* provides a sharp demonstration of what is wrong with liberal and neoclassical economics. According to Friedman, a basic belief in the capitalist right to ownership and private property overrides the desire to discriminate against non-white people. He writes: “The maintenance of the general rules of private property and of capitalism have been a major source of opportunity for Negroes (sic) and have permitted them to make greater progress than they otherwise would have made.” Accordingly, Friedman believes that the way to deal with issues of racism in the U.S. is to rely on a free market that is “colorblind.” Friedman opposes equal employment protection laws of the 1960s with the belief that the market will punish anyone who discriminates against people on the basis of difference: race, sex, or gender. He argues that discrimination against non-white people actually hurts white people; by restricting access to the most qualified people in the labor market, white capitalists impose higher costs upon themselves. Friedman does not consider the many different ways that structural inequities, labor laws, and racist institutional practices oppress non-white people. His simplistic way of making sense of oppression and equality does not account for the systemic obstacles poor persons face. As long as poor persons are equally free to spend their budget and make a living, Friedman, and capitalists like him, believe the free market will remedy social inequalities (Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and freedom* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 93-101).
“freedom from something,” whereas most Marxists and socialists focus not on whether people are equally “free from something,” but whether people actually have the same kinds of opportunities: “the freedom to become or to do.”63

Although capitalism is not the prominent topic in black and Womanist theologies, it has always played an instrumental role in shaping social problems of the black community.64 The enslavement65 of ethnic peoples from Africa, for the purpose of forced labor in the Western world,66 is an early example of the impact of capitalism for black people. Slavery in the Americas was an economic institution: in effect, a “solution” to a plantation labor problem.67 According to Eric Williams, “the very existence of British capitalism [which is the model and parent of capitalism everywhere] depended upon the slave-grown cotton of the U.S.”68 To speak of American slavery, or of the black slave


65 Adam Smith, the “father” of capitalism, opposed slavery on the grounds that it was economically inefficient; however, he wrote that: “The experience of all ages and nations [demonstrates]...that the work done by free men (sic) comes cheaper in the end than the work performed by slaves,” F. Klingsberg, “The Anti-Slavery Movement in England.” (1926), 49. The existence of slavery accelerated the U.S. entrance into industrialization.

66 As Cornel West notes, industrial capitalism in the U.S. was in large part established “on the backs of African slaves who labored in the cotton-dominated southern economy [where] profits…facilitated differentiation of the northern manufacturing economy” Cornel West, Prophetic Fragments (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 74.

67 Historian Eric Williams addresses the centrality of African slavery and the slave trade to the English economy. Williams traces how white servitude was the historic base upon which black slavery was constructed, making Africans latecomers who fit into a system that was already developed. Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery. (UNC Press Books, 2014), 7-19.

68 Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, 190.
experience in the U.S., is to speak indirectly about its traditional capitalist context. Thus, slavery and capitalism are symbiotically related. While racial prejudice and misinformation about African and indigenous peoples around the globe existed throughout continental Europe during the early stages of colonialism and modernity, the structural and social system of racism was really a consequence of slavery. Systemic racism was a byproduct of Eurocentric bias, which was rooted in ideas of human identity grafted onto a capitalist socioeconomic order.

Applied capitalist ideals use categories of difference as divisive tools for exploitation. Capitalism cements the racial prejudice of modernity and colonialism into a social order that makes race, a master category in itself, constitutive of class. This hinders a sufficient account of individuality without considering the confluence of race, class, sex, and other constructs of difference as a determining factor in a free market. In

---

69 Because of slavery’s economic roots, it in no way implied, in any scientific sense, the inferiority of black people. However, Immanuel Kant, one of the most influential thinkers of the modern era, expressed belief in the inferiority of non-white people. In his theoretical work on the concept of race, he notoriously said: “that the fact that a negro carpenter was black from head to toe clearly proved that what he said was stupid” Immanuel Kant, Observations on the Feeling of the Sublime and the Beautiful, trans. JT Goldthwait (Berkeley: California University Press, 1764), 255. Statements like this, from influential thinkers of this Eurocentric time period, were used as justification for the ethos and system of racism.

70 Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, 7.

71 Omi and Winant, Racial Formation.

72 Accordingly, “race is intrinsic to the manner in which the black laboring classes are complexly constituted at each of these levels. It enters into the way black labor, male and female, is distributed as economic agents at the level of economic practices, and the class struggles which result from it; and into the way the fractions of the black laboring classes are reconstituted through the means of political representation (parties, organizations, community action centers, publications, and campaigns), as political forces in the ‘theater of politics’ – and the political struggles which result; and the manner in which the class is articulated as the collective and individual ‘subjects’ of emergent ideologies-and the struggles over ideology, culture, and consciousness which result. This gives the matter or dimension of race, and racism, a practical as well as theoretical centrality to all the relations, which affect black labor. The constitution of this fraction as a class, and the class relations, which ascribe it, function as race relations. Race is thus, also,
the context of social injustice, capitalism facilitates a racialized subjugation of peoples under Euro-American customs and rules of law. Black Theology of the 1960s and Womanism in the 80s address the experience of black slavery as a key characteristic for the interpretation of black religious experiences. While black theologians do not represent a monolithic body of thought, black liberationists challenge racism and inherently care about the ways in which oppression is embedded within the capitalist spirit and its practical applications. In this way, for black and Womanist liberationists, privileging the role of (black) experience for theological construction becomes a modality not just for analysis of racism as social sin, but also of capitalism through notions of classism and economic exploitation as a fundamental theological source of oppression and God’s revelation.

Black liberationist and Womanist engagement with economic theory enables theological ethics to converse with the globalism of the political economy through ideas of a just global society. According to Keri Day:

For some, global political economy speaks of a new vision of wealth and a higher quality of life, sponsored by the riches of techno-capitalism. Free-market advocates often describe global political economy as a single entity of highly integrated national economies that are sustained by the global scope of...
information networks, markets, and labor. For others, global political economy
elicits angst, as it names those who are “globalized” versus those who have yet to
be globalized or are in the process of globalization (presumably away from
primitive local culture). Critical commentators on global economy argue that it
exacerbates disparities between the rich and poor. This term is charged with
ideological and geo-political baggage and implications.73

Theorists generally agree that the global influence of economics can be partly described
as a woven world of distant encounters and instant connections that has been able to
generate more wealth, resources, and cultural interactions than has previously been
experienced around the globe. However, the point of disagreement is who has benefitted
from this arrangement.74 Because of U.S. capitalism’s transnational range of influence,
the socioeconomic layers of oppression, which capitalism facilitates, function on a macro


74 Womanist Keri Day argues that a black liberationist vision for the global poor has been absent in light of
advanced capitalist processes that employ neo-liberal values in order to shape and determine economic
outcomes. Neo-liberalism hinges on the capitalist axiom of Adam Smith’s notorious “invisible hand”
(which describes the unintended social benefits of an individual’s unchecked self-interested actions),
charging government intervention of the economy as both un-natural and adverse (free enterprise). Given
the racist and predatory nature of capitalism, the structure of neo-liberalism promotes the philosophy of
success through individual action and merit that dismisses how structural constraints perpetuate poverty
among disadvantaged communities and communities of color. In turn, neo-liberal logic blames poor
persons and communities for their own deprivation, dehumanizing social bonds, privileging the
maximization of profits as an essential social value, and commodifying human beings. Keri Day, “Global
economics and US public policy: Human liberation for the global poor,” Black Theology 9, no. 1 (2011): 9-
33, 11-15. Neoliberal thinkers such as Charles Murray, Shelby Steele, and Thomas Sowell express
philosophies of free enterprise and personal responsibility as a prescription to poverty among communities
of color. For Murray, black poverty worsens due to a lack of personal responsibility. The Bell Curve:
Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life (New York: Free Press, 1994); Losing Ground:
Government (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989); and In Our Hands: A Plan to Replace the Welfare State
(New York: AEI Press, 2006). For Steele, because of social policies like Affirmative Action, black people
feel a sense of entitlement that stifles their responsibility to embrace the role of change agent. Shelby
Sowell analyzes race and poverty from a global perspective and contends that cultural behaviors and not
the persistence of structural racism are the main factors that explain socioeconomic differences among
historically marginalized groups around the world. Thomas Sowell, The economics and Politics of Race:
level around the world. A just global society accounts for the ways in which capitalism shapes global economic outcomes. Black liberationists can, therefore, articulate approaches to economic justice that respond to global poverty, especially in communities of color. This dissertation will now consider theo-ethical formulations of Black Theology and Womanism, describing their makeup and critiques of capitalism. Further, it will illustrate a need for the theological suppositions of both schools of thought in cultivating a systematic politicized alternative to capitalism.

**Black and Womanist Theologies as Constructs of Racial/Social Justice**

Cone introduces theology as a form of social, in this case racial, liberation. The point of Black Theology is to analyze white supremacy and offer a liberating alternative to it. By nuancing the discourse of salvation, liberation translates the Christian faith as an impetus for social action against oppressive structures in society. Cone underlines black liberation through the affirmation of blackness over and against white supremacy as the necessary component to actualize social justice. Cone’s theological affirmation of black identity emphasizes the liberation of poor communities from white oppression by accounting for and preserving the culture, history, and traditions of black people independent of white perspectives in an American context. Liberation accentuates an immediate opting of blackness that is crucial for black self-determination and racist white resignation. According to Cone’s expression of black liberation theology, choosing to

---

75 Questions such as “What is the global political economy?” and “Does global political economy reflect domination or liberation for local cultures around the world?” investigate the implications of globalization for cultures around the world (Enrique Dussel, “The Sociohistorical Meaning of Liberation Theology,” *Mission Studies (Hamburg)* 2 (1988): 10). While Dussel explores how questions like these relate to the global South, this dissertation explores these questions in relationship to communities of color in the U.S.
affirm “the black condition as the primary datum of reality to be reckoned with”\textsuperscript{76}—without concurrent intercommunication with white people—in constructing a just society is essential for race relations.

Cone asserts that the experience of being black is the primary source for understanding any pathway to liberation for racialized communities. Cone values the sources of the black experience to explicate his understanding of life within a system of white racism whereby black personhood is deemed invisible and inferior within the system of racism. Cone believes God’s involvement in contemporary America liberates black people from white definitions of blackness. In Cone’s theological outlook, empowering black identity is a necessary component of destroying white oppression. As a result, he recognizes black being as a cultural frequency that gauges the fluctuating currents of injustice while carving out an existence in corrupt white society. “Revelation is what Yahweh did in the event of the exodus; it is Yahweh tearing down old orders and establishing new ones.”\textsuperscript{77} “God’s revelation is a Christ-event; it is a black event – that is, black persons expressing their being in spite of white oppression.”\textsuperscript{78} According to Cone, God engages black people in and through the cultural situation of oppression, which makes God’s disclosure of God’s self to black people with regards to scripture and black tradition like the exodus event of the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus in the New Testament.

\textsuperscript{76} James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Orbis Books, 1970), 5.

\textsuperscript{77} Cone, Black Theology, 29.

\textsuperscript{78} Cone, Black Theology, 54.
For Cone, Christian theological revelation is revolution in view of black-white relations. For him to recognize revelation as decisively revolutionary in its character is to choose the risk of commitment to radical change. Radical change consists of liberation from all forms of hegemonic oppression, according to Cone. This liberation for black people is to be spearheaded by black people because “only the oppressed may write the agenda for their liberation.” Cone’s theological task analyzes the nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of oppressed peoples so they are able to see the Gospel as inseparable from their debased condition, as bestowing upon them the necessary love and strength to break the holds of oppression. Cone strongly sides with the black condition as “an ontological symbol and a visible reality which best describes what oppression means in America…Blackness, then stands for all victims of oppression who realize that the survival of their humanity is bound up with liberation from whiteness” Whiteness, according to Cone, is the symbol of the Anti-Christ: “Cone’s black theology was theology of and for the black community, seeking to interpret the religious dimensions of the forces of liberation in that community.” For Cone, authentic human existence means being (black) in (the struggle for) freedom.

While the core of Cone’s conviction within black theology remained the same throughout his career, its form changed over time. Cone’s conception of black liberation theology began with the application of European and Euro-American thinkers to the

79 Cone, Black Theology.

80 Cone, Black Theology, 7.

81 Dorrien, Social Ethics, 402.
black context; however, Cone eventually stopped relying so heavily upon Eurocentric thought.\textsuperscript{82} While the initial stages of Cone’s voice demarcated liberation of the poor and black power as essential correlations of Christian doctrines…phase two reveals Cone turning away from European and Euro-American sources…and turning toward plumbing the depths of black sources which his \textit{Spirituals and the Blues}\textsuperscript{83} and \textit{God of the Oppressed}\textsuperscript{84} underscore.\textsuperscript{85}

Arguing on the basis that whiteness is ideological rather than biological, Cone advocated that black theology had to be grounded in the history and culture of black American religion. For Cone, theological ethics was primarily a matter of the church, black and white, becoming black. Cone identified black consciousness as “defined by the liberation of people from social, political, and economic bondage for understanding the dialectic of oppression and freedom in the practice of liberation.”\textsuperscript{86}

While Cone did not systematically develop an alternative model to counter capitalism, his earliest work, \textit{Black Theology and Black Power}, did reject the “white lie” that black laziness and inferiority caused black poverty.\textsuperscript{87} Black people, who are predominantly poor, according to Cone, are connected with Jesus, who “had little toleration for the middle’ and upper-class religious snob whose attitude attempted


\textsuperscript{84} James H. Cone, \textit{God of the Oppressed} (Orbis Books, 1977).

\textsuperscript{85} David Batstone, Eduardo Mendieta, Lois Ann Lorentzen, and Dwight N. Hopkins, eds. \textit{Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity and the Americas} (Routledge, 2013), 212.

\textsuperscript{86} Cone, \textit{God of the Oppressed}, 136

\textsuperscript{87} Cone, \textit{Black Theology}, 25.
to...destroy the dignity of the poor.”88 For Cone, the black experience of poverty becomes revelatory through a relationship with Jesus. He emphasized economically exploited situations and poor conditions as “the common experience of black people in [the U.S.] that Black Theology elevates as the supreme test of truth.”89 Cone criticized theologians who “speak for a people who control the means of production [because] the problem of hunger is not a not a theological issue for them.”90 In My Soul Looks Back, Cone constructs an explicit link between poor persons and God’s revelation, claiming that, for the church to have its experience be valid for determining God’s will, it “must be in concrete solidarity with the poor who are struggling for freedom.”91 By this stage in Cone’s career, his engagement with South American theologians and Two-Third World Christians confronting economic oppression allowed him to acknowledge class privilege and the gap between wealthy persons and poor persons as relevant to black liberation,92 a sentiment he expressed in the preface to the 1989 preface to Black Theology and Black Power.93

88 Cone, Black Theology, 36.

89 Cone, Black Theology, 120.

90 Cone, Black Theology, 48.

91 Cone, My Soul Looks Back, 75.

92 The Detroit Conference, held in August 1975, called “Theology in the Americas,” brought first wave liberationists together where they broadened and deepened each other’s respective analysis (Christian Smith, The emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 208).

93 James Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, xiii–xiv. Liberationist Dwight Hopkins characterizes the second wave of Black Theology and engages Cone’s analysis on political economy. He directly addresses how global political economy affects disenfranchised communities of color around the world. He argues that: “The relocation of transnational forms [of capitalist relations] in rural areas around the globe tended to displace peasants, rural labor, and small farmers, who were forced to travel to cities for work.” And yet, the
As stated in Chapter One, Womanist theo-ethical correctives developed Cone’s work into a more radical appreciation for both the feminist and racial dimensions of black theological experiences.

[Womanism as a] concept is presented in Walker’s 1983 *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, and many women in church and society have appropriated it as a way of affirming themselves as black while simultaneously owning their connection with feminism and with the African American community, male and female. The concept of womanist allows women to claim their roots in black history, religion, and culture.

The goal of Womanism is community building, to establish a positive quality of life—economic, spiritual, and educational—for black women, men, and children. Alice Walker reminds the Christian Womanist theologian that her concern for community building and maintenance must ultimately extend to the entire Christian community and beyond that to the larger human community. Yet, Womanist consciousness is also informed by the women’s determination to love themselves, according to Delores Williams. Survival is the true sphere of life for Womanists. Like Cone, Womanists have not systematically constructed alternative economic models to capitalism, but they have critiqued capitalism as an issue of racism. Jacquelyn Grant’s focus on the experience of “the daily struggles of

---


---

94 For a four-part definition of Womanism, see Alice Walker, *In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), xi-xiii. See also Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 5.

poor black women [serves] as the gauge for the verification of the claims of womanist theology."\textsuperscript{96} Her analysis of social sin places classism alongside racism and sexism, and inaugurates the Womanist critique of capitalist oppression.\textsuperscript{97}

In \textit{Katie’s Cannon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community}, Katie Cannon partly addresses how capitalism impacts poor communities of color by addressing the ways in which racism guarantees the expansion and persistence of existing oppressive economic arrangements. She asserts that the rancor of modern racism gets its distinctive shape from the capitalist structure of labor exploitation.\textsuperscript{98} Cannon recognizes the myth of racial inferiority that enables capitalist governments, economic organizations, and financial centers to infiltrate the world.\textsuperscript{99} She writes:

\begin{quote}
[T]he hatred and fear of people of color now has developed into a global system of ideological subjugation, justifying the legitimacy of control of Third World countries through massive debt, monopoly industry, and direct military imperialism.\textsuperscript{100}
\end{quote}

Womanist Ethicist Emilie Townes explores the ways in which spirituality intersects with social issues through a theo-political analysis of spirituality as social

\begin{flushright}
\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{97} Grant believes the experiences of black women have been and continue to be defined by racism, sexism, and classism, a claim that presupposes the experience of class oppression. Jacquelyn Grant, “Womanist theology: Black women’s experience as a source for doing theology, with special reference to Christology,” in \textit{Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1980-1992}, vol. 2., eds. James Cone and Wilmore Gayraud S. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 278.

\textsuperscript{98} Katie G. Cannon, \textit{Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community} (Continuum, 1995), 160.

\textsuperscript{99} Cannon, \textit{Katie’s Canon}, 160.

\textsuperscript{100} Cannon, \textit{Katie’s Canon}, 161.
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushright}
witness. She investigates the manner in which public policies buttress socioeconomic dispossession of poor communities in the U.S. Townes asserts that public policies and their connected ideologies concerning black and poor communities disregard “the fact that poverty in the U.S. is also systematic and that most often it is the direct result of political and economic policies that deprive people of jobs, subsistence wages, and access to health care.” Womanist Kelly Brown Douglas emphasizes an awareness of socioeconomic issues and class that constrict black agency as she confronts black churches to go beyond their theological opposition of racism to also address sexism and classism. For example, in The Black Christ, Douglas deals mainly with Christology, positing that any legitimate liberation theology of survival and wholeness must be accountable to the poorest black women.

Speaking chronologically, Cone’s break from liberal Christian discourse allowed Womanism to exist within theological ethics. Both Womanism and Black Theology underscore the experience of black people and oppressed people who share in similar realities. The social elements of their analyses have shifted the mode of thought forms present within theological ethics, placing emphasis on experiences from the margins of society. Both Conian Theology and Womanism emphasize the use of reason when looking to the Bible and the life of Jesus as carried forward by the church for moral sources of love and social justice. They display the role that capitalist economic


structures play as a source of theological inquiry and reflection. Because black theo-
ethicists’ and Womanists’ analyses critique capitalism, but have not developed an
alternative model for economic justice, they could benefit from concrete approaches to
justice that not only respond to enduring poverty, but also highlight paradigms of action
that bring about social change and present alternatives to modern economic
arrangements. The work of de la Torre provides a helpful guide for how Christian
ethicists can develop a model of social justice that presents an alternative to capitalism.

**Latina/o Ethics as a Model for Theoethical Action and Racial Collaboration**

A proponent of “doing ethics from the margins,” Miguel de la Torre is a
forerunner of liberation theory across different cultural, communal, and economic social
distinctions, particularly the experience of Latina/os in America. Like Cone and the
Womanists, de la Torre is a liberationist who takes seriously the intersectionality of race,
class, and gender. As a Christian social ethicist who is a proponent of liberation theology,
he writes:

> Theologian James Cone reminds us that it is from within the oppressed black
community (and I would add any oppressed community) that Christ continues to
bring about liberation from oppressive structures. For this reason, Jesus Christ, as
understood by the disenfranchised faith community, becomes authoritative in how
ethics develops within marginalized groups. ¹⁰⁴


de la Torre brings Cone’s liberation theology into a broader conversation regarding any
and all oppressed communities. In doing so, he not only engages the same modality of
ethical thought, but he also associates Cone and the language of Christ as liberator with
different *theologies* of liberation from social oppression.
According to de la Torre, Christian liberationist ethics is praxis. Praxis connects love for God with revolutionary social practices and actions that oppose oppression. According to de la Torre, “love becomes the unifying theme of biblical text, specifically when expressed as a relational love for God and for one’s neighbor.” In order for praxis to be regenerative, it must begin from the experiential standpoint of those on the margins of any society because to love the marginalized is to love Jesus. Moreover, any construction of justice apart from the love relationship with others “becomes a perversion designed to protect the privilege of the ones doing the construction.”

de la Torre believes that:

If the dominant culture continues to be the sole interpreter of moral reality, then its perspectives will continue to be the norm by which the rest of society is morally judged…Ethics is, and must remain, the dismantling of social mechanisms that benefit one group at the expense of another, regardless if the group privilege is white black, brown, yellow, red, or any combination thereof.

Miguel de la Torre expresses that, for people who are empowered to outlast the institutionalized forces responsible for their marginalization, “the religion of Jesus is a ‘technique of survival for the oppressed.’” Although broad in scope, de la Torre’s ethics emerge out of a keen awareness of what it means to be Latina/o in today’s society.

105 Praxis is a term affiliated with the liberation theology of Latin America. Gustavo Gutierrez, A theology of liberation: History, politics, and salvation (Orbis Books, 1988), xxx, 6, 73.

106 de la Torre. Doing Christian Ethics, 11.

107 de la Torre’s model of justice emphasizes agency of marginalized communities, a notion that presupposes the centrality of inter-connections across communal dynamics as the starting point for ethics.

108 de la Torre. Doing Christian Ethics, 12.


110 de la Torre. Doing Christian Ethics, 23.
His racial context informs his theo-ethical approach, with special attention to the way in which economic disparity creates asymmetries of social power that are meant to “domesticate”\textsuperscript{111} marginalized peoples.

de la Torre’s ethics, which is rooted in the experience of the marginalized, concerns itself with conscious-raising praxis that breaks with personal and social sin and leads people to turn away from the old life of privilege and begin a new life in Christ. This new life is to be made manifest as solidarity with the same people Jesus sought to identify himself with: the outcasts.\textsuperscript{112} This radical break with how society is ordered is:

Motivated by a passion to establish justice-based relationships from which love can flow, begins with the lived experience of oppressive social situations and proceeds by working out a theory and then a course of action that will dismantle the mechanisms that cause oppression.\textsuperscript{113}

Doing ethics from the margins requires a process of observation that calls into question the historical situation that gives rise to the present situation. Questioning how social structures are constructed, while privileging the epistemological standpoint of the marginalized, guides ethical, communal action and reassessment of that and future action.\textsuperscript{114}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[111] de la Torre. \textit{Doing Christian Ethics}, 33.
\item[112] de la Torre. \textit{Doing Christian Ethics}, 45.
\item[113] de la Torre. \textit{Doing Christian Ethics}, 58.
\item[114] Miguel de la Torre and liberationists mentioned previously represent a mode of doing ethics in contrasts to popular Christian ethicists like Stanley Hauerwas. Hauerwas is credited with developing a narrative theology and is a leader in the recovery of virtue within the theological ethics discourse. For Hauerwas, virtue ethics means Christian ethics has been about the need to ask how moral selves are developed and which virtues are central to Christian living. Therefore, in ethics, the crucial matters were the practices, habits, and virtues instilled in individuals by moral communities. He explains: “As Christians we not only need a community, but a community of a particular kind to live well morally. We need a people who are capable of being faithful to a way of life, even when that way of life may be in conflict with what passes as
\end{footnotes}
A major contribution of de la Torre’s approach to theo-ethical modes of difference can be seen in his construction of a new Latina/o-centered ethical paradigm that challenges capitalism’s paradigmatic features of individualism. This paradigm is not meant to reform but to assist in the redistribution of power and wealth over and against hegemonic structures of domestication. He asserts,

Latina/o ethical thought rejects Eurocentric ethical frameworks not because they are Eurocentric, but because they are cop-opted by the social and political forces of empire in which they are embedded, and their refusal to include the Latina/o voice in the discourse makes it impossible for them to understand liberative ethics at all...Our liberation will be discovered only when we begin to construct our own ethical and moral foundation rooted within our social location and using our cultural symbols.115

‘morality’ in the larger society...Christianity is an invitation to part of an alien people who make a difference because they see something that cannot otherwise be seen without Christ” (Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon. Resident aliens: Life in the Christian colony (Abingdon Press, 1989), 24). See also Stanley Hauerwas, The Hauerwas Reader (Duke University Press, 2001), 221-254, 71-74.

According to Christian social ethicist Gary Dorrien, Hauerwas was deeply influenced by John Howard Yoder, who was a Christian pacifist. Yoder convinced Hauerwas that “mainstream social ethics had the wrong objectives. The social mission of the church was not to directly challenge and transform the structures of society. It was for the church to be itself, a nonviolent communal witness to the existing and coming kingdom of God.” Hauerwas often states, “the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic” because he holds a privatized understanding of Christian ethics. For Hauerwas, ecclesiology was a form of politics, “the politics of redemption and eschatology. The church was political to the extent that it followed Jesus, refusing to be assimilated into civic nationalism.” This privatization lacks a prophetic call that grounds ethical thought in the actual dismantling of oppressive structures apart from the church community. According to Hauerwas, the Christian must remain aloof to political change and justice, as well as progressive forces because it is only supposed to help Christian people form their community consistent with their conviction that the story of Christ is a truthful account of our existence. Gary Dorrien, Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 477-488.

Hauerwas’ ethics does not seek to understand and collaborate with experiences from the margins. According to de la Torre, Hauerwas confuses an unapologetic conviction of the truth of the Christian narrative with a privileged Eurocentric interpretation of what that truth might be, “thereby converting his truth claims into a face masking a power that reinforces Eurocentric Christian dominance in the discourse as well as the culture.” Miguel A. de la Torre, Latina/o Social Ethics (Baylor University Press, 2010), 22.

115 de la Torre, Latina/o social ethics, 62. The inclusion of marginalized voices for the purpose of challenging Eurocentric ethical formulations is not meant to outright disregard the contributions of Eurocentric thinkers. This dissertation does not summarily dismiss the ideas of liberal or Eurocentric thinkers simply because they do not deal with ethics in the same way as radical theo-ethicists. Indeed, all ideologies are fraught with internal contradictions and contradictory effects. Like others within schools of thought similar to Cone and de la Torre, this dissertation will, however, critique the exclusionary tradition of Eurocentric liberalism in spite of it being a platform upon which society and academia has been introduced to the broader language of social change. This dissertation recognizes the footholds liberalism
de la Torre advocates an ethical praxis of *acompañamiento*: of being present alongside disenfranchised Latina/o comunidades in lo cotidiano and in la lucha.116 Therefore, Christ must be understood within sociohistorical and eco-political contexts of the Latina/o community of faith that is responding to the biblical message of liberation. To do Christian ethics as Latina/os is to move away from an intellectual exercise toward concrete actions that respond to the human condition: a response that is reflective and marked by ethical living, as well as pragmatic, experimental, and cognizant of what people cannot know given that the process of discerning the contours of a just society through political engagement is ongoing.117

By moving away from the Eurocentric theoretical modalities of theo-ethical thinking, de la Torre disrupts liberal notions of social justice.118 This disruptive provides – such as the idea of social liberation, equality, and human rights – while critiquing its constraints upon historically marginalized communities.

116 Translated as follows: Miguel de la Torre advocates an ethical praxis of *accompanying*, of being present alongside disenfranchised Latina/o communities in the everydayness of life and in the struggle [to survive]. Ibid, 77.

117 De la Torre’s constructive ethical approach resonates with feminist Theologian Sharon Welch’s ethic of risk. Welch writes: “By describing an alternative system of thought an action that…we can see operating in people’s lives, we participate in constructing what [Michel] Foucault calls an alternative politics of truth…The ethic of risk is actually an attempt to exercise and create a different sort of power…On the one hand, the ethic of risk has a very different meaning for those ‘in control.’ It challenges them to relinquish ‘power over’ others…It invites them to participate in ‘power with.’” Sharon D. Welch, *A feminist ethic of risk* (Fortress Press, 1990), 4-6; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (Pantheon, 1980). The precise terms “power-over” and “power-with” were used by Mary Parker Follett in *Creative Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1924), and *Dynamic Administration* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942).

118 Political philosopher and ethicist John Rawls produced a well-known manuscript, *A Theory of Justice*, during the 1970s. He is a political liberal who builds upon continental philosophy (Rawls utilizes thinkers like Immanuel Kant, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke to construct his theory of justice) to advocate a commitment to democratic social order. In doing so, Rawls uses social contract ideology to build a model of justice. Even though the social contract framework Rawls uses is not a “Christian, theological” motif, it still operates within a theoretical framework of liberal ideas that treat ethical dimensions of human life as having a social component. Rawls builds a theory of justice for the sake
of liberty, equality, and the common good. His aim is to construct an idea that can achieve stability and social unity of the basic structures of modern constitutional democracy, not solely based on self or group interest. This idea, or overlapping consensus as he terms it, deals with Eurocentric thought forms of private rationality and public reason to reconcile freedom and inequality within democratic order. For Rawls, “society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, it is typically marked by a conflict as well as by an identity of interest.” In this schema, principles of social justice provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation: *justice as fairness*. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 4-53.

According to Rawls, all social primary goods—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or of all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favored. A person’s good is that which is needed for the successful execution of a rational long-term plan of life given reasonably favorable circumstances. For Rawls, each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all. Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 54-117).

Rawls’ concept of justice proceeds from a rational deliberation of a distribution of social goods based on what he calls an “original (hypothetical) position” whereby human beings agree to arrange a society in accordance with regulative political ideals and values of a democratic regime: “Since everyone’s well-being depends upon a scheme of cooperation without which no one could have satisfactory life, the division of advantages should be such as to draw forth the willing cooperation of everyone taking part in it, including those less well off.” Rawls theory of justice is set up in opposition to John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism. (Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 14); see also John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, vol. 7 (Bobbs-Merrill, 1971).

Rawls’ principles of efficiency and difference sanction any social arrangement in which every representative person gains, rendering potential future changes to that arrangement acceptable as an improvement if it helps the least advantaged representative person. Miguel A. de la Torres and Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, eds. *Beyond the Pale: Reading Ethics from the Margins* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 147.

The goal of Rawls’ theory “can be read as an attempt to reconcile those who have with those who do not have.” A crucial component of Rawls’ theory of justice is the “veil of ignorance” found within his image of the original position: “Among essential features of [the original position] is that no one know his place in society, his class position or social status, not does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strengths and the like…The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance. This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances” (Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 12).

The veil of ignorance is helpful in drawing attention to elements that are relevant to the topic of justice, namely social cooperation, freedom and equality, and a need for order; however, from a liberationist point of view, “it is dangerous for marginalized people not to take into consideration facts about themselves, their communities, and their societies” (de la Torres and Floyd-Thomas, *Beyond the Pale*, 149). It is precisely by being conscious of difference and intersectionality that marginalized people survive despite socially oppressive situations. Who ought to determine what is best for those less fortunate, if not the less fortunate themselves? Rawls does not consider the epistemological standpoint of those less well off as a starting point for his theory of justice. His moral principles and liberative procedures deal with matters of subjectivity steeped within frameworks of Eurocentric philosophy.

According to feminist ethicist and Anglo-American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, Rawls “conflates two questions that are in principle distinct: ‘By whom are society’s basic principles designed?’ and ‘For whom are society’s basic principles designed?’ The contracting parties [in Rawl’s hypothetical ‘original position’] are imagined to be one and the same as the citizens who will live together and whose
mechanism is what he calls an ethics para joder. According to de la Torre, “If the goal of praxis is to bring about change, then it is crucial to go beyond the rules created by the dominant culture, to move beyond what is expected, to push beyond their normalized and legitimized experiences.” Because those in power always understand the means by which they maintain their power as ethically rooted in the highest virtues and values, de la Torre’s critique of social power accentuates the concept of empire as a totalizing
dominating social force. Implicit within such a critique is a suggestion that economic ideologies affect, if not shape, the conditions of people in a globalized world. To disrupt this norm, joder becomes a moral, Christ-like imperative.

The thought forms de le Torre combats in his work speak to the realities of empire and its impact on marginalized communities. His most explicit assessment of economic injustice and its connection to race, class, and gender oppression focuses on the “spirit” of neoliberalism,122 “which encompasses both an emerging culture and a corresponding morality that justify the economic arrangements…that more often than not dehumanize those made poor by neoliberalism.”123 According to de la Torre, ensuring stable political systems is a prerequisite for the economic marketplace to function and for social justice to be a real possibility. Yet, because neoliberalism can be understood as a movement akin to that of a religion that reduces ethics to the sphere of individualism, liberationist modalities offer an alternative within people’s faith as a central focus for theo-ethical discourse.

A just globalized world requires an equitable economic foundation that would require a constant reworking of frameworks for theories of justice as presently understood within Euro-American ethical debates and visions. Miguel de la Torre’s model of praxis creates a way for communities of color to be change agents in a racist society by demonstrating that an adequate ethical response to socioeconomic difference

---

122 de la Torre describes Neoliberalism as follows; “Neoliberalism…was coined in the late 1990s to describe the social and moral implications of the free-trade policies of global capitalism (liberalism) since the collapse of the Eastern Bloc (neo-, meaning new or recent)” (de la Torre, Doing Christian Ethics, 78).

includes a focus on the economically disenfranchised, or the world’s “underclass,” in all manifestations of power. de le Torre’s mode of ethics also provides a basis for inter-communal solidarity and racial collaboration for social change because it creates a way for different communities of color to develop praxis together; while the praxis addressed in de la Torre’s work is tailored for the Latina/o community, then, it still functions as a template for action that can be both utilized by other communities and paired with other models of racial praxis. By highlighting ways in which Euro-Christian models of ethics fail to deal with racist thought forms built into the culture and theories of justice, de la Torre’s ethical modality affirms a need for more integrated visions of ethics that include experiences from racialized communities which lean heavily upon action-oriented paradigms for racial justice and social change.

James Cone, Womanists, and Miguel de la Torre situate the intersectionality of race, class, and gender within theo-ethical discourse in ways that are transformative and inspiring. Their break from liberal traditions of Christian ethics juxtaposed their radical visions of social salvation as communal liberation with Euro-American/Euro-Christian modes of privatized mono-cultural ethical identification. In spite of Cone and de la Torre’s contributions to the field of theological ethics, theories of social justice have been and continue to be crafted within the bounds of a liberal, as opposed to radical, agenda. The main contrast between liberal and radical theo-ethical paradigms can be found in their appropriation of truth claims. For the liberationist, truth comes from experience that comes before truth; conversely, for the many liberal paradigms of ethics, experience comes from interpretations of truth that come before experience. The experience of
marginalized communities serves as the basis of truth for racial justice and social transformation.
CHAPTER THREE: THE POWER OF RACIAL POLITICS

Introduction

The Black Panther Party was one of the most trenchant critics of American racism, imperialism, and economic exploitation.\(^{124}\) It became the most widely known black activist political organization of the later 1960s. Notorious for wearing distinctive black leather jackets and black berets, and often openly displaying weapons, the Panthers were innovative community activists who applied civil laws of self-defense against manifestations of systemic racism, advocating politics of self-determination as tactics of freedom for black communities around the world. The need to build self-sustainable, interconnected communities from the margins of society influenced the intellectual and socio-political principles and philosophies of the Panthers. As members of a long tradition of black people in the struggle for freedom, the Panthers were most of

---

\(^{124}\) Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther Party Minister of Information, wrote: “The enemies of black people have learned something from history even if you haven’t, and they are discovering new ways to divide us faster than we are discovering new ways to unite. One thing they know, and we know, that seems to escape you, is that there is not going to be any revolution or black liberation in the United States as long as revolutionary blacks, whites, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Indians, Chinese, and Eskimos are unwilling or unable to unite into some functional machinery that can cope with the situation. Your talk and fears about premature coalition are absurd, because no coalition against oppression by forces possessing revolutionary integrity can ever be premature. If anything, it is too late, because the forces of counterrevolution are sweeping the world, and this is happening precisely because in the past people have been united on a basis that perpetuates disunity among races and ignores basic revolutionary principles and analyses” (Carson, Clayborne. *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip Sheldon Foner (Da Capo Press, 1970), 107).
all a revolutionary black American socialist organization,\textsuperscript{125} whose radical views of racial justice laid an important foundation for moral visions of a just global society. This chapter posits that the Panthers’ political program provides an alternative economic model to normative Eurocentric paradigms that politicize and perpetuate structures of transnational, racialized oppression.

This chapter deals primarily with the power of racial politics. By emphasizing the politically repressive racial atmosphere during the heyday of the Black Panthers (1967-1971), this chapter will describe the social impact the Panthers’ revolutionary program had as it fought against and addressed economic disparities in a capitalist world. In so doing, this chapter will explain why the Panthers remain one of the most invaluable hallmarks of constructive racial politics as economic justice, in spite of media caricatures

\textsuperscript{125} “As Marxist-Leninists, the Black Panther Party advocated revolutionary struggle to establish a socialist society. Panthers turned to Marxist-Leninism for guidance in the Black Panther Party’s opposition to racism, sexism, and capitalism… Black Panther Party members…viewed themselves as disciplined, full-time revolutionaries committed to mobilizing support for a socialist revolution” (Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, \textit{Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Black Panthers and their Legacy} (Routledge, 2014), 29). The Black Panther Party co-founder Huey Newton said: “The Black Panther Party is a revolutionary Nationalist group and we see a major contradiction between capitalism in this country and our interests. We realize that this country became very rich upon slavery and that slavery is capitalism in the extreme. We have two evils to fight, capitalism and racism. We must destroy both racism and capitalism” (Clayborne, \textit{Black Panthers Speak}, 6). “The Black Panther Party grew out of the Black Power movement, but the Party transformed the ideology of Black Power into a socialist ideology, a Marxist-Leninist ideology… The Black Panther Party has transformed this movement into a socialist movement and we have become not [only] nationalists, like the Black Power movement in the past, but internationalists.” Huey P. Newton and Toni Morrison, \textit{To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton} (New York, NY: Random House, 1972). As The Black Panther co-founder Bobby Seale put it: “Working class people of all colors must unite against the exploitative, oppressive ruling class. Let me emphasize again – we believe our fight is a class struggle not a race struggle” (Bobby Seale, \textit{Seize the time: the story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton}. (Black Classic Press, 1991), 72). See also “The Socialism of the Black Panthers,” https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/black-panther-party-revolution-fred-hampton/
of them as a Black Nationalist group of angry, gun-toting militants. The goal of this chapter is to show how the Panthers’ racial politics confronted economic disparities in the

126 The discussion in this dissertation, following Black Nationalist thought, focuses on black-white binary relations and presumes that whites are the dominant group in the United States (a more complete account that incorporates the claims of and interactions among other racial and ethnic groups will be discussed in a later section of this chapter, as well as in the concluding chapter of this dissertation). Usually misunderstood to be an ideology akin to the African-American version of White Nationalism or white supremacy, Black Nationalism reflects an expression for African-Americans attempting to resolve societal racism. As a tendency for black people to realize their full potential in society, Black Nationalism has historically stood in contrast to the desire for integration (an emphasis of full participation as citizens). The move for black independence and self-determination goes back to the eighteenth century with the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church by Richard Allen (Andrew P. Smallwood, “Black Nationalism and the Call for Black power,” *African American Research Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (1999): 1).

Because of continued social, economic, and political oppression into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the concept of Black Nationalism was based first on a “subject” people under political, social, and cultural domination through militaristic occupation, and black peoples’ desire to break from foreign rule. It also represented the desire to unite disunited black people and to politically unify members and descendants of the African Diaspora and people disposed by the slave trade (Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 1988), 17). The roots of Black Nationalism in the 1800s can be traced back to movements that addressed black emigration from the U.S. to Africa and South America as a way to uplift the condition of African-Americans; it was a black American invention (Nell Irvin Painter, “Martin R. Delany: Elitism and Black Nationalism,” *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century* (1988): 149-71). According to nineteenth-century black abolitionist (and arguably the first proponent of Black Nationalism) Martin Delaney, the Black Nationalist credo can be summed up as follows: “…every people should be the originators of their own schemes, and creators of the events that lead to their destiny.” John McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African American Political Thought* (Temple University Press, 1993), 16.


Garvey’s Black Nationalism influenced the ideological formation of the Nation of Islam in the 1930s. Essien Udosen Essien-Udom, “Black nationalism: A search for an identity in America.” (1964), 18. By the late 1950s, Malcolm X, one of the more popular and recent Black Nationalists in U.S. history, had
world through a commitment to both equitably redistribute wealth in a capitalist society and create a new world for all people, not just black people. The Black Panthers’ politics shaped ideas of Black Power and galvanized democratic energies for doing social justice. The politics of the Panthers represented a practical weapon to challenge ways in which applied capitalist ideals use race, sex, and class as divisive tools for exploitation. What began as a local racial justice group—organized in 1966 in Oakland, California by two community college students to prevent police brutality—over a short time transformed into an international force whose racial politics were anti-colonial politics.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{128} The emerged as the group’s most dynamic spokesperson. Malcolm X adhered to the Nation of Islam’s adaptation of Garvey’s socio-political philosophy of Black Nationalism, pointing out in his autobiography that his parents were also followers of Marcus Garvey and members of the UNIA (Malcolm, X, \textit{The autobiography of Malcolm X} (Ballantine Books, 2015), 1-3). In the course of his political life, Malcolm X worked within local black communities and organized residents to join the Nation of Islam as an answer to their social struggles. With his rise in the organization, he then used the media as a national vice for black suffering in society. He promoted the idea that black people had the right to defend themselves against white racism by any means necessary. As the Nation of Islam moved away from political rhetoric of Black Nationalism and focused more on religious teachings to address social problems, Malcolm split with the Nation of Islam and began to change his public rhetoric, aligning himself with more socio-political Black Nationalist philosophy. Peter Louis Goldman, \textit{The Death and Life of Malcolm X} (University of Illinois Press, 1979), 115-116.

After his departure from the Nation of Islam in 1964, Malcolm X started the Organization of Afro-American Unity, embraced Pan-Africanism (a worldwide intellectual movement that aims to encourage and strengthen bonds of solidarity between all people of African descent), and broadened his scope of justice to include a more global approach. He attempted to include a more diverse group of people in the struggle for black self-determination. Malcolm’s position on politics and the black community would eventually indicate his attempt to link black oppression in the U.S. to colonial oppression of black people on the continent of Africa, leading to Malcolm’s two trips to Africa in 1964 to solicit the support of African leaders (Malcolm, X, \textit{Autobiography} 350-363; John Henrik Clarke, “Malcolm X: The Man and His Times.” \textit{Negro Digest} (1969), 215-216; Goldman, \textit{Death and Life}, 206-208).

It would be Malcolm X’s adoption and philosophy of Black Nationalism that would lay the groundwork for the Black Power movement of the late 1960s (Karen G. A. Maulana, “Introduction to black studies.” \textit{Los Angeles, University of Sankore Press} (69 _ 75) (1993), 175-176).

\textsuperscript{127} Lore about the Black Panthers’ criminality, widely broadcast in the media, eroded the Black Panther legacy. The wrongful vilification of the Black Panther Party by the FBI and various media outlets in the U.S. will be discussed in a later section of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{128} While a number of Black Power organizations at the time were interpreting different dimensions of racial oppression in the U.S., Huey Percy Newton—co-founder of The Black Panther Party—focused on police brutality and containment policing practices in black communities as an illegitimate occupying
Panthers aspired to function as a racial body politic of self-determination and human survival in an anti-black racist America. Their tactics of survival revealed mechanisms of resistance as self-defense, community service, and organized economic unity across different communities of color. The Panthers’ political philosophies combined heterodox/oppositional economic ideology with social action to create a revolutionary movement against the ongoing legacies of U.S. slavery, racism, and imperialism. Their political platform informed theories of liberation for poor communities from settler colonial conditions that remain the ground out of which the racial state perpetuates capitalist injustices.¹²⁹

What follows is a description of the political program modeled by the historic Black Panther Party. This chapter will describe its central operational tenets, and the aim of this section is to show how the Panthers sought to address racial disparities in the world through economic, specifically anti-colonial, means: a direct negation of U.S. capitalism. This section will also show the import of the Panthers’ analysis of capitalism as a pragmatic philosophy of inter-communal survival. By describing the Panthers’

---

¹²⁹ According to Omi and Winant, “The common sense view of ‘the nation’ has always been explicitly inflected by race. The United States was perceived as a ‘white man’s country’…The identification of the nation with whiteness (and maleness) was a nearly universal feature of imperial and settler nations” (Omi, and Winant. Racial Formation, 77).
revolutionary values, social services, and political commitments as an invaluable example of (cross-)racial praxis,\(^{130}\) this section will also be critical of the Panthers’ patriarchy, critiquing not only their gender and sexual politics, but also the patriarchal culture and spirit of the Black Power movement.\(^{131}\) This chapter will ultimately view The Panthers against the backdrop of the anti-black racist world they challenged, addressing institutionalized mechanisms of repression that undermined their social impact. This section will correspondingly be critical of liberal, Eurocentric models of economic justice—as addressed in Chapter 2—that neglect the politics of race in their analyses of economic injustices, failing to deal in any substantive way with the social realities of

\(^{130}\) While the idea of racial praxis and inter-communal (cross-racial) collaboration may lend itself to notions of racial reconciliation, this dissertation agrees with assertions of both James Cone and Black Power radicals that, although liberation and reconciliation are equally indispensable there can be no reconciliation without liberation. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 239-240; James H. Cone, “‘Let suffering speak’: The vocation of a black intellectual,” in *Cornel West: A Critical Reader* (2001), 111. Black Power was a declaration of freedom from seeking or depending on the good will of white people. Racial reconciliation borne out of struggle for the liberation of marginalized (and of all) communities from totalizing structures of economic oppression reveals not only good will but also the transformation of social structures and the redistribution of wealth with a concern for black life at the center of the struggle against racism.

\(^{131}\) The Black Panther Party was preeminently masculinist, often affirming hierarchies in the realm of sex and gender relations that they militantly challenged in the area of race relations: “Nobody said it, but it was understood that the Panther was a man…the words ‘Panther’ and ‘comrade’ had taken on gender connotations, denoting an inferiority in the female half of [the party].” All the original party members were men, and part of their project was to assert a strong black masculinity. While this politics challenged both stereotypes of black male deference to white power and the civil rights politics of turning the other cheek in pursuit of integration, its imagined power was too often conflated with power over the means of violence, wielded both against the “enemy” and within its own membership. The patriarchal orientation of the Panthers’ politics, common to most Black Nationalist and other movement organizations at the time, is evident throughout its early actions and communications. The Panthers’ founding, early history, and ongoing struggles as a male-oriented organization affected all men and women who subsequently joined their ranks. The history of activism by radical and revolutionary women was relatively unknown at the time, which left women struggling with male interpretations of their role. As more women joined the Panthers, modeling a mixed-gender organization that practiced gender and sexual equality remained a hard-fought battle and elusive goal. However, as more and more black women joined the Panthers, their work and leadership helped shape the entirety of the Panthers’ politics. Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s Story* (Anchor, 2015), 441-445. Angela Davis, “The Making of a Revolutionary” (1993): 1-4; Bloom, Martin Jr., Martin. *Black Against Empire*, 97-98.
inequality, discrimination, and oppression generated by the capitalist system. The Panthers’ story and work is important for this dissertation because it pushes back against traditional Western economic formulations of social ethics that rely on capitalism to improve the lives and conditions of all people.132

This chapter explores Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of The Black Panther Party to illustrate ways in which the Panthers were built on anti-colonial principles and ideologies that functioned as a revolutionary model of economic resistance in a capitalist world. The Panthers primarily opposed issues related to capitalist injustices and racial inequality that afflicted the black community.133 They challenged the individualism of Western capitalist culture and asked: “What are people’s collective responsibilities in physically and economically caring for each other, right now?” They analyzed and targeted social symptoms such as police brutality and the criminalization of black people, the prison system, housing discrimination, systemic poverty and unemployment, and the economic exploitation of marginalized and minoritized communities. This chapter will ground the identity and impact of the Panthers in the insights and experiences of black women. The invaluable contributions of former Black

132 Additionally, to leave historic groups like the Panthers out of conversations about economic justice and racial equality not only ignores a valuable part of (black) liberationist history, but it also omits and obscures “the thousands of people who dedicated their lives to The Panthers revolution, their reasons for doing so, and the political dynamics of their participation, their actions, and the consequences.” Moreover, this dissertation argues that to neglect the Panther’s politics underappreciates their intellectual resources and ultimately limits the field of social ethics’ ability to configure transformative visions of social justice as (racial) praxis. Bloom, Martin Jr, and Martin, Black Against Empire, 7.

133 In the coming sections, this chapter will show how the Panthers’ political programs opposed issues related to the relationship between capitalist injustices and anti-black racism.
Panthers Elaine Brown and Angela Davis contribute both experiential as well as intellectual resources for recovering models and critiques of social justice that share common possibilities with black and Womanist liberationists. In order to review the

---

134 Elaine Brown joined The Black Panther Party in 1968. Raised poor in Philadelphia, PA, Brown moved to Los Angeles, California, after dropping out of Temple University. “Through intelligence, hard work, wit, and a series of affluent white lovers, Brown made her way into a world of glamour and wealth, but she could never escape racism.” Elaine Brown, A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s Story (Anchor, 2015), chs. 2-5; Bloom, Martin Jr, and Martin. Black against empire, 140. Of Brown’s white lovers, Jay Kennedy was the first to politicize her, and have a strong influence on her life and her political developments. Brown, A Taste of Power, 76-104. Kennedy was a former socialist known for working with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to expose Martin Luther King Jr.’s ties to the Communist Party. According to CIA documents, “Kennedy’s position is one of complete sympathy with the Negro and the Civil Rights Movement, but hold that only through legal means and peaceful means should the Negro aims be accomplished.” David Garrow, The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr: From “Solo” to Memphis (New York: Norton, 1981, 142, and see 139-144. When in L.A. Brown soon started making friends with LA Black Nationalists, seeking a way to advance Black Power. She joined The Panthers as a rank-and-file member. In 1971, Brown became a member of The Panthers’ Central Committee. She chaired The Black Panther Party from 1974 to 1977. She wrote about her experience as a party member in her memoir, A Taste of Power.

Angela Yvonne Davis was born in Birmingham, Alabama. Her entrance onto the scene of radical Black politics in southern California roughly coincided with Elaine Brown’s (although they never became close friends, their political lives intersected – and diverged – in many significant ways.). “In late 1967 or early 1968, Angela Davis – at that time working on her PhD in philosophy with Herbert Marcuse at the University of California, San Diego, joined” social networks that sought to advance Black Power. Davis’s educational and economic privileges both distanced her from the most marginalized (African-Americans) and infused her theories of (black) liberation with an internationalist perspective. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 142. Davis describes her affiliation with The Panthers as a “permanently ambiguous status” that fluctuated between “‘member’ and ‘fellow-traveler’.” Active in community organizing, temporarily in charge of political education in the West Side office (which she worked with [prominent Panther leaders] to open) and formulating political education for the Los Angeles Chapter, Davis remained on the fringes of The Panthers’ internal contestations. She recalls her doubts about The Panthers’ militarist posturing: “I thoroughly respected The Black Panther Party’s visible defiance and principally supported the right to self-defense…I also found myself using funerals and shootings as the most obvious signposts of the passage of time. However, sensing ways in which this danger and chaos emanated not only from the enemy outside, but from the very core of the Black Panther Party, I preferred to remain uninformed about the organization’s inner operations.” Davis, “The Making of a Revolutionary,” 1-4. Davis was profoundly affected by Marxism, and sought a disciplined, antiracist movement against racialized economic exploitation. Davis also became a member of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) in 1968, at the same time that she joined The Panthers; however, her ties with CPUSA proved less problematic than her relationship with The Black Panther Party. Her affiliation with The Panthers would last less than two years; with the Communist Party, it would endure for over twenty. Davis felt that black liberation was unobtainable apart from an international workers’ movement against capitalism, imperialism, and racism. She offers one of the earliest analyses of the intersections of racism, sexism, capitalism, and antiracist feminist theory contextualized in the black experience in the Americas. She has also contributed intellectual analyses to the philosophy and history of prisons and punishment. Challenging analytical and political discourse, to illuminate a doorway in liberation praxis, Davis’ work has deeply influenced democratic theory and political struggles and is extremely informative to this dissertation’s thesis. Joy James, “The Angela Y. Davis Reader” (1998), 6-21.
Panthers’ politics, a brief history of the organization would be necessary to provide both the social context of their historic existence, as well as the development of their politics over time.

**The Dawn of Black Power**

In October 1966, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seal founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense as students at Merritt Community College in Oakland, California. Although the U.S. was fighting in the Vietnam War abroad, and despite civil rights victories at home, many black Americans felt like they were fighting an ongoing domestic war against systemic racism and poverty on a daily basis. During that time,

Civil rights mobilization played a central role in defeating legal segregation, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 enfranchised southern blacks. But for blacks outside the South, neither generated political gains or significant economic concessions. Even in its heyday in the early 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement never significantly challenged de facto, or customary, economic and political exclusion in the black ghettos of the North and West. As de jure, or legal, segregation was defeated in the South, economic and political empowerment lagged, civil rights strategies [of direct nonviolent resistance] lost their punch, and black activists across the country looked for other solutions. Many, including Newton and Seale, turned to Malcolm X.135

When he was assassinated in 1965, Malcolm X came to symbolize everything the Civil Rights Movement promised but could not deliver, and his influence expanded dramatically.136 He became a Black Power paradigm.137 Following the trend of rising

---


136 Malcolm X’s revolutionary nationalism both centralized the identity of black people in the global struggle for freedom from Western imperialism and confronted the integrationist politics of the Civil Rights Movement. When investigating diverse views on Malcolm X’s political life, a common theme discusses Malcolm X’s activism and notorious pronouncement of *self-defense* [against systemic racism] *by any means* as an alternative to Southern-style integration that sought to relieve poverty and suffering in black communities. Smallwood, “Black Nationalism,” 1.
violence against civil rights workers and supporters – and poor black communities in general – many activists became disenchanted and increasingly skeptical of the power of nonviolent resistance to affect the white power structure in the U.S. 138 Civil Rights organizations popularized by Martin Luther King, Jr., most notably the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and other political organizations were unable to “convert the energy of the [poor black communities] into political power.”139


138 For example, between January 1962 and July 1965, Los Angeles law enforcement officers killed at least sixty-five people, of which sixty-four were ruled justifiable homicides. These included twenty-seven cases in which the victim was shot in the back by law officers, twenty-five in which the victim was unarmed, twenty-three in which the victim was suspected of nonviolent crime, and four in which the victim was not suspected of any crime at the time of the shooting. The only case that the coroner’s inquest ruled to be unjustified homicide was one in which “two officers, ‘playing cops and robbers’ in Long Beach Police Station shot a newspaperman [sic].” Gerald Horne, Fire this time: The Watts uprising and the 1960s (University of Virginia Press, 1995), 68. The LAPD was known to be the most vicious police department in the country at the time. Brown, A Taste of Power, 201.

139 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 30. Consequently, in the summer before Newton and Seale formed The Panthers, Black Liberationist Stokely Carmichael’s appointment in May 1966 as chair of SNCC marked a political shift toward exclusive black self-determination in SNCC’s approach to civil rights. In June of 1966, Carmichael outlined the concept of “Black Power” as a way for black people to depart from the interracial cooperation of civil rights work and to promote racial dignity and self-respect and increased power for black people in economic and political arenas of society. Marable, Manning, “Race, reform and rebellion: The second Reconstruction in black America, 1945-1982.” (1987), 94. Carmichael posited that “concern for black power addresses itself directly to the necessity to reclaim [black] history and [black] identity from the cultural terrorism and depredation of self-justifying white guilt.” Stokely Carmichael, “Toward black liberation.” The Massachusetts Review 7, no. 4 (1966): 639-651. Carmichael believed that a new society in America had to be born in order for racism and economic exploitation by the U.S. of nonwhite people around the world to die.

The split “between the old-guard civil rights leaders represented by King and the younger wing represented by Carmichael” symbolized departures from the civil rights integrationist frame and nonviolent tactics. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 37. The concept of Black Power emerged as a doorway for black people to do social justice unapologetically from the margins.

Although he was not a black nationalist, Martin Luther King Jr. eventually began to focus on the social forces and conditions that brought philosophies like “Black Power” to the fore, calling their transition to a new mode of struggle “a response to the feeling that a real solution is hopelessly distant because of the inconsistencies, resistance, and faintheartedness of those in power.” Martin Luther King Jr., Where do we go from here: Chaos or community? vol. 2 (Beacon Press, 2010), 33. King remained fundamentally opposed to ideas within certain forms of Black Nationalism that rejected American society as irreconcilably unjust and to their disavowal of nonviolence. He understood their view that “American society is so hopelessly corrupt and enmeshed in evil that there is no possibility of salvation within,” but
Newton and Seale offered an alternative. The Black Panthers offered a political model for poor black communities that entailed three primary objectives: 1) withdrawal from white, liberal mechanisms of protest, 2) assertion of anti-colonial/anti-imperialist liberation tactics for self-defense, and 3) the development of local community service and racial collaboration networks. The Panthers’ political objectives had economic implications that challenged the capitalist power structure.\(^\text{140}\)

Shortly before forming The Panthers, Newton and Seale connected with a group called the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), an anti-imperialist and Marxist Black Nationalist organization based in Philadelphia. Working with RAM exposed Newton and Seale to strong socialist and anti-imperialist political ideas, including revolutionary nationalism of Franz Fanon, Mao Zedong, and Che Guevara. RAM advanced a key idea that would become essential to the politics of The Black Panthers: “RAM argued that black America was essentially a colony and framed the struggle against racism by blacks in the U.S. as part of the global anti-imperialist struggle against colonialism.”\(^\text{141}\) The politics of revolutionary nationalism were as follows:

---

felt that Black Nationalists rejected “the one thing that keeps the fire of revolutions burning: the ever-present flame of hope.” King Jr., Where do we go from here, 44, 46. This dissertation appreciates King’s view, and holds it in dynamic tension with the effectiveness of the Black Power movement’s ability to organize the hopelessness felt by many disenfranchised black people and people of color in 1966.

By the time Carmichael announced the advent of Black Power, Newton and Seale were eager to embrace new political ideas and organizations developing in California. Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide (Penguin, 2009).

\(^\text{140}\) The Panthers political objectives problematized the very ground out of which neoclassical economic thought/liberal capitalism orients freedom. Instead of centering the individual as the ultimate entity in society, the departure points for The Panthers’ politics of emancipation began with the collective identity of the black community. More on this point will be discussed in the following section.

\(^\text{141}\) “RAM drew on a line of thought reaching back [through the black internationalism of Malcolm X] at least to the mid-40s and the black anti-colonialism of W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Alpheaus
Revolutionary nationalism is not based on ideas of national superiority, but striving for justice and liberation of all the oppressed peoples of the world…there can be no liberty as long as black people and the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America are oppressed by [U.S.] imperialism and neo-colonialism. After four hundred years of oppression, [revolutionary nationalists] realize that slavery, racism and imperialism are all interrelated and that liberty and justice for all cannot exist peacefully with imperialism.¹⁴²

Revolutionary nationalism insisted that blacks were not full citizens in the U.S. but rather an independent nation that had been colonized in its home country. Because black Americans were colonial subjects and not full citizens, RAM argued, they owed no allegiance to the U.S. government and therefore should not fight in the Vietnam War. While RAM led the way in developing revolutionary Black Nationalist thought in the U.S. during the 1960s, the group’s practical application of these ideas was limited. RAM comprised of mostly students and intellectuals. Newton and Seale sought to meld theory with on-the-ground action and challenge police brutality and capitalism directly by involving disenfranchised black people in the struggle against racism; they eventually moved away from RAM but took with them anti-imperialist viewpoints and the idea of revolutionary nationalism.¹⁴³


¹⁴³ Revolutionary nationalism prioritized the needs and interests of black communities, and, therefore, became the first ideology that comprised The Panther’s overall strategy of economic liberation. The Panthers would now further develop their politics of emancipation by situating freedom from racism and capitalist exploitation within the context of communal, rather than individual, striving. The desire to combine theory with “on-the-ground” practice also reflects sentiments of Marxist thought that would become more apparent throughout the development of the Panthers’ politics.
Newton read about the Community Alert Patrol (CAP) in Watts, Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{144} CAP members monitored police but were religiously harassed and abused by patrol officers.\textsuperscript{145} Newton discovered that California law permitted people to carry loaded guns in public as long as the weapons were not concealed, and that citizens had the right to observe officers carrying out duties as long as they stood a reasonable distance away.\textsuperscript{146} This tactic sparked an epiphany for Newton, who realized that not only could he organize patrols like CAP, but he and his comrades in the struggle could carry guns, using weapons as a recruiting device for people who were systematically disempowered by state violence and felt empowered enough to take up arms in self-defense. Some time prior to becoming Chair of SNCC, Stokely Carmichael had organized the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) in Alabama as a new effort by local black people and SNCC to build an independent political party outside of the exclusive white Democratic Party. The LCFO selected the black panther as its symbol to signify a fierce black political challenge.\textsuperscript{147} When Newton and Seale decided to form a chapter of the

\textsuperscript{144} Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 39, 412 n80.

\textsuperscript{145} Members of CAP would follow the police with cameras and tape recorders to ensure that they did not commit acts of brutality against members of the black community. Terence Cannon, “A Night with the Watts Community Patrol,” \textit{Movement}, August 1966. “The joke was, after the patrols took their pictures and made notes about rampant police brutality on the streets, [CAP] reported [the issues] to the police.” Brown, \textit{A Taste of Power}, 247.

\textsuperscript{146} Newton, \textit{Revolutionary Suicide}, 115; Bobby Seale, \textit{Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton} (Black Classic Press, 1991), 73, 89.

\textsuperscript{147} In a June 1966 interview, John Hulett, the chairman of the LFCO, explained the symbol of the panther: “The black panther is an animal that when it is pressured it moves back until it is concerned, then it comes out fighting for life or death. We felt we had been pushed back long enough and that it was time for Negroes to come out and take over.” Committee for Lowndes County, Support the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, pamphlet 313-661108-006, Yuen Collection; Stokely Carmichael, “What we want,” \textit{New York Review of Books}, September 22, 1966.
Black Panther Party, they used the same panther logo as their symbol and took their party in the direction of political confrontation.

In early 1967, Newton and Seale’s organization became known for policing the police. Their political program initially represented a way for black people to disrupt containment policing that facilitated the criminalization and terrorizing of poor persons and neighborhoods. For many, police brutality became the first encounter of an experience intended to warehouse black bodies in jails and prisons, and to keep black people under carceral control. The black body as chattel or prisoner is the valued

---

148 The original name of the party, The Black Panther Party for Self Defense, was an adaptation of the name of an organization that preceded them, the Louisiana-based Deacons for Defense. “The Deacons for Defense had been the only civil-rights group that was openly armed and defended blacks in [Ku Klux Klan occupied territory] from being maimed or murdered for trying to exercise their constitutional rights.” The Panthers borrowed their tactic and would eventually structure their organization as follows: “There was a Central Committee which governed the party. The Central Committee was guided by the Politboro [the principal policymaking committee of a Communist Party], which made all policy decisions. Huey P. Newton was the leading member of the party as the minister of defense. Second in command was the chairman, Bobby Seale.” Brown, A Taste of Power, 135. There was no formal induction process for rank-and-file members.

“The significance of the party platform lay in the fact that it was underwritten by the gun, and by the goal of revolution as a final step to power.” The revolution was the complete overthrow of capitalism. According to Elaine Brown, the first woman member of The Black Panther Party’s Central Committee, for The Panthers to get what they wanted, they had to observe conditions as they were and develop strategies and tactics related to them. Carrying guns openly was a tactic to introduce people to an idea. It had less to do with guns than with organizing. It was the motivation behind the gun that determined the validity of its use. The ultimate armed struggle was not the business of The Panthers; their business was to develop and organize black people to carry out the revolution to achieve liberation. Brown, A Taste of Power, 134, 247-248, 304. The Panthers offered a “freedom-right-now” mentality by leveraging political power with socialist intent.

Their first direct actions laid groundwork for the organization’s initial political program: that only through armed self-defense could the black community find security. Activists in the Bay Area of California, including RAM affiliated leaders, organized a memorial for Malcolm X on the two-year anniversary of his death. Eldridge Cleaver, at the time a writer for an influential magazine that had opposed the Vietnam War, produced the idea to bring Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X’s widow, to the Bay Area as the keynote speaker at the memorial. Because of fear that Shabazz could become a target like her husband, the organizers of the event asked Newton and Seale to provide an armed escort for Shabazz. The Black Panther contingent, led by Newton, agreed and made their way in military fashion to where Shabazz was scheduled to arrive at the airport displaying shotguns and pistols. Shabazz arrived and left safely, and Panther’s tactics began to spark interest in the community at large. The sight of armed and uniformed Black Panthers caught people’s attention. More importantly, it captured people’s imagination, often getting them to listen to the Panther political program. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 48-50.
commodity of whiteness. In this way, defending the black community from militarized police forces asserted a method of black self-determination that also prevented poor persons from facing obstacles of socio-economic disenfranchisement. Newton and Seale showed people they could take matters into their own hands. In their socialist revolution, “one had, literally, to be part of the solution or part of the problem.”

According to Marxist thought, the commodity is the “cell” of capitalism. Marx, Capital. Vol. 1. Complete Works of Marx and Engels 23 (1976); Here, the process of commodification is not simply about selling “an essentialized black culture,” but rather a particular construction of blackness that has proven beneficial to white ownership in a capitalist world. “Athletes and criminals alike are profitable, not for the vast majority of African American men, but for people who own the teams, control the media, provide food, clothing and telephone services, and who consume seemingly endless images of pimps, hustlers, rapists, and felons.” Bell Hooks, who describes this process as “eating the other,” sees profit and ideology as crucial to understanding the commodification of black bodies. “When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races…affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the other.” Bell Hook, Black Looks: Race and Representation (South East Press, 1992), 23; see also Patricia Hill. Collins, “New commodities, new consumers: Selling blackness in a global marketplace.” Ethnicities 6, no. 3 (2006): 297-317, 311

As legal scholar Michelle Alexander makes clear, more black people are disenfranchised today as a result of felony laws than were denied the right to vote in 1870, the year the 15th Amendment was ratified prohibiting laws that denied the right to vote on the basis of race. Criminal records subject people to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives. Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness (The New Press, 2012). “The prison is a key component of the state’s coercive apparatus, the overriding function of which is to ensure social control…the prison has actually operated as an instrument of class domination, a means of prohibiting the have-nots from encroaching upon the haves…The built-in racism of the judicial system expresses itself, as Du Bois has suggested, in the railroading of countless innocent blacks and other minorities into the country’s coercive institutions.” Angela Y. Davis, “Political prisoners, prisons, and black liberation,” in If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance (1971): 27-43. Many members of the Panthers would face criminal charges for their efforts of self-defense, however, legal cases were often seen as opportunities for the Panthers to put America on trial, so to speak, and broadcast their political program.

Six weeks after the Black Panther Party’s well-publicized protection of Betty Shabazz, “Assemblyman David ‘Don’ Mulford introduced a bill in the California legislature proposing to outlaw the carrying of loaded firearms in public,” effectively outlawing the Black Panther’s initial strategy. Newton decided to send an armed delegation to the state capitol in protest of the ‘Mulford Act,’ garnering national attention from the media and establishing Black Panther Executive Mandate #1: “…the time has come for Black people to arm themselves against [systemic racism] before it is too late. The pending Mulford Act brings the hour of doom one step nearer. A people who have suffered so much for so long at the hands of a racist society, must draw the line somewhere. We believe that the Black communities of America must rise up as one man (sic) to halt the progression of a trend that leads inevitably to their total destruction” (Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 48-50.39, 415 n29). Although the Mulford Act was passed
**Revolutionary Services**

The Panthers’ politics of armed self-defense gave them political leverage, forcibly contesting the legitimacy of the U.S. political regime and providing a culture of (self-) defense for disenfranchised black people. Even though they structured their ranks like a paramilitary force,\(^\text{153}\) they were not just about armed action; the Panthers were a legitimate voice of black people and wanted to take care of the broad range of the community’s needs. They considered themselves to be the vanguard party of the Black Power revolution.\(^\text{154}\) The Black Panther Party created services that emphasized the commitment to advancing a revolution that addressed the needs and interests of black communities; the Panthers’ services were revolutionary because they centered an *anti-capitalist* foundation *by making means of production public property*. In socially transformative fashion, members created Panther-owned enterprises that were run and

---

and Newton and Seale’s tactic of openly carrying guns had been outlawed, the reason the Panthers went to Sacramento was to organize, to put forth a call to people ready to take a step toward revolution. The Black Panther Party still grew, and members remained dedicated to their revolutionary program of self-defense power.

According to Angela Davis, there has always been “a glaring incongruity between democracy and the capitalist economy which is the source of [black people’s] ills…The people do not exercise decisive control over the determining factors of their lives…At stake has been the collective welfare and survival of a people. *There is a distinct and qualitative difference between one breaking a law for one’s own individual self-interest and violating it in the interest of a class or a people whose oppression is expressed either directly or indirectly through that particular law.* The former might be called a criminal…but the latter, as a reformist or revolutionary, is interested in universal social change. Captured, he or she is a political prisoner…the political act is defined as criminal in order to discredit radical and revolutionary movements.” Davis, “Political Prisoners,” 27-43. In this view, The Panthers’ choice to continue to carry weapons after the passing of the Mulford Act was an act of revolutionary resistance and disciplined disobedience to oppressive law.


managed by workers who were also members of the party. They held programs in community members’ homes and appropriated abandoned buildings and converted them into offices, housing, communal business operations, and independent mechanisms to maintain their operations.\(^{155}\)

First publicized in May 1967, The Black Panther Party’s original Ten Point Program\(^ {156}\) covered demands that were essential to survival.

The party’s platform and program was a declaration and an outline for black empowerment. It demanded restitution for slavery, food, education, decent housing and land for black people. It demanded that the constitutional guarantees relating to “justice for all” be enforced for blacks; the exemption of blacks from the military service; the release of all black prisoners and the granting of new juries of their peers.\(^ {157}\)

They believed that black people would not be free until black people were able to determine their destiny, and they believed in reparations and cooperative economics. They also included a long quotation from the Declaration of Independence to provide classical political justification for their revolutionary demands and for why black people

---

\(^{155}\) Cornel West, *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs* (UNM Press, 2010). A former party member, Florence Forbes, notes, “We held [programs] in the homes of junkies, drug dealers, regular public assistance recipients, and gang bangers. Storeowners donated bread, eggs, bacon, sausage, milk, and paper products. In addition to our organizing activities, we cooked, served the food, knocked on doors to let the kids know which apartment the food was being served in, and on many occasions made last-minute pick-ups of donations from stores.” Flores A. Forbes, *Will you die with me?: My life and the Black Panther Party* (Simon and Schuster, 2006), 50.

Businesses donated food and supplies…for a mix of reasons, including altruism and the promotion of positive community relations. Businesses that chose not to help out faced the Party’s wrath. At times, The Panthers’ cajoling blended into harassment and strong-arming. Far more common were boycotts and pickets of businesses that refused to assist the programs. Equally common was the tactic of calling out, or publicly shaming, those who refused to help… Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 185.

\(^{156}\) The platform drew heavily from the ten-point platform that Malcolm X crafted for the Nation of Islam, published in August 1963; however, it modeled Malcolm X’s nationalism without the Islamic flavor. “What the Muslims Want, What the Muslims Believe,” *Muhammad Speaks*, August 16, 1963.

in the U.S. have the right to self-defense. They situated their revolutionary politics in the 
*democratic* tradition of the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{158} The Panthers were acutely aware of 
the internal contradictions present within the system against which they fought. While 
they opposed racism and the modern capitalist superstructure, they rightly made efforts to 
use the system against itself when possible in order to strategically advance their aims. 
Although the founders of the U.S. crafted the Declaration of Independence for cis-

gendered white men, the Panthers subverted its contradictions and utilized it to enable 
their own resistance movement.\textsuperscript{159}

The Panthers also developed *The Black Panther* newspaper as an important tool 
of their revolution.\textsuperscript{160} It served as a unique and dynamic voice of the black liberation 
struggle. While white and non-black owned media outlets would describe uprisings in 
black communities after police murders of black citizens as apolitical reactions to poor 
conditions, the Panthers were able to report them as signs of a broader struggle over 
social power. *The Black Panther* provided an outlet for black communities to tell counter-
narratives and frame riots and protests as moral responses, or new moods of enhanced

\textsuperscript{158} For a full layout of the original Black Panther Ten-Point Program, see Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 70-73.

On a program hosted by rightist William Buckley, Buckley’s first question to Newton was 
whether he intended to overthrow the U.S. government…Huey asked, if Buckley had to be alive at the time 
of the American Revolution, circa 1776, on which side would he have fought? Buckley stuttered, then 
laughed, and then called it a draw. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 314. Heather Hendershot, “Firing Line and 
the Black Revolution,” *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 14, 

\textsuperscript{159} The following section on economic philosophy will further address the way in which The Panthers 
pragmatically embraced tools like dialectical materialism to deal with ideological contradictions in their 
politics. Dialectical materialism will also be described in the following section.

\textsuperscript{160} Seale, *Seize the Time*, 177.
racial pride. Throughout 1967, and even a few years before, rebellions in Watts, California,161 Newark, New Jersey, Detroit, Michigan, and other predominantly black and poor cities represented political acts of black rebellion after civil rights “victories left untouched the economic and material dimensions of black subordination.”162 The Panthers situated themselves as the leading organizers of this time, issuing Executive Mandate No. 2 drafting Stokely Carmichael into the Black Panther Party. “The Black Panther pointed out that Carmichael was the first well-known [black] leader to take a stand against the [Vietnam War] draft,”163 not only presenting the U.S. as an imperialist power but also positioning the Panthers’ political program as the sole legitimate alternative.

By March 1968, SNCC attempted to merge with the Black Panthers but was eventually eclipsed by the Panthers’ social influence. Huey Newton issued Executive

---

161 “The Watts rebellion” is known to be the greatest uprising of black people against oppression during this time. Brown, A Taste of Power, 100.

162 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 91. Davis reader 45 Looting and firebombing during these insurrections can be understood as a moral response given the Panther’s politics, and especially when every day black life was lost or stolen based on the systematized disenfranchisement of bodies that defy the arbiters of the status quo. Because black communities were constantly subject to an ethic of surveillance that criminalized black people for literally nothing, the “why are you ruining your own community?” argument becomes inherently flawed and constructed to compel the oppressed to docility that submits conveniently to the whims of the white, capitalist power structure. Destruction of property in response to such social injustice reveals new meaning. According to Angela Davis, “Contained in the very concept of property, crimes are profound but suppressed social needs which express themselves in anti-social modes of action.” James, “The Angela Y. Davis Reader,” 45. Nonetheless, The Black Panthers did not celebrate the riots. Newton posited that they represented an unsophisticated reaction incapable of meeting the interests and needs from which they arise. He argued for expressing riotous tendencies of political resistance by aiming and organizing black America into a reasonable militant force that would be inextricably linked to political power with implications of revolutionizing land and the means of production. Huey Newton, “In defense of self-defense,” The Black Panther, June 20, 1967, 3-4; Huey P. Newton, “Functional definition of politics,” The Black Panther, May 15, 1967, 4.

163 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 92, 131. Others who followed his path included Muhammad Ali and Martin Luther King Jr.
Mandate No. 3, ordering all members of the Black Panther Party to keep guns in their homes and to defend themselves against any police officers or others who attempted to invade their homes without a warrant.\footnote{164}{By this time Newton had been arrested after a confrontation with an Oakland police officer and would face capital charges. There are conflicting accounts of what happened that morning, but the Panthers argued that Newton was resisting the long-perpetrated oppression of blacks by police when he was shot and imprisoned. His release became the central cause of the Panthers. Promoting the “Free Huey” campaign built emerging alliances with students and anti-war activists — advancing an anti-imperialist political ideology that linked the oppression of antiwar protestors to the oppression of blacks and Vietnamese. Huey was released because an appeals court eventually overturned the conviction. Huey Newton, “Executive Mandate No. 3,” \textit{Black Panther}, March 16, 1968, I.} Dropping the initial moniker of “for Self-Defense,”\footnote{165}{The part of the name “for Self-Defense” was dropped on March 16, 1968. \textit{Black Panther}, March 16, 1968, I.} the Panthers established a track record of militancy, strengthening their political views through anti-imperialist resistance that rejected the legitimacy of the police and the oppressive American state. By politicizing black people’s conflicts with the police, the Panthers garnered mass attention and offered practical community programs that were relevant to the socioeconomic needs of black people. “King increasingly championed the struggle against poverty and was publicly opposed to the war in Vietnam… [his program called] for a redistribution of economic power.”\footnote{166}{Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 116. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted in Jose Yglesias, “It May Be a Long, Hot Spring in the Capital,” \textit{New York Times}, March 31, 1968, SM30. The difference between King’s poor people’s campaign and The Panthers’ politics are significant. King did not consider himself a socialist: he did not call publicly for the abolition of private property in land, technology, resources, or finance. “The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King Jr.,” https://jacobinmag.com/2018/04/martin-luther-king-rhetoric-political-philosophy} After Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination in April 1968, the Panthers picked up where King and his constituents, mainly the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), left off, but with a socialist twist. At this point, the civil rights practice of nonviolence against racial exclusion had few obvious targets and could no longer generate massive and
widespread participation. The Panthers filled the vacuum both locally and internationally, frequently helping poor black communities with problems with landlords, spousal abuse, or the police, and filing for status as an official “nongoverning organization” of the United Nations.\textsuperscript{167} Chapters sprang up all over the U.S. from Los Angeles to New York.\textsuperscript{168}

By the fall of 1968, the Black Panther Party announced its intention to launch the Free Breakfast for Children Program in Oakland, one of its core and most notable community programs.\textsuperscript{169} By April 1969, the Panthers reported feeding more than twelve hundred children per day at nine facilities in California, Illinois, and Iowa. By November, the program spread to twenty-three cities nationwide, and at the height of the effort, between 1969 and 1971, at least thirty-six breakfast programs were operating nationwide with larger chapters running multiple sites.\textsuperscript{170} Virtually all chapters ran a Free Breakfast for Children program at some point. While children ate their meal, members taught them

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[168] “The party’s chapters were organized by state, except in California, where there was a chapter for Northern California and…the Southern California chapter. Within a chapter were branches, organized by city, and within the branches were sections. These were divided into subsections, which were divided into squads. Ideas and information flowed up and down the chain of command. Orders went from top to the bottom.” Brown, \textit{A Taste of Power}, 135.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
liberation lessons consisting of Panthers’ messages and black history. From August 1969 through August 1970, The Panthers developed an array of community programs in chapters across the country. These programs included the Free Breakfast for Children Program, liberation schools, free health clinics, the Free Food Distribution Program, the Free Clothing Program, child development centers, the Free Shoe Program, the Free Busing to Prison Program, the Sickle Cell Anemia Research Foundation, free housing cooperatives, the Free Pest Control Program, the Free Plumbing and Maintenance Program, renter’s assistance, legal aid, the Seniors Escorts Program, and the Free

---


The Panthers’ liberation schools included black perspectives, experiences, and knowledge in formal and informal school curricula. The liberation schools typically served children in kindergarten through the eighth grade and included meals, social welfare help for needy students and families, and extended hours. These schools also featured black history and culture, a diverse and rich academic and political curriculum, and lessons in The Panthers’ ideology, goals, and activities. The curriculum had been written to place children by ability, not by age. The Panthers saw these schools as training grounds for well-equipped citizens, sensitive to issues of class, race, and socialism. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 192; Brown, Elaine. *A Taste of Power*, 391.

The most substantial and successful Panther liberation school was the flagship Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI) in Oakland California (1971-1982, well after The Panthers had disintegrated). Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 192-193.
Ambulance Program.\footnote{172} Multiple ideological goals linked these programs, which helped to raise public consciousness about hunger and poverty in the U.S.\footnote{173}

Through their revolutionary services, The Panthers redistributed wealth in society; the services bridged artificial separations between labor and ownership; those who labored to produce the services also owned and directed the benefits of their labor in a manner that was cooperative. What made these services different than programs like the Red Cross or non-profit charity and self-help services was the fact that the Panthers explicitly tied their programs to community-based socialist ideologies with revolutionary intent. The Panthers’ socialist ideals and communal practices informed their programs, supporting and empowering black neighborhoods across the country, while simultaneously making real the socialist world for which the Panthers’ advocated in theory.

If the U.S. represented economic might as a world power, then attacking the serious problems of childhood hunger and pressing health care concerns of poor black communities was both a way to win people’s hearts and minds to the Panthers’ cause as


Women kept the community programs alive and did most of the painstaking day-to-day social labor necessary to sustain the chapters. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 193.

\footnote{173} Abron, JoNina M., “‘Serving the people’: The survival programs of the Black Panther Party,” in \textit{The Black Panther Party \textup{[}reconsidered\textup{]}}, 1998, 177-192. After picking up the gun, the next step in the process of revolution was “to get rid of the gun.” By deemphasizing the gun and emphasizing social programs, The Panthers underscored the need for the people to survive to the point of revolution. They called their Revolutionary Programs Survival Programs. To expose oppressive contradictions of the power structure beyond police brutality, the programs became another tactic for revolution. The Survival Programs would become a vehicle to draw the line from the black condition to the system of capitalism. They were models for alternative institutions. Brown, \textit{A Taste of Power}, 248-250. Newton advanced the phrase “survival pending revolution” (Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 354-355, 474 n44).
well as address the most basic material needs of poor persons. The community service programs were part of a broader insurgency, which aimed to change the U.S. capitalist system to a more equitable socialist one.\textsuperscript{174} Black Panther offices were located in the center of low-income areas of black communities. While the NAACP and Urban League began as middle-class-led movements, the Panthers primarily identified with the black working and underclass, linking the organization to varieties of black worker- and union-based activism dating back to the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{175} The Panthers provided their own labor and collected local and individual business donations to provide concrete aid to all people and materialize the notion of service to the community.\textsuperscript{176} Their programs conveyed the insufficiency of capitalism to meet even the most basic needs of poor persons and compensated for the inadequacy of its institutions. The Panthers’ programs

\textsuperscript{174} “Actions The Black Panther Party engaged in were purely strategic for political purposes designed to mobilize the community.” David Hilliard, \textit{Huey: Spirit of the Panther} (Hachette UK, 2009). The Panthers’ programs helped to shed light on the failure of the U.S. government to address issues of poverty; they conveyed the insufficiency of the capitalist welfare state to meet even the most basic needs of its black citizens. “Through direct service to community, The Panthers accomplished several pressing functions…the services provided concrete aid to an impressive number and cross-section of folk…materializing the notion of community.” These programs expanded communities’ understanding of how to create and sustain their own much-needed institutions from the ground up. The programs enabled The Panthers to grow, especially in the face of state repression. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 196-197.


\textsuperscript{176} “Panthers were assigned to work according to their abilities. There being no such thing as private income, a party member’s labor was rewarded through the redistribution of [their] collective resources in the form of food, clothing, housing, medical care, transportation, and personal expense money. [They] thought of this system as a model socialist arrangement by which each member…and [the] people were all served.” The Panthers’ socialist economic arrangements created black community spaces, “where profit was shared [and] returned to the same community.” Brown, \textit{A Taste of Power}, 330-331. Panthers also lived together in communal arrangements.
modeled black communities’ ability to manage their best interests; they constituted formal steps to advance a black nation within the U.S. nation: an expression of the Panthers’ revolutionary nationalism.

**Economic Philosophy**

The Black Panther Party’s anti-imperialist politics were deeply inflected by Marxist thought. A radical approach to economic theories, whereby socialist ideas shaped core ideologies, was at the heart of the Panthers’ revolutionary vision. Leading party members believed that, under socialism, the U.S. government could centralize the wealth of the country for the purpose of fairly redistributing it to each member of society. Conversely, capitalism produced an unjust and inhuman social scheme by promoting private ownership of property, accumulation of personal wealth, profit-driven production, and the exploitation of human beings. Although they were not utopian thinkers like Marx, the goal of the Panthers’ revolution was ultimately to institute socialism in the U.S.

---

177 According to philosopher and social theorist Cornel West, “Marxist thought contains two specific elements: a theory of history and an understanding of capitalism. The Marxist theory of history claims: (1) The history of human societies is the history of their transitional stages. (2) The transitional stages of human societies are discernable owing to their systems of production, or their organizational arrangements in which people produce goods and services for their survival. (3) Conflict within systems of production of human societies ultimately results in fundamental social change, or transitions from one historical stage to another. (4) Conflict within systems of production of human societies consists of cleavages between social classes (in those systems of production). (5) Social classes are historically transient, rooted in a particular set of socioeconomic conditions. (6) Therefore, the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. The Marxist theory of capitalist society claims: Capitalism is a historically transient system of production, which requires human beings to produce commodities for the purpose of maximizing [profits]. This production presupposes a fundamental social relation between the purchasers and sellers of a particular commodity, namely the labor-power (time, skill, and expertise) of producers. This crucial commodity is bought by capitalists who own the land, instruments, and capital necessary for production; it is sold by producers, whose labor-power is needed for production. The aim of the former is to maximize profits; that of the latter, to insure their own survival.” Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude, eds. *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 875.

Their primary job was to organize the people to work for that goal. This included black people in particular, but also all the other oppressed people in the U.S. and around the world, including the *lumpen proletariat*. Karl Marx deemed the *lumpen* insignificant because he believed they had no relationship to industrial production and could have no relevancy to socialist revolution. The Panthers disagreed with this idea, because a significant percentage of black people fell into the *lumpen proletariat* class: the underemployed, the unemployed, and the unemployable. Moreover, a significant part of the membership of the Panthers came from that class. The party believed it was the sector in the U.S. most motivated to lead the revolution.

Party members took political education classes and were required to closely read books about Malcolm X, Mao Zedong, Franz Fanon, and Karl Marx. Party members also

---

179 “The only effective guarantee against the victory of fascism is an indivisible mass movement which refuses to conduct business as usual as long as repression rages on...The pivotal struggle which must be waged in the ranks of the working class is consequently the open, unreserved battle against entrenched racism...the greatest menace to racism and fascism is unity!” Davis, “Political Prisoners,” 27-43.

180 Another reason The Panthers’ politics and programs were revolutionary in character was because they emphasized the empowerment of the most abject, disadvantaged class of people (as opposed to the atomic individual in a free market) as the pathway to racial and economic emancipation. According to Newton, “The Panthers seek to organize the ‘unemployable’ elements of society, or *lumpen proletariat*, because they form the only revolutionary class in technological society. As the ruling circle continue to build their technocracy, more and more of the proletariat will become unemployable, become lumpen, until they have become the popular class, the revolutionary class.” Huey P. Newton, “Speech Delivered at Boston College: November 18, 1970,” in *The Huey P. Newton Reader* (1995), 160-75.

“The black *lumpen proletariat*, unlike Marx’s working class, had absolutely no stake in industrial America. They existed at the bottom level of society in America, outside the capitalist system that was the basis for the oppression of black people. They were the millions of black domestics and porters, nurses’ aides and maintenance men (sic), laundresses and cooks, sharecroppers, unpropertied ghetto dwellers, welfare mothers, and street hustlers. At their lowest level, at the core, they were the gang members and the gangster, the pimps and the prostitutes, the drug users and dealers, the common thieves and murderers.” Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 135-136.

181 While the black underclass was a core constituency of The Panthers, many members and most leaders were either working class or middle class with educated and professional families. No narrowly working-class Marxist revolutionary formation in the U.S. has had nearly as transformative a historical effect as the Black Panther Party. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 467 n6.
had to help other members understand these texts. The Panthers’ embrace of orthodox Marxism was not ever rigid, sectarian, or dogmatic; Panther leaders did not adopt Marxism wholesale. Newton explained that The Panthers were dialectical materialists,\(^{182}\) drawing a dynamic and evolving method of political analysis from Marx rather than any stagnant set of ideas.\(^{183}\) The Panthers’ use and incorporation of Marxist theory evolved over time. Different Panther leaders used Marxist theory in different ways, to different degrees, and at different times. As ideas garnered influence, the Panthers would further integrate their analyses of race and class into its Ten Point Program, changing point 3, for example, in July 1969 from “We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our

---

\(^{182}\) Dialectical materialism is a philosophy of science and nature developed in Europe and based on the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Ralf Wadenström, http://www.wadenstrom.net/texter/madi.htm: “This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e. civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; describing it in its action as the state, and to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc. etc. arise from it, and trace their origins and growth from that basis. Thus, the whole thing can, of course, be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another). It has not, like the idealistic view of history, in every period to look for a category [e.g., measuring periods of history in accordance to certain ideas], but remains constantly on the real ground of history; it does not explain practice from the idea but explains the formation of ideas from material practice. Accordingly it comes to the conclusion that all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism, by resolution into ‘self-consciousness’ or transformation into ‘apparitions,’ ‘spectres,’ ‘whims,’ etc. but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which gave rise to this idealistic humbug; that not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history, also of religion, of philosophy and all other types of theory. It shows that history does not end by being resolved into ‘self-consciousness as spirit of the spirit,’ but that in it at each stage there is found a material result: a sum of productive forces, an historically created relation of individuals to nature and to one another, which is handed down to each generation from its predecessor; a mass of productive forces, capital funds and conditions, which, on the one hand, is indeed modified by the new generation, but also on the other prescribes for it its conditions of life and gives it a definite development, a special character. It shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The German Ideology*, vol. 1. (International Publishers Co, 1972); see Chapter 2.

\(^{183}\) Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 466 n5.
Black Community” to the Marx-inflected point “We want an end to the robbery by the CAPITALIST of our Black Community.”

“The Black Panthers held that the freedom of black people was tied to armed socialist revolution, which incorporated, by definition, the liberation of all oppressed people, including poor and working-class whites.” From its inception, the Black Panther Party believed in inter-communal solidarity; it “had embraced both an uncompromising commitment to black liberation and a principled rejection of a separatist

184 “The unchanging core of The Black Panther Party’s political ideology was black anti-imperialism... While Marxist content deepened and shifted over The Panthers’ history, the basic idea remained constant. The Black Panther Party saw itself as the revolutionary vanguard advancing the interests of the black community for self-determination within a larger global struggle against imperialism. Huey Newton sought to more fully articulate this theory as a theory of ‘revolutionary Intercommunalism’ in 1971,” an evolution of “revolutionary nationalism.” Sharper and more important shifts of this theory reflect practical political changes rather than narrowly ideological ones. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 312, 467 n11.

The Panthers did not simply seek to understand the world, but they also sought to change it by acting and engaging in praxis, which reflects a Marxist trend of connecting theory and practice. Karl Marx, The German ideology: including theses on Feuerbach and introduction to the critique of political economy (Pyr Books, 1976).

The Panthers long line of Marx-inflected anti-imperialist thinking drew on a long line of black anti-colonialist thinkers going back at least to W.E.B. Du Bois. Von Eschen, Race Against Empire. The nondogmatic, Marx-inflected anti-imperialism of The Black Panthers allowed them to find common cause with many other movements around the world.

185 Although the Panthers advanced self-defense philosophy that involved taking up arms, there were two main schools of thought related to armed revolution throughout their legend of activism. One school of thought, led by Huey Newton and the national organization, advocated for the primacy of their survival programs. In this view, The Panthers would overthrow the system of capitalism within the U.S. government by modeling a new, socialist society within society to the point of total transformation. The other, associated with Eldridge Cleaver, promoted a violent overthrow of the U.S. government by way of guerilla warfare and immediate insurrection. Eventually, these two schools of thought came to a head, and Newton expelled Cleaver and party members and chapters that agreed with him from The Black Panther Party in March 1971 for encouraging people to go to war with the U.S. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 339, 358, 362-371, 374, 376, 377, 380, 390, 476 n66, 477 n72, 478 n81; Brown, A Taste of Power, 246-249, 261-262. This internal factionalism crystallized two distinct ideological positions that facilitated external repression of The Panthers. Cleaver’s position facilitated the development of the “Black Liberation Army” (BLA), as an underground insurrectionary wing of The Panthers. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 343.

186 Brown, A Taste of Power, 142.
black politics.” Unlike most other Black Nationalist organizations, The Panthers embraced cross-racial politics. For The Black Panther Party, liberation was a condition not limited to a particular culture, race, or people; therefore, the principles upon which their struggle for human rights was based was all inclusive and applied equally to all people. Moreover, without support from non-black allies, the Panthers would not have been as effective in their struggle against racism. However, from the start, party members had conflicting ideas about how to advance the group’s ideological support for racial equality. Nonetheless, the Panthers keenly understood that their struggle for liberation required nonblack allies, especially progressive white allies. Campaigns built on emerging alliances with students and white antiwar activists advanced their anti-imperialist political ideology that linked the oppression of antiwar protestors to the oppression of blacks and Vietnamese.

187 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 110.

188 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 79.

189 Whatever the hazards of association, The Panthers even accepted support from white Hollywood stars like Bert Sneider, Susan St. James, Jon Voigt, and Jane Fonda just to name a few. Stars would lend their homes for fund-raising soirees, subscribe to and help obtain other subscriptions for their newspaper, send monthly checks for their breakfast program, and pay bails. Brown, A Taste of Power, 208-209.


191 In his efforts to build a black student alliance in California, sociology professor and Black Power activist Harry Truly explained to Elaine Brown the importance of students in a socialist revolution: “Although the student in not a worker, he (sic) is also not a member of the bourgeoisie, at least not as a student. He (sic) has not relation to the means of production and thus has not real class status. The student’s youthful fervor, however, combined with his (sic) biological moment of rebellion against all authority, make him (sic) a prime candidate for a revolutionary.” Brown, A Taste of Power, 111.

192 The most important early alliance was with the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP), which was part of a national network of antiwar political organizations. The Panthers believed that the increasing isolation of the back radical movement from the white radical movement was a dangerous thing, playing into the power
Black Power helped to spark draft resistance and the development of the New Left. The multiracial New Left would prove to be a crucial ally of the Black Panther Party.\textsuperscript{193} As the vanguard party, The Panthers accepted support from whites, but also set the terms for what that support looked like. The Panthers believed only black people should determine their own destiny. They allowed whites to offer material contributions, information, and skills, but were opposed to any relationship whereby whites could dominate Black Power politics. The New Left’s self-understanding evolved in relation to the struggle for black liberation. It was not anti-imperialist in the beginning, but between 1966 and 1968 its major growth correlated with draft resistance: built upon embrace of revolutionary anti-imperialism and the struggle for black liberation by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the main New Left organization.\textsuperscript{194} Eventually, SDS made support for the Panthers one of its causes as many antiwar activists declared themselves revolutionaries, seeking self-determination through resistance. Much support from

\textsuperscript{193} Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 107-110.

\textsuperscript{194} Although popular imagery portrays draft resisters as mostly white, black SNCC activists were among the first to mobilize resistance to the draft during the Vietnam War. With the emergence of “Black Power,” SNCC activists had intensified their opposition to the war and invented the slogan “Hell no, we won’t go!” In July 1966, at Stokely Carmichael’s behest, SDS and SNCC published a joint statement to the House Committee on the Armed Services cosigned by Carmichael and Carl Oglesby, president of SDS, that would later be adopted and spread by the Black Panther Party: “In a supposedly ‘free society’ conscription is a form of legalized enslavement of the worst kind: a slave had to serve his master’s economic interest with labor and sweat; but a draftee must serve the ‘national interest’ with murder and his own blood. Black men in the United States are forced to kill their colored brothers in Vietnam for $95 a month and the risk of death, injury and disease; this is why we oppose the draft.” Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}. 
numerous New Left organizations also increased, creating alliances that would develop into significant coalitions for racial and economic justice.

One of the more visionary Panther chapters that dedicated itself to coalition building for economic justice across racial lines was the Chicago chapter, led by Fred Hampton. Hampton told the New Leftists: “We [are] gonna fight racism not with racism, but with solidarity. We [are] not gonna fight capitalism with Black capitalism, but we [are] gonna fight it with socialism.” Known as the ‘Rainbow Coalition,’—

195 Black capitalism is a movement among black Americans to build wealth through the ownership and development of businesses.


197 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 292. The Young Lords originated in the 1950s as a Puerto Rican street gang in Chicago’s Lincoln Park neighborhood. See de la Torre, Miguel A. Latino/a Social Ethics, 89. The Young Lords wore purple berets, asserted their right to armed self-defense, and developed a thirteen-point platform and program modeled after The Black Panther’s program. In 1969, they changed their name to the Young Lords Party and began publishing a mimeographed packet called Palante, which grew into a full-fledged newspaper by May 1970. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 291-293.

Another group that sought to emulate The Panthers was a Chinese-American group in San Francisco that grew out of Leway, a nonprofit organization serving low-income youths in Chinatown. Named after Mao Zedong’s army in China, they saw themselves as part of a global revolutionary struggle for self-determination, in solidarity with both the Chinese Revolution and The Black Panthers. The Red Guard emulated many Black Panther activities, including establishing community service programs and organizing against police brutality. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 461 n6.

The Young Patriots was a group of poor revolutionary white youths led by William “Preacherman” Fesperman, a white seminary student who had moved to Chicago from Appalachia, wore Black Panther buttons, and displayed the Confederate flag. Over time The Panthers learned to tolerate Confederate flags as intransigent signs for rebellion. Their only stipulation was that the white Young Patriots denounce racism. Eventually, Young Patriots rejected their deeply embedded ideas of white supremacy – and even the Confederate flag – as they realized how much they had in common with The Black Panthers and Young Lords. The Panthers helped the Patriots set up their own community service programs. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 292; The Panthers and the Patriots 1969: When Black Panthers Aligned with Confederate-flag-wielding, Working-class Whites Colette Gaithttps://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/05/black-panthers-young-patriots-fred-hampton-chicago-era - http://theconversation.com/chicago-1969-when-black-panthers-aligned-with-confederate-flag-wielding-working-class-whites-68961.

Young white activists did not face racial oppression. And the Appalachian Young Patriots notwithstanding, many white New Left activists came from middle class and did not personally suffer class exploitation either. Nonetheless, many looked to the Black Panther Party as a primary reference point for their own political activism. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 296.
codeword for economic justice—Fred Hampton and the Chicago Black Panthers built alliances by June 1969 with the white New Left, the Communist Party, The Young Lords, the Red Guard, and the Young Patriots as a socialist site of racial collaboration and solidarity. Each racial activist group represented a model of economic justice. The groups shared a revolutionary commitment to class struggle across race.\textsuperscript{198} The Coalition reflected the international scope of the Panthers’ politics, which allowed them to find common cause with many other movements around the world. Anti-imperialist movements from around the world came to see The Panthers as part of their own global cause.\textsuperscript{199} Each culture functioned as an “arm of economic and social liberation.”\textsuperscript{200} The possibility of the Panthers’ revolution appeared to have a promising future. However, “it lurks under the surface wherever there is potential resistance to the power of [capitalism], the parasitic interests which control this society.”\textsuperscript{201} In 1969 and 1970, the Panthers’ politics catapulted them into the center of ever-widening resistance.

\textbf{Forms of Repression}

Both external and internal factors contributed to the decline of the Black Panther Party. State repression was a key external factor. To the state, the Black Panthers represented a political insurgency. Insurgency threatens political arrangements of the status quo, pushing constituencies to choose sides on polarizing issues and leading to


\textsuperscript{199} Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 312-322.

\textsuperscript{200} Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 315.

\textsuperscript{201} James, “The Angela Y. Davis Reader,” 51.
realignments. Such realignments are usually accompanied by attempts by supporters of the status quo to repress insurgents. By 1968, the broad insurgency of which the Panthers were a part, including urban rebellions and draft resistance, destabilized status quo political arrangements. Republican President Richard Nixon “seized the day with a ‘Law and Order’ platform that...brought increasingly virulent state repression of The Black Panthers alongside broad alienation of blacks and liberals.” Even before Nixon’s election, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had targeted groups like the Black Panther Party for concerted repressive action. The federal government formalized and consolidated its “intelligence-gathering” (read: disruptive) activities into the first counterintelligence program known as COINTELPRO in 1956, specifically targeting the Communist Party USA. By the time the Panthers became a political force, many in the federal government believed they constituted a threat to the internal security of the U.S.

“On August 25, 1967, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover sent a memo to twenty-three FBI field offices around the country instructing agents to initiate counterintelligence

202 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 200.


205 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 201. Architects of the illegal and violent counterrevolutionary COINTELPRO attack on The Black Panther Party also include Richard Nixon, Attorney General John Mitchell, and Governor Ronald Reagan.
activities against Black Nationalist organizations.” The memo stated that the purpose of the new counterintelligence endeavor was to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of Black Nationalist, their leadership, spokespersons, membership, and supporters. The FBI wanted to frustrate the unity and recruitment of Black Power racial justice organizations. On March 4, 1968, Hoover expanded COINTELPRO to more field offices and established substantial long-term goals for the program that included the following:

Prevent the rise of a “[black] messiah” who could unify, and electrify, the militant Black Nationalist movement. Malcolm X might have been such a “messiah;” he is the martyr of the movement today…Prevent militant Black Nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability. The goal of discrediting black nationalists must be handled tactically in three ways. You must discredit these groups and individuals to, first, the responsible Negro community. Second, they must be discredited to the white community, both the responsible community and to “liberals” who have vestiges of sympathy for militant black nationalists simply because they are Negroes. Third, these groups must be discredited in the eyes of Negro radicals, the followers of the movement…A final goal should be to prevent the long-range growth of militant black nationalist organizations, especially among youth. Specific tactics to prevent these groups from converting young people must be developed.

206 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire.

207 Ibid. Memo, J. Edgar, FBI Director, to Field Offices, August 25, 1967. All FBI memos cited in this chapter/dissertation are available in the FBI Reading Room, FBI Headquarters, Washington, DC. The memo targeted six “black nationalist hate-type” organizations. However, most revealing was the inclusion of King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). This was noteworthy because King and the other Christian ministers in the SCLC consistently called for nonviolence and rejected Black Nationalism, advocating instead for reforms within the political framework of the U.S. that would address the struggle of blacks and other poor and disenfranchised Americans. When King and the SCLC redirected their efforts after the defeat of Jim Crow in the mid 1960s and called for the redress of the problems of poverty and for an end to the Vietnam War, Hoover qualified these political positions as a dire threat to national security. At the time, The Black Panthers were still a local organization in Oakland and were not mentioned. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 201, 441 n8.

One month later to the day, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. By the fall of 1968, the FBI was secretly developing what would become its most intensive program to repress any black political organization, as the Panthers emerged as the leading black movement organization in the U.S.209 Because the mid-1960s brought a divide over the Vietnam War, stakes for anti-imperialist protest were high: “Unlike the Civil Rights Movement, draft resistance specifically violated federal rather than local policies.”210 On July 15, 1969, with the Panthers in the midst of leading a strong anti-imperialist coalition, and draft resistance at the height of its political fervor, Hoover publicly announced that of all the Black Nationalist groups, “the Black Panther Party, without question, represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the [U.S.].”211

Hoover recognized that criminalization was the best way to diminish public support for the Panthers and the political challenge they posed. “Of 295 actions initiated by the FBI’s Counterintelligence Program to destabilize Black Nationalist organizations, 233 of them (79%) targeted the Black Panther Party.”212 COINTELPRO aimed to undermine the Panthers’ ability to threaten the political status quo. Federal actions against The Panthers ranged from spreading false information about misappropriation of party money to inciting marital strife, and in some cases, participating in planned killings

210 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 204.
211 J. Edgar Hoover quoted by United Press International (UPI) in “FBI Director Blacks Black Panthers,” Oakland Tribune, July 15, 1969, 17. This may be the most famous quote Hoover made about The Panthers. The first major newspaper report of the quote was found in David McClintick, “Black Panthers: Negro Militants Use Free Food, Medical Aid, to Promote Revolution,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 29, 1969, I.
212 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 210, 445 n47.
of Panther leaders. No aspect of The Panthers program was of greater concern to the FBI than the Free Breakfast for Children Program. Hoover expressed:

You must recognize that one of our primary aims in counterintelligence…is to keep [The Black Panther Party] isolated from the moderate black and white community. This is most emphatically pointed out in their Breakfast for Children Program, where they are actively soliciting and receiving support from uninformed whites and moderate blacks.

In order to undermine support for the Panthers’ breakfast program, for example, FBI agents forged letters and incendiary propaganda to supermarkets to dissuade them from providing food and impersonated concerned citizens to dissuade churches from providing space for the program, among other activities. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) even mobilized to address the political “threat” posed by the Panthers, establishing the Activist Organizations Committee in July 1969 to “collect basic intelligence data” on party members, organizations that did business with the Panthers, and other “radical”

213 Before Nixon became president, there had not been a single raid of a Black Panthers office. However, state repression intensified after Nixon’s election, and police and federal agents began staging raids on Panther offices. In this context, because of Newton’s Executive Mandate No. 3, commanding Panthers to defend their homes and offices with guns against trespass by police who could not produce legal warrants, raids on Panther offices were acts of war. Pioneering the first-ever Special Weapons Assault Team (SWAT), the raiding officers came dressed for war. For more details on FBI and police raids of Panther offices and homes, see Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 223, 233-237. Panther leaders like Elmer “Geronimo” Pratt, a Vietnam veteran, joined The Panthers in 1968 and agreed to share military knowledge to help other Panther leaders to train members in more effective self-defense measures. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 216-217.

One of the more treacherous government raids on The Panthers involved the planned assassination of the Chicago chapter leader Fred Hampton. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 237-239, 451n42-46.


215 Church Committee Report, book 3, 210-211. See also assorted news coverage of these revelations, such as Richard Philbrick, “Panther Free Meals ‘Threat’ to Hoover,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 8, 1976, 5. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, *Black Against Empire*,
political organizations. The FBI supplied the names of individuals and organizations, and, in turn, the IRS supplied the detailed personal financial information as well as targeted these individuals for special enforcement of tax regulations.\footnote{\textsuperscript{216} Memo, Internal Revenue Service Assistant Commissioner D.W. Bacon to chief counsel and other officers, Re: Activist Organizations Committee, July 24, 1969: “Internal Revenue Service: An Intelligence Resource and Collector,” in Church Committee Report, book 3, 876-890.} The FBI infiltrated the Panthers and shrouded its politics, ultimately discrediting their image and repressing the organization’s long-term potential.\footnote{\textsuperscript{217} The FBI effectively exploited internal factionalism within the Black Panther Party as part of their strategy of vilifying The Panthers’ public image, playing up the notion that the Panthers were primarily attempting to go to war with the U.S. government. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 339. As the Panthers quickly grew and met with increasingly repressive action from the state, and as both legitimate members and agent provocateurs engaged in unsupportable actions, The Panthers sought to groom its public image, likely seeing community programs as ways to win broad support and clean its reputation. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 343, 471 n5. However, for most practical purposes, The Black Panther Party ceased to be a national organization and once again became a local Oakland organization. And for much of the 1970s, Newton ruled The Panthers through force and fear and began behaving like a strung-out gangster. To what extent federal counterintelligence measures may have contributed to the unraveling of Newton and the Oakland Party in the 1970s is difficult to determine. But the spirit of J. Edgar Hoover would have been proud of the results. Nothing did more to criminalize The Panthers in the public imagination than the allegations about Newton’s actions in the years following the ideological split. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 381-383.} By 1971, the Black Panther Party was quickly unraveling. The greatest strengths of the Panthers’ politics after 1971 were its notoriety and its concentration of relationships and resources in Oakland.

\textbf{Gender and The Panthers}

\footnote{Another reason The Panthers’ influence declined was due to concessions of the federal government. By late 1969, and increasingly into the 1970s, concessions by the political establishment to key constituencies eroded the bases of allied support for the Black Panthers’ politics. Political transformations undercut the self-interests that motivated blacks, opponents of the Vietnam War, and revolutionary governments internationally to support The Panthers’ politics. As Democratic leaders opposed the war and Nixon scaled back the military draft, blacks won broader social access and political representation, and revolutionary governments entered diplomatic relations with the U.S., The Panthers had greater difficulty sustaining allied support. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 346-347.} Until his death in 1996, one of the very last voices of The Black Panthers was Rapper and Actor Tupac Amaru Shakur. Shakur was son of prominent Panther Afeni Shakur, he was nephew of Assata Shakur, and godson to Geronimo Pratt. Growing up around party members shaped Tupac’s formative years and spirituality. Throughout his music and entertainment career, Shakur remained committed to revolutionary sentiments of The Panthers, with an intentional love for black communities.
Gender bias was an internal factor of repression within the part, and sexism in the Black Panther Party constituted a significant problem. Gender bias diminished the Panthers’ lasting potential as a revolutionary force for social change. Radical movements and thought forms related to race, class, and gender have implications for identity. The Black Panther Party demonstrates that, although oppressive structures create discriminatory labels for communities of people, fighting for social justice means to configure identity within the boundaries others have created, sometimes internalizing oppression in the process. The Panthers were not reflexively critical of patriarchy and (black) male privilege. Although Malcolm X, the political precursor to The Panthers, said that the most disrespected, unprotected, neglected person in America is the black woman,218 the Panthers did not primarily imbue their politics with tactics for self-determination that centered on the systemic oppression of black women and emphasized the confluence of racism and sexism in their struggle for liberation.

The initial Panther project aimed to politicize “brothers on the block.”219 Newton viewed racial obstacles pertaining to black men not as a result of the pathology of black matriarchal culture, or a cultural difficulty endemic to black people,220 but as a form of oppression imposed on black men by the racist social structure. Women who wanted to fight for freedom were drawn to the Panthers’ political mission. Within months of its founding, The Panthers attracted the participation of women, “who soon became trusted


219 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 34-39, 193.

220 Newton’s position was contrary to Moynihan report—a policy study for the War on Poverty—issued by the U.S. Department of Labor in 1965. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 95.
and invaluable members. From the start, women participated in all Party activities, including the more militant ones.” Women became valued members: as soldiers, poets, and writers.

[Original] Panther women applauded the idea of revolutionary nationhood and the bold masculinity of the Black Panther Party. In a recruitment pitch aimed at women, [Panther women] emphasized the appeal of a black political organization led by and consisting of revolutionary black men... On occasion, the early Party imitated Madison Avenue tactics, blatantly exploiting black female beauty to sell the Party. 222

Relative to other militant Black Nationalist organizations,223 The Panthers appeared to be a strong advocate for women’s rights. Even though original party members were all men, the Panthers’ gender politics shifted over time. Still, deeply rooted sexism made the struggle for gender and sexual equality difficult:

[For] women, [the] role was not very different from that of men, except in certain particulars. [Panther women leaders] told [women Panthers] point-blank that as women [they] might have to have a sexual encounter with “the enemy” at night and slit his throat in the morning... 224

221 The Panther entourage that confronted the police while escorting Betty Shabazz at the San Francisco Airport included women. Women Panthers also participated in the direct action at the capitol building in Sacramento. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire.

222 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 96.

223 Both Elaine Brown and Angela Davis view The Black Panther Party as a stronger advocate for women’s rights than Black Nationalist groups like Ron Karenga’s US (as in “us” versus “them”) Organization – a leading Black Nationalist organization that began in California and rivaled The Panthers. US “was certainly not a promoter of equal opportunity for black women, inside or outside his ranks.” Brown, A Taste of Power, 116; Davis, “The Making of a Revolutionary,” 1-4. Karenga’s group sought to transform society through a cultural, rather than political, revolution. They were not opposed to political action but saw culture as the key vehicle for change. US remained a small, tight-knit organization, delivered no political consequences, and garnered limited national following. US is best known for starting the holiday Kwanza. Scot Brown, Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

“No matter how close a woman came to approximating the contributions of the most respected male leader, the respect granter her could always be reversed with the language and practice of sexual seduction,”225 whether initiated by the woman or the man. One of the most explosive struggles women Panthers faced was the mistaken notion that one of the women’s revolutionary duties was to have sex with revolutionary men.

“Feminism was not a popular subject among most black women active in revolutionary organizations.”226 While many black women detested the overt sexism of male leaders, they tended to associate feminism with middle-class white women who could not understand their battles against racism. In failing to recognize the masculinist emphasis of their own struggles, black women were at risk. Early articles by women in the Black Panther about issues of gender and sexuality varied widely in tone, subject matter, and consciousness. Some Panther women argued that by embracing the revolutionary struggle, social barriers and distinctions between men and women disappeared and became replaced by communal unity; however, in their nuanced treatment of gender and sexuality, they would represent the man’s revolutionary role as central and the woman’s revolutionary role as supportive.227 “Telling contrasts, such as the iconic representation of Huey as ‘Black Warrior Prince’ set against the relatively obscure representation of the Panther woman as ‘Woman Warrior,’ speak to the initial


226 Davis, “The Making of a Revolutionary.”

masculine identity of the Party.” The Panthers often described a revolutionary’s identity by centering its male leaders and counterparts.

Women had been denied equal access to power as party members. Over time, most of the rank-and-file members of The Panthers were women; however, male supremacy persisted. The black women who increasingly joined the Panthers were far more active than the men in forcing The Panthers to focus on critical gender and sexuality concerns. Intra-party debates on gender and sexuality were shaped by parallel conversations about gender and sexual issues within the Black Liberation Struggle and black communities, as well as within the growing Women’s Liberation Movement, Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement, and sexual revolution. Women Panthers urged the men and women to address gender oppression, distinguishing it from race and class oppression, and pointing out that it compounded systemic social problems. They placed the issue of male chauvinism in its larger context as a reflection of capitalist society.

---


229 “Women were a pivotal force in The Panthers, at times constituting a majority of The Panthers’ membership. Panther women energized the local branches and played a central role in creating the indigenous culture of struggle that gave local chapters their resonance and distinctiveness. Providing informal childcare networks and day-care centers, assisting elderly and infirm community members with their housing, food, medical, and even more personal concerns were generally the province of Panther women.” Reflecting traditional gender norms, The Panthers newspaper endorsed Survival Programs as fundamentally materialistic. Davis, “The Making of a Revolutionary,” 193, 440 n50.


231 “In its conceptions and goals, the women’s liberation movement is not homogeneous. Its decentralized organizational forms, while genuinely anti-authoritarian in intent, simultaneously reflect pronounced, even irreconcilable, theoretical differences within. Yet, in the midst of this diversity, the predominant tendency of the more militant sector is probably represented by Robin Morgan when she invokes ‘the profoundly radical analysis beginning to emerge from revolutionary feminism: that capitalism, imperialism, and racism
They asserted that the Panthers “needed to address such problems collaboratively and find better ways of working together rather than tolerate male chauvinism and let it cause rifts.”

It was important for all party members to stay unified, particularly around issues of gender and sexuality because “one of the most destructive aspects of male supremacy is how it divides people who should be united.”

What the Panthers failed to underline within its ranks through praxis was the way in which the liberation of black people was inextricably linked to the liberation of black women and gender equality. Their political structure did not realize ways in which sexism is antithetical to liberationist praxis. Panther men saw women as their “other half,” relying on patriarchal social norms. “One focus, for example, was the idea of revolutionary motherhood: having babies for the revolution.” In this formulation of revolutionary motherhood, the revolutionary woman made babies not just for the revolutionary nation but for her revolutionary man. “Revolutionary love, then, supported are symptoms of male supremacy – sexism” (Angela Y. Davis, “Women and capitalism: Dialectics of oppression and liberation.” The Black Feminist Reader (2000), 161).

---

232 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 303.

233 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 465 n40.

234 To the extent that “Panthers pads,” or living arrangements, operated among egalitarian and democratic lines, Panther homes reflected the Panthers’ critique of conventional familial norms. The Panthers’ open and nonmonogamous communal living arrangements aimed to offer freer and more fulfilling lives. However, Panther pads often perpetuated the very practices they were supposed to alleviate, reinscribing male privilege and sexist attitudes. Thus, women were primarily responsible for housework and bore the brunt of the responsibility for open relationships with men, taking on family planning and reproductive concerns – notable birth control and abortions. Similarly, pregnancy and childcare were primarily women’s responsibility: so single mothers with children were often expected to pull the same load as their single and childless comrades. Rather than ushering in greater and sexual quality, these Panther pads all too often replicated gender and sexual inequality. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 195.

235 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 305.
patriarchy, confirming conventional heterosexual gender norms.” Panther women would recall having babies because they thought it was their revolutionary duty to have babies, not because they were thinking of what they wanted for themselves. In practice, such notions put severe strain on some Panther women, which was exacerbated by the strains of state repression. If the state killed a Panther man, Panther women who were pregnant or had their babies did not always receive sufficient support. Further, there were no policies in place for childcare, or for how to continue to function in the structure of the movement while providing for children. The Panthers often provided no more support for Panther mothers in handling the demands of childcare and motherhood than most employers did at the time for their women employees.

However, Panther leaders sought to deepen commitments to gender and sexual liberation: “Newton issued a formal Party position about the Women’s and Gay Liberation Movements, challenging the heterosexual normativity and patriarchy in the Party.” The Black Panther Party became the first major national black organization to embrace gay rights. They identified women’s and gay liberation as integral intersections in the global struggle against oppression. Newton acknowledged the need to confront ingrained gender and sexual values and language, but disclaimed that the Panthers had

236 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire.

237 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 466 n47.

238 Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 466 n48.

239 Newton identified “homosexuals and women as oppressed groups,” noting that “homosexuals…might be the most oppressed people in the society” and arguing that “a homosexual man should have freedom to use his body in whatever was he wants to” (Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 306, 466 n49).
not yet established a revolutionary value system, but were only in the process of establishing it.\(^\text{240}\) When men Panthers attempted to champion gender equality, it remained rooted in normative heterosexuality. As with men in society at large, changing Panther men’s chauvinist attitudes and practices was a challenge. Nationalism has historically been a gendered project, and the revolutionary black nationalism of the Black Panther Party began as a part of that project, centering on patriarchy and male privilege.

Given this masculinist context, women had to define for themselves their identities as woman and revolutionaries. These intense struggles yielded an evolving and, at times, highly contested gender and sexual consciousness within and beyond the Panthers. Because their main battle was against white supremacy and capitalist exploitation, party members clung to each other fiercely, forgetting cliques, and chauvinism, and internal strife when possible;\(^\text{241}\) male-female relationships and issues of gender and sexuality often took a backseat.\(^\text{242}\) The extreme state repression of the Panthers further intensified the common belief that the racial and class components of the struggle had to take priority. The Panthers did not build mechanisms into the organization’s internal structure to systematically deal with (black) male privilege and patriarchy.\(^\text{243}\) Such a task was an opportunity missed, specifically by many Panther men.

\(^{240}\) Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 466 n52

\(^{241}\) Brown, \textit{A Taste of Power}, 194.

\(^{242}\) Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 308.

\(^{243}\) The gendering of The Panthers’ community programs as female and the public face of The Panthers as male became entrenched for two major reasons. First, The Panthers’ continuing masculinism and the society’s deeply ingrained gender norms undercut the women’s serious battles against sexism within The Panthers. Second, even as women’s participation became increasingly central to the operation of The...
While the Panthers’ political program struggled against all forms of oppression, the Black Panther Party drove a cycle of insurgency that could have gone to reaches far beyond its heyday if its internal gender and sexual politics were imbued with its community-oriented activism and racial and economic politics of liberation.

Still, the Black Panther Party modeled a new way to become black and human and fight systemic poverty in a racist world. It transformed “democracy” from a noun to a verb. It modeled a form of democratic socialism that offers a precedent for appreciating the power of racial politics: The Panthers energized people to make elites responsible. Through dynamic striving and collective movement, the Panthers helped people take back power in the face of the misuse of elite power. In a form of black socialist praxis, they signified all power to all people.

Panthers and questions of gender loomed large. The Panthers had no formal and effective mechanisms to root out sexism and misogyny. Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, Black Against Empire, 194.

Cornel West, Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism (Penguin, 2005).
CHAPTER FOUR: RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Introduction

The field of Christian social ethics faces several dilemmas, of which two are: 1) liberal models of social justice have both shaped the development of twenty-first century Christian discourse, endorsing the belief that capitalism will improve the lives and conditions of all people, and 2) there is a need for black and Womanist ethicists\textsuperscript{245} to contribute models of racial justice that advance radical socioeconomic alternatives to capitalism. Given de la Torre’s mode of ethics that responds to realities of economic injustice for the Latina/o community, black and Womanist ethicists can harvest anticolonial politics of The Black Panther Party to develop models of praxis that empower black communities and affirm transformative moral visions of a just

\textsuperscript{245} While this dissertation agrees that all ethicists, especially ethicists tied to subaltern positions in society, need to contribute models of racial justice that advance socioeconomic alternatives to capitalism, the focus of this chapter deals with the trajectory and scope of black liberationist and Womanist ethics.
society. In order for Black Theology/Womanism and the racial politics of The Black Panthers to align, religious literacy \(^{246}\) can assist in the process of developing a stronger connection between the role of religion/religious faith from the margins and secular economic praxis in the struggle for social justice. This chapter argues that, together, the Panthers’ socialist, anticolonial foundations and the activist/public arm of black churches \(^{247}\) represent a holistic manifestation of praxis for the (economic) liberation of black lives.

This chapter puts black liberationist and Womanist ethics in conversation with the black socialist underpinnings of The Black Panther Party from 1967-1971. By critically analyzing the term “religion,” this chapter will discuss the racial politics associated with agency within black Christian and secular approaches to social justice. This section aims to bolster the need for praxis that reflects upon structural forms of privilege in its struggle for economic and racial change. The goal of this chapter is to show that black and Womanist ethics and the Black Panthers’ anti-colonialism share racial concerns that are

---

\(^{246}\) The following definition of religious literacy articulated by religious studies scholar Diane Moore has been adopted by the American Academy of Religion to help educators understand what is required for a basic understanding of religion and its roles in human experience: Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world’s religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place. Critical to this definition is the importance of understanding religions and religious influences in context and as inextricably woven into all dimensions of human experience. Such an understanding highlights the inadequacy of understanding religions through common means such as learning about ritual practices or exploring “what scriptures say” about topics or questions. Unfortunately, these are some of the most common approaches to learning about religion and lead to simplistic and inaccurate representations of the roles religions play in human agency and understanding. “Definition of Religious Literacy,” https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/definition-religious-literacy

\(^{247}\) Here, this dissertation invokes the spirit of black prophetic witness from the Civil Rights Movement as led by black religious leaders and church people.
more important than their ideological differences, and when put together, can fundamentally change economic discourse on praxis. A major takeaway from this chapter will be the philosophically religious connections across visions of economic and racial praxis between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ schools of thought, as well as ways to account for domains of knowledge and power for the sake of reworking Christian liberationist ethics toward new economic models of racial justice. Concepts of black Feminist/Womanist principles of radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement will guide this chapter’s concern with racial politics of liberation.²⁴⁸

What follows is an exploration of the similarities and differences between black and Womanist ethics and the anticolonial bedrocks of the Black Panther Party. This exploration will emphasize a need for economic praxis from the moral agency of black communities. This chapter aims to connect the core socialist tenets of the Panthers’ political program with black and Womanist theo-ethical reflection as well as with the activist/public arm of black churches. By invoking the invitation made by James Cone and Cornel West, for black (and Womanist) liberationists to engage heterodox economic theories for social change,²⁴⁹ this chapter continues a conversation in Black Theology

²⁴⁸ Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 8-11.

²⁴⁹ In 1980, Cone wrote “The Black Church and Marxism” for the Democratic Socialist Organization Committee’s seminar in Washington D.C. in order to provide historical context for the relationship between the black church and Marxist thought. It marked the first occasion that Marxist thinkers and black Christians came together for dialogue “looking toward doing some things together to make this society more humane.” Cone describes his failure of not dealing with Marxist thought when he wrote Black Theology and Black Power, A Black Theology of Liberation, and God of the Oppressed. He posits that the black church cannot remain silent regarding socialism, because such silence would be interpreted as
about Christian ethics and Marxist thought. Womanist themes from Kelly Brown Douglas and Jacquelyn Grant will frame the re-signification of Black Power and liberationist thought. Cornel West’s eschatological vision for economic justice will supplement this chapter’s conversation on racial and economic liberation. Ethical analysis from Joan Martin will conclude this chapter’s suggestions for how black and Womanist theo-ethicists can advance liberating approaches to work and economics. This chapter grounds its exploration in a breakdown of connections among religion as a category in the modern world, Christianity as its prototypical default, and race.250

The following section appreciates the rhetorical candor of Malcolm X’s infamous critique of Christianity:

Brothers and sisters, the white man has brainwashed us black people to fasten our gaze upon a blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus! We're worshiping a Jesus that doesn't even look like us! Oh, yes… Now, just think of this. The blond-haired, blue-eyed white man has taught you and me to worship a white Jesus, and to shout and sing and pray to this God that's his God, the white man's God. The white man has taught us to shout and sing and pray until we die, to wait until death, for some

support for the capitalistic system that exploits the poor all over the earth. Cone and Harrington, The Black Church and Marxism, 1980.

According to social philosopher Cornel West, “Black [and Womanist] theologians [and ethicists] and Marxist thinkers are strangers. They steer clear of one another, each content to express concerns to their respective audiences. Needless to say, their concerns overlap. Both focus on the plight of the exploited, oppressed and degraded peoples of the world, their relative powerlessness and possible empowerment…This common focus warrants a serious dialogue between black [and Womanist] theologians [and ethicists] and Marxist thinkers. This dialogue should not be a mere academic chat that separates religionists and secularists, theists and atheists. Instead it ought to be an earnest encounter that clearly specifies the different sources of their praxis of faith, yet accents the possibility of mutually arrived-at political action. The aim of this encounter is to change the world, not each other’s faith; to put both groups on the offensive for structural change, not put black Christians on the defensive; and to enhance the quality of life of the dispossessed, not expose the empty Marxist meaning of death” Cornel West, Black Theology and Marxist Thought (Theology in the Americas, 1979).

250 “The intergenerational lesson of radical subjectivity is to wrest one’s sense of identity out of the hold of hegemonic normativity, as womanist ethicists show in their work can be done” (Floyd-Thomas, Mining the Motherlode, 9). The term ‘hegemonic’ will be discussed more in the concluding section of this chapter.
dreamy heaven-in-the-hereafter, when we're dead, while this white man has his milk and honey in the streets paved with golden dollars right here on this earth!251

This chapter acknowledges that modern race is an inseparable component of Christian history and “religious” studies. By highlighting connections among the categories of race, religion, and Christianity, this section’s goal is to problematize the theoretical bases of the categories themselves, as well as to consider new grounds on which to discuss Christianity, religion, and race. The implications for this assessment will affect the way in which the academic study of religion appropriates notions of human anthropology, undertaking a radical transformation and redress for future tasks of philosophical, theological, and religious construction. The work of Talal Asad and Jose Casanova will also be used to assist in the first section’s breakdown of religion in the modern world, as it is fraught with Western assumptions of what it means to be a human being.

Religion, Knowledge, and Power

Many religious theories use the term “religion” when referring to existential dimensions of life that may or may not be immediately obvious to human beings.252

Religion, therefore, signifies a portal, or doorway, into symbolic forms of human

---


While this chapter is particularly critical of Christianity, the author of this dissertation identifies as a (black) Christian and believes that the church can learn from The Black Panther Party and its progenitors, namely Malcolm X. With ethical constructs of (black) love and (social) justice in place, the church can specifically learn how to consider new sociopolitical constellations for justice that advance radical economic arrangements, an idea that will be explored in more detail in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

252 For example, American anthropologist Clifford Geertz proposes that religion is “a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men (sic) by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” Clifford Geertz and Michael Banton, “Religion as a cultural system,” (1966), 90.
existence and experience that can be coded into language and communicated among people who perceive life as such. However, more recent work in the field of religious

Émile Durkheim is a notable classical thinker acknowledged in the field of religious studies who sought to create a universal definition of religion and understood religion to be a window into all meaningful social human realities. When referring to thinkers like Durkheim as classical thinkers, the term ‘classical’ denotes the Western social context out of which scholars appreciate his theories of religion within broader discourses surrounding his ideas and the defining of religion.

Durkheim, a founder of sociology, was born in France in 1858. He is recognized for making sociology a scientific endeavor and incorporating it into the French academic curriculum under the title “Science Sociale.” He took for granted the term ‘religion,’ and approached it from a rationalist, “objective” viewpoint. As a sociologist, his works related to religion are concerned with apprehending by observation a collective way of looking at the human world. His views of religion “with a social ‘eye’” argues that the “social location of individuals shapes their individual consciousness and, in turn, conditions the religious experience of pious believers.” Durkheim would agree, for example, with the statement that “pious believers experience a religious exaltation at revival meetings…because of the effects of being part of a crowd in a high state of excitement…called ‘effervescence.’” Society can be said to be prior to forces that stem solely from within the lone person.” Ivan Strenski, ed. Thinking about Religion: A Reader (Blackwell, 2006), 284.

Durkheim’s major theoretical book on religion, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, investigates what he calls Totemism, the ‘religion’ of the first peoples of Australia, as an avenue “to yield an understanding of the religious nature of man, by showing…an essential and permanent aspect of humanity.” He wants to find the origin and source of religion, and his research leads him to believe that the ‘permanent aspect of humanity,’ or human nature, found in the first peoples of Australia is the human need and capacity to relate socially. His central thesis reports that the totem is in fact society itself conceived symbolically. He writes, “If the totem is both the symbol of god and of society, are these not one and the same . . . The god of the clan…must therefore be the clan itself, but transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal species that serve as totems.” By grafting Totemism onto a totalizing platform of academic study called ‘religion,’ Durkheim projects his understanding of human nature onto the first peoples of Australia, thereby coming up with a universal definition of religion. This process leads him to define religion as “beliefs and practices relative to sacred things…that unite into one single moral community called a church…all those who adhere to them” (Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (Courier Dover Publications, 2012), 3, 154, 46).

Prior to Durkheim were two leading theories on the origins of religious thought at the level of “first peoples”: animism and naturism. Animism posited that religious thought derived from the phenomena of “spiritual beings” that are visible to human imagination through dreams and death. Leading theorists of animism were Edward B. Taylor and later Herbert Spencer. Naturism is a “secondary or derived form” or subset of animism. Naturism asserts religious thought derives from evolution of human imagination in confrontation with forces of nature, either great cosmic forces, such as winds, rivers, stars or the sky, or objects of various sorts that cover the surface of the earth. In this theory, animism becomes an incidental case on naturism. The leading theorist of naturism was Max Muller. In both naturism and animism, origins of religion are located in delusions; Durkheim took an approach to ground religion in a more “objective reality” (Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 47-75).

Although he did not reduce religion to morals, or to Christianity, Durkheim perceived the moral identity of the first peoples of Australia as comprehensible insofar as they fit the general category of religious lifestyles of his time. His book’s title, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, spoke to the dominant academic conception of a global family of human societies existing from the least complex to the most complex in terms of sociopolitical organization and technology. To Durkheim, the first peoples of Australia characterized a more basic community of human beings that also stood as a representation of a
studies calls into question the universalization of ‘religion’ and its definition, challenging
the ways in which scholars understand, define, and teach religion as a category in the
modern world. Nonetheless, classical theories of religion offer a foundation out of
which the field of religious studies has introduced terminologies scholars associate with
religious thinking and constructs. Life “as it exists now” would be radically different if
the word ‘religion’ was not a part of the fabric of society. And yet, classical thought
around the theorizing of religion is not devoid of academic assumptions that are
connected to cultural particularities in the actual process of defining “religion” itself.

Thought forms reveal biases related to the social locations of thinkers. It is this
sociopolitical context that is of interest when calling into question the universalization of
religion and its definition.

simpler form of human nature relative to European notions of civilization. “He held as a scientific principle
the belief that to understand a complex phenomenon one must begin by examining its simplest form.”
Moreover, Durkheim theorized from the presumption that human nature and ‘religion’ work together in his
definition of religion. To read his thesis only as a monograph on Australian totemism, a general theory of
religion, an epistemology, a sociology of religion, and/or an account of the origin of social dynamics would
be to dismiss his conflation of human nature with his belief that all human natures are inherently religious
and can be interpreted in ‘religious,’ especially Christian, terms. Durkheim, Elementary Forms, viii.

The realm of concepts Durkheim uses when describing humanity’s nature as religious nature
structures his contribution to the category of religion itself. In other words, if all of humanity is a
developmental chain culminating in European thought forms of life and society, then the European
understanding of the term ‘religion (or religious)’ becomes a standard through which human beings are
qualified as being human. The philosophical anthropology of Durkheim’s thought – social realism –
reflects a level of abstraction that subsumes religion into an objective sphere of ideas. According to
Durkheim, “Society is not at all the illogical or a-logical, inherent and fantastic being which has too often
been considered. Quite the contrary, the collective consciousness is the highest form of psychic life, since it
is the consciousness of consciousness. Being placed outside of and above individual and local
contingencies, it sees things only in their permanent and essential aspects, which it crystallizes into
communicable ideas. At the same time that it sees from above, it sees farther; at every moment of time it
embraces all known reality; that is why it alone can furnish the minds with the molds which are applicable
to the totality of things and which make it possible to think of them.” In this way, for Durkheim, by
definition, society’s ‘collective character’ will continue to assume a sacred character, just as religion will
continue to assume a social character. All societies have religion, because all religion is society reflecting

Markus Dressler and Arvind Mandair, Secularism and Religion-making (Oxford: Oxford University
The category of religion comes out of the Enlightenment project in Europe from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Enlightenment worldview sought to catalog and explain all human knowledge with an extremely heavy emphasis on rational intelligibility or empirical, scientific validity. The study of religion became a subfield of this project. Before the Enlightenment period, Eurocentric social order understood religious theorizing to occupy the “highest” model of explanatory significance. However, with the rise of science, religion became an area of study among other academic fields of inquiry, and theoretical tools used to study religion indicated ways of understanding the category itself. By the nineteenth century, Germany invented the “university,” founded on the premise that there needed to be academic freedom for professors to conduct research. Through nineteenth century academic developments, different fields within the study of religion emerged—history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, philology, etc.—that comprised the overall field itself. These strategies laid foundations for classical descriptions of religion by first taking the term “religion” as their analytical point of departure.255

Classical scholarship in the field of religious studies laid a foundation claim: “religion is a distinctive space of human practice and belief, which cannot be reduced to any other.”256 Any insistence that religion has an autonomous essence bids scholars to describe religion (like any essence) as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon.


However, postcolonial theorist Talal Asad examines the ways in which a theoretical search for an essence of “religion as transcultural and transhistorical phenomenon invites scholars to separate it conceptually from domains of power. By identifying some of the historical shifts that have produced the popular concept of religion as the concept of transhistorical essence, Asad argues persuasively that there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but also because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes. According to Asad, “the entire phenomenon of religion is to be seen in large measure in the context of Christian attempts to achieve a coherence in doctrines and practices, rules and regulations, even if that was a state never fully attained.” 

Asad highlights that these attempts had the effect of problematizing the idea of an anthropological definition of religion because they were attached to a particular history of knowledge and power out of which the modern world has been constructed. Asad writes:

It was in the seventeenth century, following the fragmentation of the unity and authority of the Roman Church, and the consequent wars of religion, which tore European principalities apart, that the earliest attempts at producing a universal definition were made.

From being a concrete set of practical rules ascribed to specific processes of power and knowledge, scholars abstracted and universalized constructs of religion, mainly from the standpoint of the religious European consciousness. Asad’s point regarding religious symbols underlines this fact due to his idea that “religious symbols

---

258 Asad, “Construction of Religion.”
cannot be understood independently of their historical relations with nonreligious symbols or of their articulations in and of social life, in which work and power are always crucial.\textsuperscript{259} The symbols through which religious knowledge was originally authorized and then abstracted for universalization within religious theoretical discourses were reflective of Eurocentric ways of thinking about religion. These mechanisms imposed definitions of religion upon both Western and non-Western cultures, creating inherent political structures within religious theorizing that proved to be both inclusive and exclusive.\textsuperscript{260}

A major characteristic of Western traditional religious symbolism consisted of a sacred-profane dualism.\textsuperscript{261} In \textit{Public Religions in the Modern World}, sociologist José

\textsuperscript{259} Asad, “Construction of Religion,” 53.

\textsuperscript{260} Political structures of religious theorizing were marked by parameters of “otherness.” Jonathan Z. Smith writes, “Abstracting from a large collection of historical data…basic models of the ‘other’ have been…represented linguistically and/or intellectually in terms of intelligibility…it must be insisted that the language of the ‘other’ always misunderstanding, suggesting, as it does, an ontological cleavage than an anthropological distinction…culture-itself is constituted by the double process of both making differences and relativizing those very same differences…It is the character of the difference and the mode of relationship that supplies both the key characteristics for classification and the central topics for disciplinary thought…"otherness" is an ambiguous…it is preeminently a political category…[Religious] anthropology may be described as the science of the ‘other’…A ‘theory of the other’ is but another way of phrasing a ‘theory of the self.’” Jonathan Z. Smith, \textit{Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion} (University of Chicago Press, 2004), 231-275.

\textsuperscript{261} Romanian born historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, was one of the most influential religious comparativists of the twentieth century. He is known as the founder of North American religious studies. Eliade established crucial paradigms in religious studies that persist to this day. His theory that \textit{heirophanies} form the basis of religion, splitting the human experience of reality into \textit{sacred} and \textit{profane} space and time, was believed to “grasp the original meaning of a sacred phenomenon…” He sought to interpret religious history by way of an examination of the sacred ‘shape of religions,’ from primitive to advanced, based on data from different academic disciplines. Through this examination, Eliade understood sacred space to be organized around a center point that would allow for morphology of mythical phenomena. Religion in its various cultural and complex forms could be seen, for Eliade, to reflect “a deep similarity of process, the result of internal, logical, teleological principles of transformation.”\textsuperscript{261} Smith, \textit{Relating Religion}, 67, 69.

Eliade’s \textit{The Sacred and The Profane} offers a definition of religion that in some ways rejects epistemological and ontological foundations of modernity. Eliade crafts an understanding of religion by
interplaying his ideas of religion in contrarian ways against the backdrop of modern expectations of the study of religion. The primacy of interpreting ideas on rational bases required empirical conclusions that Eliade understood to be important in his study of religion, but those rational conclusions did not speak for the whole character of human knowledge, according to Eliade. Religion, configured as irrational, was only the beginning for him. Scholar of comparative religion Rudolph Otto influenced Eliade’s concern with religion as an irrational part of human experience. Otto’s focus on rationalism and mysticism in his study of religious psychology schematized religion through a duality of rational and non-rational aspects of human life. According to Otto, religion itself is outside of human experience; it has a numinous quality to it that produces “the awe and love in relation to divinity that [is] ‘wholly other’ than ordinary, everyday human experience.” For Otto, this numinous character of religion is non-rational and becomes moralized when the rational features of human thinking schematize it, thus creating the divine and consequently a ‘religious’ system. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, vol. 14. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).

*The Sacred and The Profane* proposes to present the phenomenon of the sacred [read religion] in all its complexity, and not only insofar as it is irrational. What [concerns Eliade is] not the relation between the rational and non-rational elements of religion but the sacred in its entirety. The first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane. The aim of *The Sacred and The Profane* is to illustrate this opposition between sacred and profane. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, vol. 11 (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 10.

Eliade’s description of the sacred is meant to capture the whole of religious symbolism within his appropriation of the term religion. For Eliade, all religion is a matter of sacred dimensions of reality that transcend history. He writes, “What distinguishes the historian of religion from the historian…is that he is dealing with facts which, although historical, reveal a behavior that goes beyond the historical involvement of the human being.” For Eliade, sacred space is qualitatively different from profane, or not sacred, space that surrounds it. Sacred spaces are religious archetypes that manifest itself to people as a heirophany, or revelation. “All these facts arise from a single type of behavior, that of homo religiosus.” Religious human beings witness and can experience revelations of the sacred, or religion, that happen and can happen all of the time around people. *Mircea Eliade, Images and Symbols* (London: Harvill Press, 1961), 32; Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 18.

Eliade provides numerous examples of the consecration of sacred space as an attempt to illustrate the importance of cosmogony as a paradigmatic model for practically every creative endeavor, making the world in which the homo religiosus lives filled with possibilities of sacred time and space. “Symbolically man became contemporary with the cosmogony, he was present at the creation of the world, thus, homo religiosus can insure the life of animals, plants, crops, culture, and so on. Myth as the repetition and imitation of divine models allows homo religiosus to remain in the sacred and in reality, and, sanctify the world. Homo religiosus assumes a humanity that has a transcendant standard. The cosmos as a whole is an organism at once real, living, and sacred […] it simultaneously reveals the modalities of being and of sacrality. Ontophany and hierophany meet” and are lived out in the mind of the homo religiosus. *Eliade, Sacred and the Profane*, 79, 99, 117.

Eliade conceives of religion as a supernatural phenomenon that is not historically based but rooted in an eternal domain that breaks into human reality and appears as different manifestations of a sacred, archetypal modality that may or may not embrace linear time. By not limiting the sacred to history, his definition of religion extends the modern boundaries of potential data for a study of religion, but it also takes the term ‘religion’ for granted and attaches it to human nature everywhere and at all times. According to Eliade, “We must get used to the idea of recognizing heirophanies absolutely everywhere, in every area of psychological, economic, spiritual, and social life. Indeed, we cannot be sure that there is anything…that has not somewhere on the course of human history been transfigured into a heirophany…it is quite certain that anything man has ever handled, felt, come in contact with or loved can become a heirophany. We know, for example, that, on the whole, the gestures, dances, children’s games, toys, etc. have a religious origin…This list could be carried on to include man’s everyday movements…all his physiological activities and so forth” (Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in comparative religion* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 11-12).
Casanova delves more deeply into this dualism in Western culture and thought. According to Casanova, historically speaking, the dualism of sacred-profane was institutionalized throughout society so that the social realm itself was dualistically structured. The structured division of “this world” into two separate spheres, “the religious” and the “the secular,” came to represent a sacred-profane dichotomy. Spatially, the two worlds were connected through the church, which was seen as sacramental.

“Secularization” as a concept refers to the actual historical process whereby this dualist system within the world and the sacramental structures of mediation between this world and the other world progressively break down until the entire medieval system of classification disappears to be replaced by new systems of spatial structuration of the spheres.\(^{262}\)

The theory of secularization is a major catalyst for how the West has come to appreciate the category of religion. Secularization is a Christian concept that was not ever really formulated explicitly or systematically.\(^{263}\) It was seen to be the cultural technology

\[\text{Religion as the orientation of people to the sacred allows Eliade to appreciate a definition of religion as a description of something inherently valuable as opposed to the profane experiences of a desacralized world. “For religious man (sic), every existential decision to situate himself (sic) in space in fact constitutes a religious decision;” as physical space is arranged, so also the mind follows. Eliade, Sacred and the Profane, 65. Eliade “achieved something of an integration of the historical and the morphological…by encompassing both within an onto-theological hierarchy.” Smith, Relating Religion, 96.}

Eliade’s description of religious consciousness utilizes an approach to religious studies that conflates the category of religion with a universal definition of its elements: time, space, experience, etc. His concepts of the sacred and profane, heirophany, and homo religiosus assume an objective existence in all human cultures through time, taking for granted the existence of the term ‘religion’ as the starting point of his descriptions of religion. This aspect of his thinking systematized his definition of religion as part of the larger academic project of assuming the term ‘religion’ had totalizing connotations for all of humanity. Forming religion into a universal category supported views of human nature as ‘religious’ and the category of religion as an autonomous field of reality.


\(^{263}\) Casanova, Public Religions.
and ethos through which the West could consider only “one world” in which the notion of religion would have a new place, if any, within the new differentiated spheres of civic life. Casanova points to the three major elements of the secularization thesis that have been taken to be essential to the development of modernity. They are:

1) increasing structural differentiation of social spaces resulting in the separation of religion from politics, economy, science, and so forth; 2) the privatization of religion within its own sphere, and 3) the declining social significance of religious belief, commitment, and institutions.  

This dissertation disagrees with Casanova’s assertion of religion’s declining social significance. Although religion is privatized as its differentiated social space, it is still very much a part of how Western culture organizes life and makes meaning in the world today. The social significance of secularization is greatly overlooked in the myriad ways in which religion can appear different from how it has traditionally appeared in the modern world. Secularization generated conceptual and civic room for the existence of the field of religious studies. However, due to the dominant impression of a Christian worldview, all ways of knowing religion are now set against the premise of Christian subjectivity. “Religious” knowing has become the structural science through which religion itself and all other social spheres operate as differentiated spaces in society. The consciousness and reasoning associated with “religion” is the premise for how existential spheres function in society. Because of the ways the category of religion has been constructed in the modern world, definitions of religion are interpretations necessarily

---

264 Casanova, *Public Religions*

265 Here, this chapter invokes the sentiments of Eliade in believing the secular frames what religious scholars consider “religious” by being itself part of aspects people take for granted when thinking about the term “religion.”
articulated by power. Attention to the historical grammar of such concepts is an issue that seems unavoidable. What becomes implied in this instance is the idea that no definition of religion and its concomitant parts within any society, no matter how global a community, can be value neutral, insofar as its foundations echo these associations with the modern category of religion.

When taking the term “religion” for granted, some scholars overlook many important questions. For example, does “religion” represent a group’s unity or does it create that unity? If discussing different “religions” is like talking about apples and oranges, then from what context do we derive the category of fruit? These are questions to consider once one problematizes the ground out of which a universal definition of religion can emerge: “Resisting concepts of religion as universal insists on not essentializing religion or the secular, but seeing both as processual.”266 Constructive criticism of “religion” is important because it draws attention to the ways in which “‘religion’ is conceptualized and institutionalized within the matrix of a globalized world-religious discourse in which ideas, social formations, and sociocultural practices are discursively reified as ‘religious’ ones.”267 Criticizing and contextualizing ‘religion’ as a heuristic tool for analysis and deconstruction fosters perspectives through which discursive processes are historicized within the frameworks of particular epistemes of “religion” and the “secular.”268

266 Dressler and Mandair. Secularism and Religion-making, 17.

267 Dressler and Mandair. Secularism and Religion-making, 19.

268 Given the modern historical developments within the construction of the category of religion, a constructive approach to religious theorizing requires an understanding of and change from the ways in
Christianity and Modern Race

The philosophical deconstruction of “religion” produces significant points of analysis for understanding a way to constructively appropriate modern race and its relationship to the category of religion (and vice versa). When taking a close look at which “Eurocentric ethics are based on the presupposition that religion as a discipline is rooted in a nineteenth-century European definition of what education of religion should be” (de la Torre, *Latina/o Social Ethics*, x). This definition of religion coincides with the ethos of Western colonialism.

The colonial interactions between Christianity and race emerged out of a time period where European scholars began discourses surrounding the nature and meaning of religion as a category of human experience. Colonialism is situated at the height of modernity, when science and rational knowledge reigned supreme. Religion now occupied its own sphere within a ‘secularized’ social order, mirroring the academic backdrop of growing conversations surrounding what was seen by academics as religious phenomena. Alongside European contact with different cultures and groups of people, academics placed non-Europeans into a Eurocentric cognitive framework of thinking. Subsequently, creating a dominant worldview regarding humankind. The development of human cultures and social organization from what was deemed primitive tribal levels to the higher and more advanced levels of the Western nuclear family headed by the patriarch bled into modes of analyzing the human being. These fundamental presuppositions generated racialized theories of religion that were based on conceptions of human nature as identity. For example, renowned German theologian of his time, Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith* (published in 1831) posited that the anthropocentric revelation of Jesus affirms the inherently superior nature of Christian piety because Jesus Christ not only discloses God but also reveals the true nature of what it means to be a human being. People who respond positively to the redeeming influence of Jesus Christ essentially grow into their authentic selves, which are made in the image and likeness of God. This methodological approach to communities of piety implies the belief that religions that do not respond to the redeeming influence of Jesus as understood by Christians are on a lesser plane of existence because they could never fully attain their authentic God given essences unless they become Christian communities. He writes, “Idol worship proper is based upon a confused state of the self-consciousness which marks the lowest condition of man, since in it the higher and the lower are so little distinguished that even the feeling of absolute dependence is reflected as arising from a particular object to be apprehended by the senses. So, too, with Polytheism: in its combination of the religious susceptibility with diverse affections of the sensible self-consciousness, it exhibits this diversity in such a very preponderant degree that the feeling of absolute dependence cannot appear in its complete unity and indifference to all that the sensible self-consciousness may contain; but instead a plurality is posited as its source. But when the higher self-consciousness, in distinction from the sensible, has been fully developed, then, insofar as we are open in general to sensible stimulation…and expand the latter into a general consciousness of finitude, we are conscious of ourselves as absolutely dependent… Judaism, by its limitation to the love of Jehovah to the race of Abraham, betrays a lingering affinity with fetishisms; and the numerous vacillations towards idol worship prove that during the political heyday of the nation the monotheistic faith had not yet taken fast root, and was not fully and purely developed until after the Babylonian Exile. Islam, on the other hand, with its passionate character, and the strongly sensuous content of its ideas, betrays in spite of its strict monotheism, a large measure of that influence of the sensible upon the character of the religious emotions which elsewhere keeps men on the level of polytheism. This Christianity, because it remains free from both weaknesses, stands higher than either of those other two forms, and takes its place as the purest form of monotheism that has appeared in history.” See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999), 36-43.
certain elements of Christian theology and its foundations, this chapter utilizes the work of American theologian Willie James Jennings, who traces a historical relationship between Christianity and origins of race in the modern world. According to Jennings, race in the modern world has been produced by certain occasions in the colonial history of Christian theology. The production of race in Christian theology highlights defining moments in the European construction of human identity. The category of religion in the modern world has played a major role in forming contemporary structures of human anthropology. As part of the liberation of black communities, Christianity’s connection to colonialism needs to be undone as a way forward into future studies of theology and religious studies. Issues of identity undergird the relationship between religion and race. Western philosophies and Christian theologies related to the formation of what it means to be a human being reveal spaces of intellectual and cultural contact. Spaces of Western contact with different cultures around the world, vis-à-vis colonialism, served as

269 “Womanist ethicists engage in scholarly compositions that hold them accountable not to their individual whims or personalized localized consciousnesses but rather to the collective values of black history and culture…In doing so they render a better understanding of how black people collectively undo the historically constructed racist-sexist-classist-heterosexist ideologies that have homogenized them in ways that discount the variations of their humanity and that have deprived them of seeing themselves culturally as traditionally capable as well as traditionally universalist, even within the most oppressive of circumstances.” Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 9.

Arvind Mandair’s *Religion and the Specter of the West* and David Chidester’s *Empire of Religion* emphasize ways in which connections among religion, Christianity, and race intersect in the field of religious studies. They aim to recover ‘religious’ thought forms that stood prior to colonial contexts by focusing on a political history of ideas related to spaces of Western intellectual and cultural contact with non-Western peoples and parts of the world. In doing so, they underline contexts out of which religion scholars produced knowledge of ‘religion,’ only to forget that the category itself exists within a secular Christian worldview of ideas about life. Their research rightfully identifies a problem of translation in religious studies due to dominance of Western thought forms. Accentuating the problem of translation interrogates the self-referential aspect of the West and how notions of human being are signified. Arvindpal Singh Mandair, *Religion and the specter of the West: Sikhism, India, postcoloniality, and the politics of translation* (Columbia University Press, 2013); David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 2014).
the subtext through which the West would create theories of identity. Western politics of knowledge production provide foundation for race in the modern world.270

The inherent problems with Christian theology in relation to race highlight a presumptuous flaw of modern Western analyses of “religion”: that it can account for identities of people who may not know of or subscribe to the term “religion.” Colonial Christian theology conflates the reality of race as the reality of Christian culture. However, sciences of interpretation cannot be universalized; therefore, culture must be accounted for as a hermeneutical influence when describing the experiences of different people. Yet, despite the fundamental issues embedded within definitions of Christian theology and race, one cannot simply avoid the terms. The idea of a post-racial/post-religious society is escapist.271 Religion is a racialized category even when race is not explicitly on the table,272 and the social construct of race is a religious category even when religion is not explicitly on the table. Even though race as culture has greatly predisposed a supposed supremacy of human orientation, one can still glean from the data


271 According to Paul Gilroy, race ties into rationality and nationality as logic that perpetuates the colonial (read fascist) order of capitalist social relations. Because processes of colonialism commodified racialized human bodies, racism reflects the planetary trafficking of human identity for the sake of economic, in this case white, Eurocentric, imperial expansion. Gilroy also asserts that modern logic of racial ideology is breaking down due to processes of globalization; therefore, global cosmopolitanism can better lead the way into a post-racial society. Gilroy ultimately believes that we “should free ourselves from the bonds of all raciology in a novel and ambitious abolitionist project...to demand liberation, not from white supremacy alone, however urgently that is required, but from all racializing raciological thought...” Although this dissertation agrees with Gilroy’s assessment of ‘raciology,’ this dissertation does not agree with eliminating the concept of race from academic discourse as a step forward into global cosmopolitanism. A conception of global cosmopolitanism should not incorporate escapist ideas when it comes to racial identity. It must wrestle with the realities of race as a foundation for its content and not be too quick to entertain post-racial humanity. The conclusion of this dissertation deals with these ideas in more detail. Paul Gilroy, Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line (Harvard University Press, 2000).

a solid ground from which to resynthesize notions of the self as well as the category of religion as it has been constructed in the modern world.

Christian theology and Europe’s “religious” imagination were woven into processes of colonial dominance. The problem became not Christianity and “religion,” *per se*, but the direct linking of Christianity and “religion” with the modern structures of rational self-consciousness and thought itself. The secular background of Eurocentric theories of religion emerges within frameworks of moral ontology. “Moral” defines a certain kind of reasoning, which reflects culturally coded principles and priorities of the Eurocentric order. Rationality and reason became yardsticks for philosophies of human anthology. Western moral (read: rational) human nature became the category applied to non-Western peoples and religious categories and measures. Colonial Christian theology served as the historical model of the ultimate link between human nature and religious studies.

Religion, therefore, has been used to create a particular identity of the West. The Western ‘religious’ identity rooted in rational, Christian subjectivity—seen as both a moral and existential standard for what it means to be a human being—assumes ways of thinking and of being human that need to be confronted in the academic study of religion. Religion as a category in the modern world has become virtually synonymous with “the Western race,” attaching itself to totalizing analytical platforms of human life. For these

---

273 Tomoko Masuzawa argues that “religious discourse did the work of churning Europe’s epistemic domain...[and]...forged from that domain an enormous apparition: the essential identity of the West.” This identity not only crystallized into a self-sustaining belief in the West’s unique sovereign, nature, it also helped to preserve and promote its universalizing tendency, paradoxically, through a language of pluralism as found in the discourse of “world religions” (Tomoko Masuz, *The Invention of World Religions: or, how European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 20).
reasons, it is important to consider that religious theorizing originates from epistemic domains of power and privilege. Religion may be an indigenous category of the West, but it is not necessarily a universal term. The power and privilege affiliated with religious studies demonstrates the significance of tracking the ways in which spaces of intellectual and cultural contact expose modes of being human that should be of primary interest in the academy. Human liberation, therefore, involves both a de-linking of human identity from Western definitions of human being and an intentional engagement with racial politics that advance cultural modes of self-determination.\textsuperscript{274} A post-colonial/anti-colonial reading of religion enables black and Christian theological formations to align more complementarily with the anticolonial politics of the Black Panther Party.

\textbf{Religion and Social Change}

There is constructive potential for Christian social ethics to both engage the ideas of the Black Panthers and view their racial politics as sacred and not necessarily secular (or irreligious).\textsuperscript{275} While black and Womanist ethics represent the academic arm of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{274} “...The study of religion can resituate itself as a science of human contact...Theologies of religion have far too often treated religion as if it exists in a vacuum, separated from all other networks of social relations...religious difference needs to examine how Christianity constructs difference in various historical epochs, taking into consideration the contestation of meaning, the shaping of imagination, and the changing of power relations. The issue before us is not religious diversity, but religious difference as it is constituted and produced in concrete situations, often with significant power differentials.” This postcolonial reading of religion also has implications for the ways in which hegemony makes race and class “gendered” categories. It critiques the colonial base out of which the grammar of such concepts haven been applied in society. Postcolonial thought deals with the exploitation of meaning within systems of Empire, drawing connections in how race, gender, and class function symbiotically to uphold Eurocentric patriarchal ideologies and worldviews. Kwok Pui-lan, \textit{Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 205.

\textsuperscript{275} Here, this dissertation is not imposing “religious” language onto The Black Panther Party’s politics but rather utilizing the term “sacred” to bridge the gap between the church and The Panthers’ revolutionary praxis as an aspect of the Womanist principle of redemptive self-love. “As Womanist Cheryl Townsend Gilkes states when looking at this theme in Alice Walker’s work: ‘If we are to explore the work of Alice Walker for ethical content or for direction in constructing ethics and in thinking theologically, I think that

111
Christian communities, the racial and economic aspirations they signify share significant similarities with those of the Black Panther Party. Although black and Womanist ethics of black churches and secular racial justice movements have differed on tactical approaches regarding the economic liberation of black people, both forms of advocacy have embraced the struggle for freedom and victory over oppressive social conditions as core elements of what it means to be a human being. Their messages of liberation resonate with one another. Black Theology and Womanism underline black experience as a filter through which one encounters the revelation of God the liberator. The Panthers advanced anti-colonial Black Power, asserting black experience—separate from whiteness—as the vanguard of liberation. Historically, even though the underrepresented work of black women has not only been invaluable within both contexts but has also provided essential correctives for how each site ought to live in community, black church

the most fruitful course is her artful advocacy of unconditional love that starts with our acceptance of ourselves as divinely and humanly lovable.” Both black ethicists and The Panthers assert black self-determination as an act of loving black people regardless, one of the most revolutionary political actions. [in October 2016], Floyd-Thomas, Mining the Motherlode, 10; Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, in Cheryl J. Sanders et al., “Roundtable Discussion: Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanism Perspective,” in Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 5 (1989): 108-9.

276 During the Black Power movement of the 1960s, James Cone urged black churches to join it. Black Theology and Black Power was a sensational debut that won a large readership and changed Cone’s life. Cone forged relationships with several leading Black Nationalist groups, and played a leading role in a major nationalist group. Such experiences were chastening, however, helping him clarify that his center was Christian liberation theology, not Black Nationalism. Speakers at a 1970 conference in Atlanta ridiculed religion and the black church unsparingly, sneering that the church had no place on its own terms in the struggle for black liberation. Cone had similar experiences with The Black Panthers. At a conference in Oakland, Panther leader David Hilliard insulted black preachers with vulgar and threatening invective, telling them to choose between shooting white police officers and being shot by The Panthers. This encounter reordered Cone’s strategic priorities. Cone was willing to support nationalist and Marxist organizations on a secondary basis, but resolved that his primary loyalty was to the liberationist wing of Christianity. James H. Cone, Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian (Orbis Books, 2018), 77, 103-105. Gary Dorrien, Social Ethics, 401. Amiri Baraka and LeRoi Jones, eds., African Congress: A Documentary of the First Modern Pan-African Congress (New York: Morrow, 1972); Cone, My Soul Looks Back, 55, 57; James H. Cone, “Black Theology and the Black College Student,” Journal of Afro-American Issues 4 (Summer/Fall 1976): 420-30.
folk and the Panthers’ tactics for justice have taken different forms and have been shaped by different social factors. However, because both social forces believed that authentic human existence means being in freedom, black and Womanist ethics and the Panthers share philosophical concerns that emphasize the *sacred* anthropological need for concrete, spiritual negations of social oppression.

James Cone lamented the fact that, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, class analysis was missing in Black Theology. According to Cone: “for too long, [black theologians] have given the impression that all [black liberationists] want is an equal piece of the [rotten] North American capitalist pie.”277 However, given that structural racism makes it impossible for black people and non-white people to assimilate or participate in the capitalist system as equals to whites, the ethical concerns of liberationists invite the possibility of freedom towards a new economic order: one oriented more towards community and cross-racial collaboration. With regard to liberation, Womanists have established seeds of thought for pathways toward social ethics of economic justice. When put in conversation with the Panthers’ politics of Black Power, Womanist themes of “wholeness” and “self-direction” offer constructive ideas for economic liberation from the margins.

Kelly Brown Douglas holds together the individual and the community in her liberationist attempt to seek “wholeness.” Douglas appropriately says: “Black women have traditionally been concerned, not just for their welfare, but for the welfare of their

---

entire community and families."  

Her “underlying assumption is that only individuals who are at least moving toward wholeness can nurture wholeness within the community.”  

This dissertation supports the sentiment that the health of the community also impacts the health of the individual. In the context of economic justice, a vision of “wholeness” for black liberation directly influences and challenges black peoples to participate in activities that advance the unity and freedom of individuals within black communities. Jacquelyn Grant views economic liberation as freedom for a life of “self-direction”; liberation means to no longer be another’s servant, either in language or in practice. Because black women’s job prospects have often been limited to domestic servant roles in the post-slavery U.S., according to Grant, economic liberation constitutes the need for greater decision-making and bargaining power for Black women workers, and concomitantly black people in communities.

---

278 Douglas contends that consistent commitment to family and community has led black women on a search for a politics of wholeness as they have evaluated their participation in various freedom movements such as the contemporary woman’s movement and the 1960s freedom struggle. She writes, “These women needed a political strategy that would assure black people, men, and women, rights to live as whole, free, human beings and that would keep the black community whole, unified, in striving for liberation…[Wholeness] does not seek to prioritize different forms of oppression, or to pit women against men/the poor against the rich…this analysis of wholeness might challenge the ‘haves’ in the black community who maintain their status by supporting structures of oppression. It will confront the alienation that often develops between the black middle class and the black poor” (Brown Douglas, The Black Christ, 98-99). Dassie, “The Interconnection Between Race, Religion and Economics,” 194. Black women and other women of color have experienced racialized, gendered forms of economic deprivation at the same time as they have been responsible for the survival, care, and nurturance of others under these conditions. Layli Phillips, The Womanist Reader: The first quarter century of womanist thought (Routledge, 2006), xxxix-xl.


While black and Womanist ethics acknowledge the sacred concerns for racial liberation:

[T]he signifier “liberation” has become decontextualized (politically, economically, and culturally) …causing the discourse to become perpetually oriented towards past, not present or future, alternative dreams of social transformation and sites of struggle informed by the Black Christian radical tradition.  

Liberation as political engagement has historically been identified with activism and movements of resistance. Although resistance struggles often draw upon narratives and events from the past, liberation is concerned with resistance in the present historical moment, giving rise to social, political, cultural transformations that are future oriented. Black liberationist and Womanist engagement has been instrumental in the transformation of religious institutions, theological education, and social structures, but have lacked comprehensive focus on the creation of an anticapitalistic political economy that meets the needs of marginalized people, especially black women.

Black theo-ethicists have seemingly failed to rethink the heuristic of “liberation” for the purpose of transforming economic structures; black theo-ethicists have not reimagined Black Power for the self-sustainability of racialized communities, specifically black communities. This discursive reimagining involves identifying with the racialized existence of black communities as well as restructuring the nature of labor and work in poor black communities. Such an undertaking has not happened, in part, because some of


that work is not being done within black existential reflection, whereby “reflection on the poor becomes an act of intellectual and theoretical imagining, not necessarily connected to an on-the-ground political activity.”

Womanist Elonda Clay tellingly argues that current trends in Black Theology divert attention away from the challenges of material solidarity with the margins, instead of representing contemporary reflexive theologies of liberation. Material solidarity “pushes [people] to confront [their] embeddedness in structures of oppression. It forces [people] to increase [their] strength to identify, analyze, and resist them, and to find collective ways to push the envelope.”

The neglect of material solidarity and a lack of focus on transforming the nature of work in poor black communities has a universalizing effect that limits the efficacy of black and Womanist theo-ethical reflection and formulations of praxis. Using Douglas’s theme of “wholeness” and Grant’s understanding of “self-direction” for the purpose of a constructive dialogue with socialist modes of liberation moves black and Womanist ethical discourse forward.

There indeed may be irreconcilable differences between the practical and theo-ethical modalities of black and Womanist ethics and the anticolonial politics of the

---


286 The allegation of U.S. Black Theology’s disengagement with the plight of poor people is not new. Gayraud Wilmore has argued that the institutionalization of Black Theology led to its retreat into a largely academic dialogue among scholars in predominantly White institutions who were pursuing tenure. Gayraud S. Wilmore, “Black Theology: Review and Assessment,” Voices from the Third World 5, no. 2 (1982): 9-10.
Panthers. Nonetheless, in their heyday, the Panthers represented the most revolutionary Marxist group of community organizers in the U.S., offering a vital conversation partner for black and Womanist theological ethics and reflection.\textsuperscript{287} Much like the Young Lords modeled what a Latina/o ethical paradigm should look like,\textsuperscript{288} the Panthers moved

\textsuperscript{287} The lack of engagement with Marxist thought has stunted the radical potential of black churches and of the civil rights tradition of black prophetic witness. For example, according to religious and African-American studies scholar Eddie Glaude, “Of course, many African Americans still go to church. But the idea of this venerable institution as central to black life and as a repository for the social and moral conscience of the nation has all but disappeared…. We have witnessed the routinization of black prophetic witness. Too often the prophetic energies of black churches are represented as something inherent to the institution, and we need only point to past deeds for evidence of this fact…Rare are those occasions when black churches mobilize in public and together to call attention to the pressing issues of our day…Prophetic energies are not an inherent part of black churches, but instances of men and women who grasp the fullness of meaning to be one with God” (Eddie Glaude, “The Black church is dead,” \textit{Huffington Post} 2, no. 24 (2010): 10).

\textsuperscript{288} For example, according to de la Torre, “The New York chapter of the Young Lords launched the East Harlem Garbage Offensive on July 27, 1969. The Offensive consisted of sweeping the streets and neatly stacking up the garbage on the corners for pick-up. But the sanitation departments historically ignored the accumulation of waste in communities of color and provided poor waste collection services. In response, the Young Lords moved the garbage bags to Third Avenue, a main thoroughfare used by commuters leaving Manhattan for the suburbs. There they built a five-foot-tall barricade across the avenue and set the garbage bags ablaze. Fighting broke out with the police when they attempted to stop the burning of garbage and arrest those responsible. This led to over 1,000 people marching to the 126\textsuperscript{th} Street police station protesting the norm of police brutality…In spite of the crackdown by the police, the negative publicity caused by the protests prompted the city to be faithful to its responsibilities of picking up the garbage in Spanish Harlem, although the service never matched that offered in wealthier and whiter neighborhoods. Members of the organization also conducted a door-to-door campaign for lead poisoning and tuberculosis detection. Soon, the organization focused its energies on other institutions that failed to respond to the needs of the people they were supposed to serve, specifically the church, which has moral responsibility for protecting poor and disenfranchised community. In 1969, Young Lords physically occupied the facilities of McCormick Seminary in Chicago (May) and \textit{La Primera Iglesia Metodista Hispana} in New York City (December).

“As Presbyterian ministers convened in Texas for a national conference in April 1969, the Young Lords (along with the Black Panthers, the Young Patriots, and the students for a Democratic Society [SDS]), aided by some McCormick Seminary students, staged a sit-in at the school’s administration building. Barricading the doors, the protesters occupied the Chicago seminary for a week. The Young Lords voiced their grievances, specifically that Puerto Ricans were being displaced from the Lincoln Park community because of gentrification that was occurring with the complicity of the seminary. They demanded funding, to the tune of $600,000, for low income housing in the seminary’s neighborhood, a children’s center, a legal assistance program for residents, and a cultural center for Latin Americans. The protesters left the seminary when it agreed to their demands.

“In New York City, \textit{La Primera Iglesia Metodista Hispana} (First Hispanic Methodist Church), located at Lexington Street and 111\textsuperscript{th} Avenue in the Spanish Harlem barrio, was visited by a delegation of the Young Lords requesting to use available space in the church to provide children in the neighborhood with a breakfast program and residents with a clothing drive…the pastor, who was an anti-Communist
beyond Eurocentric moral thinking by advocating a social paradigm of disruptive praxis. As a distinct socioeconomic contribution, generally absent in black and Womanist theological ethics, the Panthers’ racial politics of liberation offer black and Womanist ethicists an adequate social theory to present a practical sketch of human liberation. Together, black and Womanist theological ethics and Marxist thought can point toward methodological approaches to economic liberation.

Black and Womanist theological ethics and orthodox Marxist thought share three characteristics:

1) Both adhere to a similar methodology, the same way of approaching their respective subject matter and arriving at conclusions. 2) Both link some notion of liberation to the future socioeconomic conditions of the downtrodden. And 3) [most importantly], both attempt to put forward trenchant critiques of liberal capitalist America…These three traits provide a springboard for a meaningful dialogue between black theologians and Marxist thinkers and possibly spearhead a unifying effort for structural social change in liberal capitalist America. 

Cuban exile, and the church board refused, referring to the Young Lords delegates as satanás – demons. When the Young Lords delegates attempted to address the congregation on Sunday, December 7, 1969, the church called the police, who showed up in the sanctuary and proceeded to beat the Young Lords brutally. On December 28, over a hundred Young Lords activists and sympathizers successfully took possession of the church, sealing the door with six-inch railroad spike and raising a wooden sign with red letters renaming it La iglesia de la gente – The People’s Church, under the premise that the first responsibility of the church is to the people. During the eleven days of occupation, over three thousand people came to church. The People’s Church briefly developed childcare for working parents, established breakfast programs for children, conducted clothing drives, provided opportunities for political education, fought police brutality, and made a concerted investment in the social services (like health clinics). By January 7, 1970, the police had taken control of the church, arresting 105 occupiers – at which time the church ceased being the people’s church…

“…Unfortunately, because of FBI infiltration of the organization and political infighting, the Young Lords disintegrated in the early 1970s. But for a brief moment, an indigenous Hispanic-based ethical methodology was enfleshed…Through their militant takeover and implementation of needed services, they demonstrated that those who claimed to perform the task of ensuring the people’s welfare had violated their social contract…Although the Young Lords were not a Christian organization, nor were they practicing a pacifist ideology, they did demonstrate, more than most Christian theologians or ethicists, that the implementation of the gospel is a subversive and radical venture that disrupts, undermines, and challenges those who have become complicit with the status quo of oppressive structures” de la Torre, Latina/o Social Ethics, 89-92.

289 West, Black Theology, 1979.
Black and Womanist theological ethicists have employed a dialectical methodology in approaching their subject matter; they have refused to accept what has been given to them by white theologians, reducing white deception and distortion of the gospel and making Christianity meaningful in light of oppressive conditions. Black theological reflection begins by negating white interpretations of the gospel, continues by preserving its own perceived truths of the Bible, and ends by transforming past understandings of the gospel into novel ones. “Their penchant for revealing distortions leads them to adopt a sociology of knowledge-approach that stresses the way in which particular viewpoints endorse and encourage ulterior aims.”

Marxist thinkers also employ a dialectical methodology in approaching their subject matter; however, their subject matter is inter alia bourgeois theories about capitalist society. “Marxist social theory is first and foremost a critique of inadequate theories of capitalist society and subsequently a critique of capitalist society itself.” For Marx, a correct, demystified understanding of capitalist society is a prerequisite for a

---

290 Dialectical methodology is a complex procedure useful for grasping, comprehending, interpreting, explaining or predicting phenomena. Aside from the foundation laid by Plato, this procedure was fully developed by Hegel and deepened by Marx. Hegel’s most succinct discussions of this approach can be found in his Logic (Part 1, Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences) trans. William Wallace (Oxford, 1975), no. 81, 115-119, and The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J.B. Baillie (New York, 1967), 80. For Marx’s brief presentation of this approach as it relates to his social theory, see The Grundrisse, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York, 1973), 83-111. To borrow from Karl Marx’s understanding of dialectical materialism, and then to add modern race to his conception of capitalist relations, [colonial] existence created [religious] consciousness through economically driven processes of cultural exploitation. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto (Penguin, 2002), chapter 1.


292 West and Glaude, African American Religious Thought.
promising political praxis. While black and Womanist theological ethicists agree that black liberation has something to do with challenging the socioeconomic conditions of black people, “a dialectical methodology discourages discussions about the ideal society and instead encourages criticizing and overcoming existing society, negating and opposing what is.”

The brief sketch Marxist thinkers, like the Panthers, provide requires a particular system of production and political arrangement: namely, participatory democracy and non-exploitative economic arrangements.

The Panthers were able to present a sketch of human liberation primarily because they stressed settler colonialism as the condition of what people must liberate themselves from. For black and Womanist ethics to say anything about what society can be, they can adopt and re-contextualize the clear-cut social theory the Panthers’ employ about what society is. Liberationists can use the Panthers’ racial politics not to advance the Panthers’ cause, but to strengthen Black Theology’s formulations of Black Power as a model of wholeness and self-determination for the liberation of black communities from settler colonial conditions. A fuller account of Black and Womanist ethics develops prescriptions for ethical approaches to labor that highlight anticapitalistic/antiracist modalities within the system of capitalism.

---


294 Participatory democracy refers to the idea that human liberation occurs only when people participate substantively in the decision-making processes in the major institutions that regulate their lives; democratic control over the institutions in the productive and political processes in order for them to satisfy human needs and protect personal liberties of the populace constitutes human liberation. West and Glaude, *African American Religious Thought*, 879.

295 James Cone reviewed the various attitudes at work in the history of the relationship between the black church and Marxist thought: indifference, hostility, and mutual support. According to Cone, the most
frequent attitude between black church people and Marxists has been indifference. According to Cone, “Mutual indifference can be seen by the absence of references to each other in their respective expressions of radicalism in the United States.” Cone writes, “It is as if black radicalism does not exist for white socialists until the appearance of Martin Luther King Jr. and Stokely Carmichael.” Black preachers and theologians are indifferent toward socialism, according to Cone, because they know little about it and because they believe that the reality of racism is too serious to risk reduction with socialism.

“In addition to the dominant attitude of indifference among Marxists and black church people, there have also been instances of hostility and mutual support. [During the 1920s] – One communist said of the black preacher: ‘The duty of the preacher is not alone to detract the mind of his congregation from their wretched conditions. It is also to serve the white plantation owners as their best agents in spying upon the activities of the rural populace. For so faithfully serving their masters, these lackeys often receive excellent wages.’ This attitude continued until the early 1930’s when the communists began to change from hostility to support. They supported Father Divine and later Adam Clayton Powell, Jr…”

Cone then moves to a consideration of the unfavorable assumptions by which Marxists and black church people have held that have kept them both at a distance from each other. Cone begins by stating that black churches should not reject Marxist thought because it does not claim to espouse faith in the Christian God. Many people from all over the world distinguish between Marxism as a worldview and Marxism as an instrument of social analysis; therefore, people claim to be Marxist and Christian at the same time all the time and black Christians can do the same thing. Cone also believes that it should not be a problem for black people to overcome socialism’s history of racism because black people overcame (and are actively still overcoming) the problem of Christianity being white and racist. This does not mean, however, that race should be of second importance to black people or to Marxists.

According to Marxists, the black church, and church in general, is a sedative that masquerades the pain of injustice on earth by directing people’s attention to an afterlife in heaven. Such a perspective reflects compensatory religious reasoning that encourages people to exclude social analysis and the need for human beings to act on behalf of their own liberation from oppressive circumstances. Cone asserts that the church can ignore this criticism because it is a part of the Marxist worldview that is both different than Marxism as a tool of analysis and already incompatible with the Christian imagination. While the black church may not be a consistent model of liberation, many people have found in it not an “opiate” but an energizer that offers courage and strength in the struggle for freedom. And yet, because black people have provided the necessary leadership for a critique of capitalism, black theology and Marxist thought can develop alternative visions of social existence.

Cone suggests the possibility of a way to incorporate the reality of racism into an analysis of economic injustice that embraces a unique contribution from the black church in particular and the black community in general to the struggle for liberation in this society. Both the black church and Marxists must be open to hear what each is saying in order for dialogue to be deepened. “Marxism must further consider whether the black church has something distinctive to contribute to the struggle to create a new socialist society.” European socialism must be aware of its own racism – Marxists must accept that whiteness is inherent in the very nature and structure of western civilization, meaning racism will not be automatically eliminated when capitalism is destroyed. Black church people must be willing to think about the total restructuring of society in alignment with democratic socialism.

Cone asserts Marxism is at least right in its critique of capitalism and in its affirmation of the class struggle. He writes, “…Regardless of what happens in the dialogue between black churches and socialists, it is clear that [black people] must begin to think of a radical and total reconstruction of this society from its material, economic base. This reconstruction must include political freedom, racial and sexual equality, in short, the opportunity for all to become what we are meant to be…It is time for us to consider a radically new social arrangement…When the words socialism and communism are mentioned, most people think of Soviet Russia, Cuba, China, Eastern Europe and other such places – all of which would be rejected by democratic socialists as examples of state capitalism…but the absence of a historical model shot not deter us from our attempt to create one.” Cone and Harrington, The Black Church and Marxism.
which black and Womanist ethicists understand internal dynamics of liberal, capitalist America, enabling black and Womanist theological ethics to utilize a social theory that relates the oppression of black people to the overall make-up of America’s system of production, foreign policy, political arrangement, and cultural practices.\footnote{According to Cornel West, “Religion, sex, age, ethnicity, and race often have been considered the only worthy candidates as determinants of oppression. This has been so primarily because American liberal and radical criticism usually has presupposed the existing system of production, assumed class divisions, and attempted to include only marginal groups in the mainstream of liberal capitalist America” (West and Glaude, African American Religious Thought, 882-883).}

The Panthers performed an important service for black and Womanist theologians in that they modified (European) Marxist thought by emphasizing the need for poor black communities to gain significant control over their lives. No school of thought within the heterogeneous Marxist intellectual tradition has accomplished such a task. The Panthers’ theoretical innovation of centering the black unemployable, \textit{lumpen proletariat}, leaned heavily upon the significance of black experience to achieve an egalitarian society. While there is a plurality of Marxist beliefs, The Panthers fashioned a unique form of Marxist thought that was concerned specifically with black peoples’ abilities to control means of production and to establish themselves as un-exploitable communities of resistance. “No narrowly working-class Marxist revolutionary formation in the U.S. has had nearly as transformative a historical effect as the Black Panther Party.”\footnote{Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 467 n6.}

The Panthers made clear that political and economic self-determination involved the real power to direct institutions such that black people can live free of excessive exploitation and oppression. The Panthers linked racist practices to the role they play in buttressing capitalism’s mode of production, concealing the unequal distribution of

\footnote{According to Cornel West, “Religion, sex, age, ethnicity, and race often have been considered the only worthy candidates as determinants of oppression. This has been so primarily because American liberal and radical criticism usually has presupposed the existing system of production, assumed class divisions, and attempted to include only marginal groups in the mainstream of liberal capitalist America” (West and Glaude, African American Religious Thought, 882-883).}

\footnote{Bloom, Martin Jr., and Martin, \textit{Black Against Empire}, 467 n6.}
wealth, and portraying the inadequacy of the political system. The Panthers’ anti-colonialist socialism modeled the belief that only collective control over major institutions of society constitutes genuine power on behalf of all people. Their economic and racial politics advocated for black participation in the decision-making process of the major institutions that affect human destinies, and their programs allowed the economy to work for black people, not the other way around. As black and Womanist ethicists devote attention to black armors of survival, forms of reaction, and products of response to economic injustice, they can establish their continuity within the tradition of political struggle to oppression fashioned by the Black Panther Party, while also even allowing their methods to improve foundational remnants left behind by the Panthers.

A Vision for Black Liberationist Economic Programs

What role should black and Womanist ethics play in the development of economic models for racial justice? As a form of economic liberation and resignification of Black Power, what do Womanist themes of “wholeness” and “self-direction” look like for black communities? The lack of incorporation of liberationist themes and praxis into action-based, anti-racist religious and theological frameworks for economic moral visions of social change has civic consequences that relate to the versatility of radical black thought. Integrating and re-contextualizing themes of social liberation across theoretical contexts not only widens the basis for theo-ethical reflection but also orients a more adaptable analytical platform for black religious thought in the struggle for human freedom from economic oppression. A radical reworking of economics and its connection to racial difference will allow ethics to speak more clearly to systemic realities of globalization and economic injustice. A just, globalized world requires an equitable
economic foundation that would require a constant reworking of frameworks for theories of justice as presently understood within Euro-American ethical debates and visions.\textsuperscript{298}

Black and Womanists ethicists can relate their view of black culture and experience to a notion of power in liberal capitalist America.\textsuperscript{299} According to Marxist Theorist Antonio Gramsci, the systems of production and culture relate in a symbiotic way with one another: class struggle is a battle between capitalists and proletariats that also takes the form of cultural and religious conflict over which attitudes, values, and beliefs will dominate the thought and behavior of people.\textsuperscript{300} For Gramsci, this incessant conflict in which the cultural and political domain is understood to enjoy relative autonomy is a crucial springboard for a revolutionary political praxis. Gramsci deepens Marx’s insights. For Marx, ideology is the set of formal ideas and beliefs promoted by the dominant class for the purpose of preserving its privileged position in society. For Gramsci, hegemony is the set of formal ideas and beliefs and informal modes of behavior that support and sanction the existing order; however, hegemony can also represent a challenge to that order. Black theological ethicists can facilitate the development of a counter-hegemonic culture: a socialization process that opts for the transformative modality that opposes the dominant one.

\textsuperscript{298} The Womanist tenet of critical engagement obliges ethicists to acknowledge that survival strategies must entail more than what the Eurocentric, patriarchal status quo (including one-dimensional white feminism, black liberation, and Marxist thought) has provided as an alternative. Floyd-Thomas, \textit{Mining the Motherlode}, 11.

\textsuperscript{299} West and Glaude, \textit{African American Religious Thought}, 885.

“Counter-hegemonic culture represents genuine opposition to hegemonic culture; it fosters an alternative set of habits, sensibilities, and worldviews that cannot possibly be realized within the perimeters of the established order.”301 The Panthers represented a counter-hegemonic culture as a militant, grass root, socialist organization, and black and Womanist theological ethicists can contribute their leadership and institutional affiliations to embrace and foster the socialist aims of the Panthers’ counter-hegemonic culture in American society.

Black religious leadership can make an enormous contribution to a counter-hegemonic culture and structural social change in American society. Black preachers and pastors are in charge of the most numerous and continuous gatherings of black people, those who are the worst victims of liberal capitalist America and whose churches are financially, culturally, and politically independent of corporate influence. This also holds true to an important degree for white poor and Latina/o (Pentecostal) churches.302


302 Ibid, 887-888. Manning Marable echoes this sentiment, claiming that there have been no social programs developed by black politicians, leaders, or clergy which have effectively called for the structural or radical transformation of the inherently racist/capitalist state. He further claims that the majority of black religious leaders from the mid-nineteenth to late twentieth centuries have been “pragmatic or accommodationist in their politics, integrationists, and at times, profoundly conservative.” Marable Manning, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy and Society* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 180-182.

Lincoln and Mamiya note that an economic ethic of black churches involves a dialectic tension between the poles of survival and liberation. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Duke University Press, 1990), 11. Marcellus Andrews, in his ‘economic audit’ of the civil rights movement, notes that the movement both succeeded and failed in transforming American life, as we can see by the existence of both a thriving black middle class and a ‘permanent’ black underclass. Marcellus Andrews, *The political economy of hope and fear: capitalism and the black condition in America* (NYU Press, 1999), 1. The Community and Economic Development Movement (CEDM) within the black church began as a response to the failure of the benefits gained from the civil rights movement to reach all segments of the black population. Its origins are in both the Community Development Movement (with its historically specific focus on housing) of the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement. Dassie, “The Interconnection Between Race, Religion and Economics,” 121-122;
The freedom of black and Womanist ethicists marks them as leaders of the only major institutions in the black community that are not accountable to the status quo. The contribution of black religious leaders can be exceptional, as exemplified by Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X.

In the spirit of counter-hegemonic culture of black resistance to the traditional capitalist status quo, Cornel West offers an eschatological vision for black communities, which provides a tool for determining the implicit visions of black and Womanist theological ethicists. His eschatological visions for the economic liberation of black communities include “market activities of some sort, with price mechanisms that balance supply and demand and reflect cost and use-value, [as] the only modern alternative to large, powerful, unaccountable bureaucratic hierarchies of full-fledged central planning.” This would be part of a restructured society that will need many checks and balances of economic power and decision-making. West identifies this new economic order as having five major components: some state-owned industries with democratically elected decision-making; self-managed local-scale socialized enterprises; cooperative


Emilie Townes indicts the black church for its general drive for inclusion into this economic and social order, rather than a negation and radical transformation of it. The failure of the black church to offer a serious criticism of the prevailing economic arrangements steeped in capitalistic economic rationality has implicated it in the ills perpetuated by capitalism.

303 West, Prophetic Fragments, 131.
enterprises that control their own property; small businesses run by self-employed entrepreneurs; and many self-employed individuals.\(^\text{304}\)

According to West, the Panthers initiated a first step in a “great, democratic awakening, especially among young black people.”\(^\text{305}\) This awakening involved the process of turning politically disadvantaged individuals into hopeful people willing to live and die for black liberation: “The revolutionary politics of The Black Panther Party linked the catastrophic conditions of local black communities…to economic inequality in America and colonial or neocolonial realities in a capitalist world-system.”\(^\text{306}\) In so doing, the Panthers facilitated some of the ideas in West’s vision for a just society. The Panthers also included the step of organizing their vision to galvanize the lumpen “unemployable” first. By addressing white supremacy in relation to the reality of class, empire, and other forms of domination, West advocates for the tangible socialist institutions the Panthers modeled: democratically controlled, cooperatively owned enterprises with minimal government interference whereby self-employed individuals in community decide what to do with surplus value.

Both West and the Panthers suggested that both the economy and society should be run democratically, to meet public needs, not to make profit for a few. Further, workers and consumers who are affected by economic institutions should own and

---

\(^{304}\) One of West’s major points is that the method of making most black people voiceless in their economic lives is a serious problem. Black workers and workers in general need to have some voice in the decisions of their workplace that affect their lives, their families, and their futures – [including control of the processes of surplus production, appropriation, and distribution]. West, *Prophetic Fragments*, 133-135.

\(^{305}\) Cornel West, *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs* (UNM Press, 2010), foreword.

\(^{306}\) West, *The Black Panther Party*. 
control them. They reject the belief that the whole economy should be centrally planned, favoring as much decentralization as possible. They oppose ruling classes and authoritarianism of capitalist societies. They both understand that the elimination of private corporations cannot happen in the short term, but they can be brought under greater democratic control, public pressure and community organizing can play a critical role in the struggle to hold corporations and private businesses accountable. Most importantly, the Panthers and West have advanced the idea that people enjoy work when it is meaningful and enhances their lives; tasks should be spread among as many people as possible rather than distributed on the basis of class, race, gender, and other forms of difference, as they are under capitalism. Black and Womanist ethicists that fully integrate a critique of capitalism and integrate an economic model of praxis like that of the Panthers into their visions of the future can indicate conclusions similar to West, specifically for a political economy that combats concentrated poverty in black communities. Historic examples include the case of Reverend George Washington Woodbey and Albert Cleage.\textsuperscript{307}

“A great example of a black religious thinker and leader who combined the insights of black theological reflection and Marxist social theory was the Reverend George Woodbey.”\textsuperscript{308} Woodbey devoted his life to promoting structural social change

\textsuperscript{307} In comparison to the theologians who wrote after Cone’s \textit{Black Theology and Black Power}, Woodbey and Cleage stand at a disadvantage. Woodbey and Cleage’s major works were published in 1903 and 1968. This is well before Womanism, and Cone and West’s earliest remarks concerning black theological ethics and Marxist thought. While more contemporary theologians have had the opportunity of incorporating elements of black feminism, and Cone and West’s thoughts into their ongoing thinking, Woodbey and Cleage would still lay a foundation upon which they could build.

\textsuperscript{308} West and Glaude, \textit{African American Religious Thought}, 888.
and creating a counter-hegemonic culture in liberal capitalist America. Woodbey was a Baptist preacher in San Diego, California, and a major socialist leader.309 He believed that he could be socialist without giving up his religious beliefs, positing that under socialism, religious freedom would be guaranteed. Woodbey also believed that it was in the interest of women, more than men, if possible, to be socialist because women suffer more from capitalism than anyone else.310 He believed that, under socialism, each woman would receive her own income and be an equal shareholder in the industries of the country. In a capitalist society, a working man is a slave, and his wife is the slave of a


310 According to Angela Davis, “For as long as the woman’s ‘natural’ place is proclaimed to be the home – in concrete terms: as long as she remains chained to a man and to a private domestic economy – her servile status is inevitable…The demand for job equality – equal jobs and equal pay for the same jobs – is one of the indispensable prerequisites for an effective women’s [and human] liberation strategy… The ultimate meaning of equality of the fight for the equality of women at the point of production should transcend its immediate aim. These efforts must be seen as an essential ingredient of a broader thrust: the assault on the institutional structures which perpetuate the socially enforced inferiority of women…The singular status of black people from slavery to the present, has forced the woman to work outside the home – at first as provider of profit for the slave-master, but later as provider for her own family. Certainly, as female, she has been objectively exploited to an even greater degree than the black man…What has been prompted in the black woman by the utter necessity of trying to survive in face of ruthless and sustained national oppression, should be elevated by the women’s movement [and liberationists in general] to the status of a strategic goal…The entire revolutionary continuum must be animated by the consciousness that the real goal of socialism is to shatter the automatism of the economic base…The material and ideological supports of female inferiority are not to be carried over intact into the socialist order, they must be relentlessly attacked throughout the course of building the revolutionary moment…If the quest for black women’s liberation is woven as a priority into the larger bid for female emancipation; if the women’s movement begins to incorporate socialist consciousness and forges its practice accordingly; then it can undoubtedly become a radical and subversive force of yet untold proportions. In this way the women’s liberation movement may assume its well-earned and unique place among the current gravediggers of capitalism.” Angela Y. Davis, “Women and capitalism: Dialectics of oppression and liberation,” in *The Black Feminist Reader* (2000), 183-186.
slave; therefore, liberation of both would enhance the position of women more than that of men.\textsuperscript{311}

Woodbey was the only black delegate on the Socialist Party conventions of 1904 and 1908. Jailed frequently, and hospitalized more than once owing to police brutality, Woodbey was a devoted Christian who sacrificed greatly for fostering a counter-hegemonic culture and promoting structural social change in liberal capitalist America. His life and writings best exemplify the point at which black theologians and Marxist thinkers are no longer strangers.\textsuperscript{312}

Albert Cleage began as pastor of the “Shrine of the Black Madonna” in 1953. Cleage preached directly and persistently to his congregation about the “Black Nation.”\textsuperscript{313} The centerpiece of Cleage’s sermons concerning the Black Messiah, is that not everyone’s experience reflects the revelation of the potential Black Nation. Many fall away or collaborate to get ahead economically. Cleage encouraged his congregation to face the fact that “we try to go along pretending that we’re all brothers [and sisters] because we’re all black, and that we’re all catching hell together, but that’s not the way it is.”\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{311} Woodbey’s most influential work, What to Do and How to Do It or Socialism vs. Capitalism was translated into three languages. George Washington Woodbey, \textit{What to Do and how to Do it: Or, Socialism Vs. Capitalism} (Press of Appeal Publishing Company, 1903).

\textsuperscript{312} West and Glaude, \textit{African American Religious Thought}, 889.


Whether a person is engaging in the struggle for the Black Nation is the criterion for their experience to be considered a valid source for Cleage’s Black Theology. Cleage most directly presents critical perspectives on aspects of capitalism, including critiques of Black individuals of the American middle-class. The result is that capitalist issues of individualism and class status are, to varying degrees, in tension with some forms of economic liberation. Because some of the foundational pillars of capitalist theory are the individual and private ownership, for Cleage, individualism is the principal sin of black people (which in the 1960s meant black men).\(^{315}\) It degrades the people’s identification with the Black Nation, sells black people out for personal gain, and pits black people

\(^{315}\) Much like the legacy of The Black Panthers, “black women are the main pillars of those social settlements which we call churches.” William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (Courier Corporation, 1999).

According to African-American studies scholar Evelyn Higginbotham, “Much has been written about the importance of the black church in the social and political life of black people. Much less has been written about black women’s importance in the life of the church...[with a focused attention on the women’s era movement from 1880-1920 that brought into existence the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., which represents and continues to represent the largest group – religious or secular – of black Americans] [Higginbotham] argues that women were crucial to broadening the public arm of the church and making it the most powerful institution of racial self-help in the African American community...In some instances, church women contested racist ideology and institutions through demands for anti-lynching legislation and an end to segregation laws...Largely through the fundraising efforts of women, the black church built schools, provided clothes and food to poor people, established old folks’ homes and orphanages, and made available a host of needed social welfare services...Since women have traditionally constituted the majority of every black denomination...the black church [is] not the exclusive product of male ministry but the product and process of male and female interaction...Left unheard are women’s voices within the public discourse of racial and gender self-determination...Black Baptist churchmen certainly recognize the importance of women’s active support for the denomination’s efforts toward racial self-help and self-reliance. Yet male-biased traditions and rules of decorum [have] sought to mute women’s voices and accentuate their subordinate status vis-à-vis men...Nonetheless, Fannie Barrier Williams, a founding member and leader of the National Association of Colored Women, acknowledged in 1900: ‘The training which first enabled colored women to organize and successfully carry on club work was originally obtained in church work. These churches have been and still are the great preparatory schools in which the primary lessons of social order, mutual trustfulness and united effort have been taught...The meaning of unity of effort for the common good, the development of social sympathies grew into woman’s consciousness through the privileges of church work.’” Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. “The Black church: A gender perspective.” *African American religion: Interpretive essays in history and culture* (1997): 201-225; See Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Club Movement among Colored Women of America,” in *A New Negro for a New Century*, eds. Booker T. Washington, N.B. Wood, and Fannie Barrier Williams (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1900), 383.
against one another. Repenting of their individualism, people of financial means (that is, the middle-class), need to use their money not for themselves to do as they please, but for the sake of the movement. In this way, the Black Nation can be strengthened. Salvation for Cleage is self-determination; it means black people are going to control things themselves.

Cleage and Woodbey reflect strong social character in their preferred economic order for black communities. Of the thinkers explored in this dissertation, these black theologians are particularly pertinent in that they reach economic conclusions similar to those of West. They also offer concrete actions to provide economic alternatives with a pragmatic utility. Their visions represent examples of moral visions to create models for economic salvation in the form of black democratic socialism. In the context of black liberationist power and praxis, they resonate with the Panthers in that they advocate how control of the means of production can benefit black communities in ways that are communally grounded. By embracing The Panthers’ revolutionary economic model of racial justice, black and Womanist ethicists can more deal more adequately with capitalism and develop implicit references to theological formations of a just, global society.

When re-contextualizing economic liberation and building upon examples like Woodbey and Cleage, Womanist themes offer a constructive, vanguard starting point of a

---


restructured society. “Wholeness” for the economic liberation of black communities can model traditional Womanist concerns for communal striving. It is the direct antithesis of capitalism’s hyper-individualistic starting point. Moreover, it facilitates a socialist approach to community wealth-building in society. For black people in communities “to be whole,” black self-love must be the number one priority, centering poor black women. An unapologetic desire to remain connected to the uplift of black women and black people in poor black communities is of paramount importance to “wholeness” as economic liberation. “Self-direction” as economic liberation reflects political agency to determine work and inclusion. A vision to create a self-sustainable economic community requires an intentional organizing force that is responsible for the community it serves. A “self-directed” black community envisions labor to be self-fulfilling, a supplement to well-being that involves the acquisition of skills and parity of health and welfare. Aligned with black and Womanist theo-ethics, The Black Panthers and West share the value of community-oriented self-determination.

319 BLT tradition’s focus regarding wealth and possessions is centered on redistribution. The reason for this focus is the acknowledgement of “sedimented inequalities” that account for the disparities of wealth between blacks and whites, rich and poor and decades of racial discrimination and injustice which kept blacks locked in the most menial jobs, leaving the possibility of generational wealth accumulation beyond the reach of many African Americans. Likewise, womanists note this historical material reality and offer the vision of a commonweal existence which entails an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-sexist, anti-racist economic democracy where the poor receive a just share of the benefits of social cooperation, particularly in the form of the abundance of society’s wealth. Dassie, “The Interconnection Between Race, Religion and Economics,” 204.

320 Jacquelyn Grant envisions a world where black women’s economic opportunities are not restricted, so long as they do not oppress others as they themselves have been oppressed. However, the result is more capitalism, incorporating blacks and women fully, along with greater decision-making for workers on the job. Here, this dissertation uses her idea of “self-direction” to facilitate a socialist vision.
Womanist Joan Martin provides an ethical way to deal with labor and work that assists in further explicating the meaning of community-oriented self-determination (as well as situating examples like Woodbey and Cleage) within black theological developments of democratically socialist “wholeness” and “self-direction.” In *More than Chains and Toil: A Christian Work Ethic of Enslaved Women*, Martin analyzes women’s work during slavery within the framework of Christian social ethics. She explicates the experiential realities in lives of enslaved women and their social world in the antebellum concerning the relationship among moral agency, work, and human meaning.  

According to Martin, slave narratives were a means of writing African women into history, as well as a way of articulating a strategy of resistance within chattel slavery. Slave narratives represent sacred texts that enable one to see the processes whereby religious faith becomes a source of power for black people as oppressed people.

To develop a Womanist theoretical foundation, Martin uses poststructuralist Pierre Bourdieu’s “logic of practice” for its concept of social space as multidimensional, relational, and interactive, and couples it with anthropologist James C. Scott’s theory of hidden transcripts because “Bourdieu inadequately addresses the power of subordinated groups to resist and subvert the dominant objective structures even

---


if they must do so in ways that appear passive, ineffective, and short term.” Scott gives Martin’s reading of slave narratives currency to see the often neglected social spaces and actions wherein marginalized peoples experience relative autonomy within their structured livelihood. According to Martin, four constitutive elements for constructing a work ethic based on experiences of oppressed black women include:

Black women’s theo-ethical understanding of the relations of God to slavery, Womanish moral authority, instruction, and action as an inter-generational dynamic for communal resistance, empowerment, and solidarity in the context of oppression, black women’s struggles for self-determination in the use of one’s own sexual and reproductive labor, and black women’s work-related attitude of self-reliance, and confidence in one’s owned learned craft and skill.

Martin’s engagement with these four elements buttresses economically just themes of “wholeness” and “self-direction” because it highlights a fundamental dynamic in the narratives of enslaved, and poor, black women; work as exploitation is considered evil, but work that functions as resistance strategy engenders moral living.

In critiquing and redefining work, Martin pushes back on the notions of work as “calling” and as “vocation.” Original formulations of these ideas did not take the reality of exploitative work into consideration in the construction of its theology. Martin creates a way for black liberationist and Womanist ethics to articulate moral agency

---


327 Martin defines vocation as a “vehicle through which one is obedient to God, who is the Christian’s master” (Martin, *More than Chains and Toil*, 114).

The Biblical roots of Christian economic ethics provided the basis for a rightly ordered economic life. Martin Luther and John Calvin’s attempts to relate biblical economic ethics to industrial revolution had a profound influence on the shape of how people began to understand their work as vocation. The belief is that Christians serve as stewards and their work is service to neighbor and contribution to the common good. Waldo Beach, *Christian Ethics in the Protestant Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 90.
through an approach to work that enables black people, especially poor black women, to be their fullest selves while also establishing bases for communal self-determination. Martin clearly shows how a Womanist interpretation of God and Jesus Christ as Creator and Liberator does not approve of captivity, and motivates the ongoing search for freedom and wholeness over and against evils of economic and human oppression. Black and Womanist ethicists can define themselves as liberated beings in and through their work by owning the fruits of their labor, serving to help create a vibrant black community despite the limitations placed on the community, especially black women, by those on the outside. Martin writes:

Enslaved women perceived work as ‘productive’ and ‘fulfilling’ when it contributed to the community in the ongoing struggle for emancipation and freedom. When we use our labor to meet material need, we realize our true humanity and enable our participation with God as co-creators.\(^{328}\)

From a democratically socialist perspective, black and Womanist ethics can build upon the revolutionary example of the Panthers, re-contextualizing their politics against the backdrop of Cornel West’s eschatological vision (and, like Woodbey and Cleage, blend love for black people with a praxis/action-oriented concern for transformative economic arrangements), for the purpose of centering poor black women within the “wholeness” and “self-direction” of black communities. To achieve a more just society, black and Womanist ethicists can use the Christian example of Christ as a model of organized liberation,\(^{329}\) showing that there is nothing Jesus did throughout his life and ministry that

\(^{328}\) Martin, *More than Chains and Toil*, 152.

\(^{329}\) In this model, Jesus the Christ’s twelve apostles were movement activists.
the Panthers did not do; Christ’s militant ministry of exorcising evil spirits is drawn upon
the sacred work of expelling forces of sexism, classism, racism, and economic injustice.
Black and Womanist theo-ethics need not shy away from commitments to spiritual
socialist revolution. “The Holy Spirit of freedom does not fear black leather jackets and
berets,” said Rev. Kamal Hassan of the Sojourner Truth Presbyterian Church in
Berkeley—referring to the agreement between The Black Panther Party and St.
Augustine Episcopal Church where the free breakfast program started in West Oakland in
1969—to a packed assembly at the Black Panther Party 50th Anniversary conference at
the Oakland Museum.\textsuperscript{330} In the most liberating respect, the spirit of Jesus the Christ is
that of a Black Panther.

CHAPTER FIVE: A JUST GLOBAL SOCIETY

Introduction

As a way to pragmatically counter capitalism, black and Womanist ethicists can articulate practical responses to chronic poverty experienced by marginalized individuals around the world. As a way forward, black and Womanist ethics can adopt the Panthers’ emphasis on what this chapter calls collective liberation. Contemporary politics within the theological community and beyond can be enriched by interaction with the memory of the Panthers’ anti-capitalist platform of collective liberation in the following ways: 1) black and Womanist ethicists can develop an internationalist approach to praxis that highlights the interplay between globalized economic structural transformation and the enlargement of human capabilities as an alternative to capitalism, 2) contemplative practices of black churches can connect prophetic energies of black religion to community-oriented social movements for racial and political praxis, and 3) the black prophetic tradition can craft a new ethic of resistance, a beloved community, as an antiracist cosmopolitan vision for economic liberation in a globalized world.

According to Civil Rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer, “Nobody’s free until everybody’s free” (Fannie L. Hamer, “Nobody’s Free Until Everybody’s Free,” Speech Delivered at the Founding of the National Women’s Political Caucus, Washington, DC (1971), 134-139. Collective liberation means recognizing that the struggle of all peoples is intimately connected, and that people must work together to create the kind of world where every person is worthy of dignity and respect. Collective liberation is both a noun and a verb; it refers to the idea that human collaborations provide tools to dismantle systems of economic and social oppression, and it is possible to create a world in which all people are seen as fully human.
This chapter concludes this dissertation and explores takeaways from the Panthers to “envision how reflection on a community’s economic ethics can stimulate a re-evaluation of economic life and ethics with the hope of bringing communities, public policy, and ultimately broader society more in line with the demands of justice.”

By describing the possibility of a just global society, this chapter will explain why the priorities of the Panthers’ racial politics offer an economic blueprint for black and Womanist ethicists to realize racial justice as collective liberation. In doing so, this chapter will explain why it has been long overdue for black liberationists and churches to consider new sociopolitical constellations for justice that advance radical economic arrangements. This chapter will show how a black and Womanist constructive appropriation of economic values that model concerns of the Panthers’ communal programs is a step in the direction of crafting a collective, antiracist cosmopolitan vision of liberation in a globalized world. This chapter will use tendencies in Black Feminist/Womanist thought to guide its conversation of human liberation, and the goal of this chapter is to offer a more concrete, practical basis for moving Christian ethicists away from Eurocentric models of economic justice.

As the conclusion of this dissertation, this chapter will provide an original attempt to ground a critical intellectual study of religion/theological ethics and globalization in relation to the praxis of black socialist politics and radical movements.

---


333 This chapter will advance further this dissertation’s central argument discussed in Chapter 2 and explicated in Chapters 3 and 4: that capitalist, Eurocentric models of economic justice are harmful to social projects of emancipation because they are predicated on negative views of human freedom, do not adequately address the experience and knowledge of poor persons and communities from the margins, and perpetuate dependency of marginalized communities on those who own means of production.
What follows is a liberationist reflection of a theory for social change. Ideas from Angela Davis’s *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* will help tease out this chapter’s concern for takeaways from the Black Panthers that build on Chapter Four’s Womanist themes of “wholeness” and “self-direction.” This chapter aims to position a liberationist vision for racial equality in a globalized world through a holistic model of social justice—which includes both radical economic leanings as well as prophetic energies of black faith commitments—for engaging revolutionary praxis. This positioning will facilitate the exploration of the concept of cosmopolitanism in the final section of this chapter: a thorough report on the role of religion and (inter-)communal self-determination in a just global society. By using Keri Day’s work to highlight the interplay between structural transformation and the enlargement of human capabilities as an alternative to capitalism, this chapter will develop associations between black and Womanist ethicists’ moral concerns and the Black Panther Party’s economic platform to connect Womanist prophetic energies of black religion\(^{334}\) to avenues for racial and political praxis. Barbara Holmes’ discussion of contemplative practices of black churches will facilitate this chapter’s consideration of future possibilities for black churches in a just global society.

In keeping with this dissertation’s methodological aim to center the liberation of poor black women, the premise for acknowledging takeaways from the legacy of the

\(^{334}\) As M. Shawn Copeland notes, “Black religion is an historical phenomenon neither Protestant nor Catholic, normatively centered in an African worldview, even if the language of its expression and the symbols of its rituals are Christian in inspiration and in fact, even if the very features of the Christianity peculiar to the enslaved peoples masked their Africanty.” M. Shawn Copeland, “Foundations for Catholic Theology in an African American Context.” *Phelps, Black and Catholic* 119 (1997).
Black Panthers is the continued need to situate collective liberation and challenge capitalism from a Black Feminist/Womanist lens. According to Angela Davis,

Liberation is synonymous with revolution…A revolution is not just armed struggle. It’s not just the period in which you take over. A revolution has a very, very long spectrum…Che made the very important point that the society you’re going to build is already reflected in the nature of the struggle that you’re carrying out. And one of the most important things in relationship to that is the building of a collective spirit, getting away from this individualistic orientation towards personal salvation, personal involvement…One of the most important things that has to be done in the process of carrying out a revolutionary struggle is to merge those two different levels, to merge the personal with the political where they’re no longer separate.\textsuperscript{335}

Because both the Panthers’ domestic and global analyses did not account for the feminization of the global market,\textsuperscript{336} their politics of gender and patriarchy reduced the collective spirit of the Black Power movement’s revolutionary potential. Black Feminism/Womanism emerged as a theoretical and practical effort demonstrating that race, gender, and class are inseparable in the social worlds people inhabit. Insisting on the connections between struggles and racism in the U.S. and struggles against globalized economic injustices is a feminist process.

As the social body of application for this chapter’s takeaways, black church folk must always remember the words of Womanist Cheryl Townsend Gilkes: “If it wasn’t for the women, you wouldn’t have a church!”\textsuperscript{337} “In the struggle for liberation within the

\textsuperscript{335} \textit{LIFE Magazine}, September 11, 1970, 26. The quote, from a speech Davis made for the Soledad Brothers, comes from a June 27, 1970, interview with Maeland Productions, which was doing a documentary on Davis.


\textsuperscript{337} Cheryl Gilkes, \textit{If It Wasn’t for the Women--: Black Women’s Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community} (Orbis Books, 2001), 1
black church and community, women...have historically been ignored...Furthermore, the
issue of sexism in the black community is often overshadowed by the race problem.”

This is problematic, according to Davis, given that:

Whenever you conceptualize social justice struggles, you will always defeat your
own purposes if you cannot imagine the people around whom you are struggling
as equal partners...With respect to feminist struggles, men will have to do a lot of
the important work. [Feminism is not only something] that adheres to bodies, [it is
as not exclusive] as something grounded in gendered bodies, but [it is] an
approach – [it is] a way of conceptualizing, as a methodology, as a guide to
strategies for struggle.

What does it mean to model (black) Feminism/Womanism as a human being? It is about
a certain kind of consciousness that progressive persons have to encourage others to
cultivate. There must be willingness among church folk to serve as sacred spaces where
dialogue and responsiveness to issues of gender and class are entered into. The

church must then work to understand how its perpetuation of sexism and classism
are systemic issues, connected to the broader culture (pervading all societal
institutional structures) and be prophetically countercultural, rejecting these
phenomena at all levels within its institutional structure.

Conscious interventions are necessary. Because sexism remains the nexus through which
racism and capitalism function to exploit poor persons and marginalized communities,
Black Feminist/Womanist ideals create one of the most fruitful spaces out of which to
construct a just economic theory for social change.

Black/Womanist Practical Guidance toward Collective Liberation for Global Poor

338 Dassie, “The Interconnection Between Race, Religion and Economics,” 75-76; Gilkes, If It Wasn’t for
the Women, 307.

339 Angela Y. Davis, Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a
Movement (Haymarket Books, 2016), 26-27.

Because the Panthers’ political task established a normative internationalist focus on communal striving, an appropriate response from black and Womanist ethicists to economic injustice must include a vision of moral action directed at policies that both underestimate the real harms associated with domestic and global markets and overestimate persons’ abilities to rise out of poverty based on individual freedoms, personal merit, and economic success to the exclusion of oppressive structures and inequitable institutional practices. As a way to carry forward the Panthers’ historic political task, black and Womanist ethicists can articulate liberation as the process and end goal for oppressed peoples within a capitalist global economy through policies that provide checks to market mechanisms and forces that perpetuate inequities worldwide.

According to Keri Day, “communities of color can experience greater equity and equality by crafting a vision of a preferable future that includes the implementation of public policies in order to foster thriving and flourishing for vulnerable segments around the world.” She writes:

Public policies that are guided by normative commitments such as human dignity and communal accountability can cultivate the type of structural transformation and actualization of human potential needed to close the wealth gap between rich and poor countries and within individual countries themselves...Black liberation and womanist scholars must negotiate the significations of global political economy and how these relate to the integration of poor persons into modernizing global processes toward flourishing.

---


342 Day continues, “While some scholars are dubious as to whether the goal is to integrate poor persons into modernizing processes (supplanting current advanced-capitalist arrangements with alternative economic models), other scholars argue that advanced-capitalist systems and its practices can be penetrated, critiqued, and transformed into more just economic arrangements that reflect mutuality and reciprocity instead of gross-profit maximization. See Kathryn Tanner’s *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2005), which contends that our present global political economy must not be reified or its processes seen as
The historical factors that give rise to oppressed voices around the world point beyond happenstance and toward inequitable global productions. Black liberationist and Womanist scholarship function as a necessary rejoinder to faulty logic of capitalism and neo-liberalism that can provide possibilities within this mode of economic activity. In building upon the economic priorities of the Panthers, a black and Womanist theo-ethical vision of a preferable future for a global society includes “fostering a sense of transnational justice, thriving for the global poor, and public policies to regulate inequitable international markets, thereby minimizing economic disparities associated with capitalist exploitation and commodification.”

When turning to the problem of global poverty, black and Womanist ethicists can couple their moral sensibilities with the Panthers’ transnational scope of justice and connect this to women of the Third World.

Transnational justice is critical to thriving for poor persons around the world, particularly because throughout the global community women are over-represented among the vulnerable class of impoverished individuals. Black liberationist and Womanist discourses can enrich their own theological discourses by relating their theo-ethical values, concerns, and commitments to an idea of global counter-capitalist communities. In this case, the idea of global counter-capitalist communities arises out of the global economic interaction and interdependence nation-states already experience, inevitable as all economic systems are shaped and sustained by social and political forces. She proposes a model of ‘theological economy’ that presents subversive principles and ways of being, which can breed transformation of exploitative structures and practices within political economy. Tanner represents this tension between the radical corruptibility of capitalist structures and recognizing the need to transform such structures within political economy” (Day, “Global Economics,” 14-15).

which shows a way for values and norms that can guide and regulate global market interactions cross-culturally. According to Day,

The concept of *Imago Dei* can contribute to the development of such values as human equality, fairness in market exchange, and defending the most vulnerable segments of society; values that are worthy of commendation...poor communities need more than survival, they also need to *thrive*. Poor global communities of color would benefit from a concept of thriving that details what cultural and economic resources are need for poor persons to participate, on par, with their peers in broader society344...One normative commitment is gender equality across societies...[Martha] Nussbaum’s work on “human capabilities” [is] compelling with respect to women. Nussbaum persuasively argues that any strategy to ameliorate poverty around the world must privilege women who constitute over half of the global poor.345

Much like the Panthers did, black and Womanist liberationists can engage democratic vitalities that will most likely ensure the possibility of social transformation, and the enlargement of human freedoms, in order for poor persons to self-actualize and

---

344 For instance, Martha Nussbaum identifies a list of basic cultural and economic resources the global poor (particular poor women) need to flourish, such as life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses/imagination/thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, and control over one’s environment. In *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Nussbaum expounds on this list. For Nussbaum, life means being able to live to the end of human life of normal length, not dying prematurely due to structural constraints. Bodily health means being adequately nourished and having shelter, able to have good health. Bodily integrity means being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against assault. Senses, imagination, and thought mean being able to think and reason in a “truly human” way through adequate education as well as freedom of artistic, religious, and social expression. Emotions mean to love those who love and be loved as well; not having one’s emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety from organizational, structural, or unfair interpersonal relations. By practical reason, she means being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about one’s life plans. Affiliation means being engaged in various forms of social interaction with self-respect and dignity. “Other Species” means being able to live at peace and love in relation to plants, animals, and the world of nature. By play, she means persons being able to laugh, play, and enjoy recreational activities. Finally, “control over one’s environment” means being able to participate in political processes and choices and being able to have access to real opportunities in employment and property. She sees this list as dynamic and not static. For a more in-depth description of each human capability, refer to chapter one, “In Defense of Universal Values.”

flourish.³⁴⁶ This includes the implementation of normative commitments of increased regulation of international markets through public policies that regulate “inequitable markets in order to ensure equity on a number of social issues that affect the poor, such as wages, employment conditions, health benefits, and more.”³⁴⁷

Angela Davis speaks of the kind of commitments for collective liberation Day highlights as a form of abolitionist advocacy.³⁴⁸ Black and Womanist ethicists can offer a vision for a new world by relating their theological reflections to a political economy of globalized communal hope, centered on abolitionism. At the heart of the Black Panthers’ revolutionary services was not only a concern for the survival and liberation of disadvantaged communities, but also abolitionist demands for quality education, for antiracist job strategies, for free health care, and the promotion of anti-capitalist critiques and movements toward socialism. Advocacy of “revolutionary transformation was not primarily about violence, but also about substantive issues like better life conditions for poor people and [marginalized communities].”³⁴⁹ A normative focus of Black and

³⁴⁶ This chapter is not suggesting the exporting of Western democracy to other nations and parts of the world. Rather, it is suggesting that political and economic arrangements must consider what types of democratic energies cultivate the possibility of social justice and the securing of basic human freedoms.


³⁴⁸ Davis, Freedom is a Constant Struggle, 6.

³⁴⁹ Davis, Freedom is a Constant Struggle, 7.

“The abstract character of the public perception of prisons militates against an engagement with the real issues afflicting the communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers. This is the ideological work that the prison performs – it relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of late capitalism, of transnational capitalism. The naturalization of black people as criminals thus also erects ideological barriers to an understanding of the connections between late twentieth-century structural racism and the globalization of capital. The vast expansion of the power of capitalist corporations over the lives of people of color and poor people in general has been accompanied by a waning anticapitalist consciousness…Ironically, prisons themselves are becoming a source of cheap labor that attracts corporate capitalism – as yet on a relatively small scale – in a way that
Womanist ethicists as it relates to “abolishing the prison [economy] is about attempting to abolish racism… [a way for people] to develop the institutions that would allow for the incorporation of previously enslaved people in a democratic society.”

“Wholeness” and “self-direction” relate to abolitionist advocacy as a form of international collective liberation through concerns for global (inter-)communal striving. Much like the Panthers’ economic locus of revolutionary inter-communalism, as discussed in Chapter Three, “wholeness” for global collective liberation begins with countries as “whole” communities. For countries under the superstructure of global capitalism to be considered “whole,” they must be free from dependency on Western hegemonic standards of First World “civilization.” Global economic liberation begins with centering poor women in Third World contexts through a commitment to abolish the structural nature of interconnected international class issues. “Self -direction,” therefore, reflects the political agency of peoples around the world to determine work that is meaningful to them insofar as it promotes the economic self-sustainability of countries’

(parallels the attraction unorganized labor in Third World countries exerts” (James, “The Angela Y. Davis Reader,” 67). “Prisons are racism incarnate. As Michelle Alexander points out, they constitute the new Jim Crow. But also much more, as the lynchpins of the prison-industrial complex, they represent the increasing profitability of punishment. They represent the increasingly global strategy of dealing with populations of people of color and immigrant populations from the countries of the Global South as surplus populations, as disposable populations.” Davis, Freedom is a Constant Struggle, 107.

Because of assumptions that capitalism is the only future alternative, the proletarianization of women of color in the U.S. is simultaneous with exploitation of women in the Third World. Women’s organizations have been engaged in international solidarity work at least since the previous century (i.e. Third World Women’s Alliance of the 1960s and 1970s. Davis, Freedom is a Constant Struggle, 18), there are precedents for the kind of organizing across borders that women are presently attempting to do. Davis, Freedom is a Constant Struggle, 321.

350 Davis, Freedom is a Constant Struggle, 23, 26.

351 See footnote 61.
autonomous interdependence in a globally connected world. “Self-direction” as a form of collective liberation of abolitionist values looks like the ability for countries to organize labor forces that are responsible first for the peoples they serve, and not to the interests of a global hegemonic power and militaristic gaze.

**Black/Womanist Practical Guidance toward Collective Liberation for Black Churches**

A black and Womanist theo-ethical focus on aspects of black churches that point beyond particular congregational gatherings toward a mystical and communal spirituality, not within the exclusive domain of any denomination, involves collective liberation. The notion of a collective liberation includes a departure point in framing discussions on what praxis from black churches for a liberated global poor might look like. To challenge the capitalist system, black religious faith communities and all communities in a globalized world can operate as communal precursors to the participation of a co-creating God. According to Womanist Barbara Holmes, “Today, increasing numbers of young people believe that the black church exists in a time warp, with slavery as its originating marker and civil rights as its culminating goal.”

**In Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of The Black Church,** Holmes focuses on a shared religious imagination at the

---

352 Although black churches are not monolithic communities, Holmes is aware that the phrase “historical black church” can be problematic when it is used to gloss over complex and multifaceted worship choices. Accordingly, she uses the phrase as a cultural reference point that may illuminate or impinge upon a historical trajectory but is not limited to those disciplinary boundaries. She writes, “The phrase black church is used in theological circles to describe many different aspects of Africana [Holmes uses the term Africana to denote Africans in various global contexts] worship life; however, I am specifically referring to a dynamic religious entity forged in oppression and sustained by practices that were often covert and intuitive. All who have lived within its embrace know that the historical black church exceeds its walls, preachers, ideology, denominational focus, and Protestant/Catholic differences…The black church has an actual and a meta-actual form.” Barbara A. Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church* (Fortress Press, 2017), xxii.

353 Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable.*
center of black church practices that manifest as the communal intent to sustain one another and journey together toward joy despite oppressive conditions. Through a retrieval of the contemplative practices of black churches, Holmes brings a diversity-based, beloved community into view.

In spite of capitalism’s facilitation of radical individualism, people cannot carve out shared destinies in isolation. Holmes offers an understanding of contemplation that both creates intersections between inner cosmologies and the interpretive life of a community and depends upon an intense mutuality, shared religious imagination, and the free flow of interpretation within the context of lived spirituality. For the purposes of this chapter, employing Holmes is meant to move the current Western theo-ethical condition beyond being “dependent, interdependent, networked, constructed, and directed by the larger, cultural, moral orders that nurture, orient, and guide human motivations and actions for much of what the Enlightenment has taught [people] to be remotely plausible.” Holmes brings contemplation into focus as an important, taken-for-granted worship legacy in the historical black church. Because African indigenous religions make few distinctions between sacred and secular, contemplative moments in the historical

354 Christian Smith, Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 155. According to Smith, human beings are characterized by their capacity to believe and by their construction of a moral order.

355 Religious comparativist David Chidester considers a way forward through ‘religion’ and its confluence with secularism in proposing an alternative genealogy of the study of religion. Empire of Religion tracks back and forth between an imperial center and a colonized periphery to achieve an interpretive analysis of imperial comparative religion’s translation. By situating his analysis in the imperial context, Chidester utilizes ‘religion’s’ concrete link to the actual imperial context in order to expose the grounds out of which classical thinkers in the subfields of religion studies collected data. He shows that “imperial comparative religion generated knowledge that was a prelude to empire and a consequence of empire but also an accompaniment to the contingencies of imperial, colonial, and indigenous mediations.” Chidester unsettles the theoretical industry of translation by resituating gaps in between ‘religion’ and secular representations.
The black church has always been central to the life of black communities, but things have changed. Black-American communities and churches are not as homogeneous as they seemed during the years of sanctioned cultural oppression. Instead, both are becoming more diverse:

The response of the black church has been to raise the entertainment quotient and streamline. Survival depends on the ability to keep the people attending and giving so that increasing budget demands can be met...This is not to say that recent changes in worship are not a welcome improvement...Excellence in all things is a joy to behold. Because this postmodern era is characterized by a multiplicity of narratives and needs, [however,] the historical black church must identify and reclaim its diverse congregational practices and taken-for-granted spiritual gifts.\textsuperscript{358}

\textsuperscript{356} Holmes, \textit{Joy Unspeakable}, xxv.

\textsuperscript{357} Holmes, \textit{Joy Unspeakable}, xiv.

\textsuperscript{358} Holmes, \textit{Joy Unspeakable}, xxiv.
Marginalized communities still require attentive listening, prayer, and an inclined will to flourish. When life is viewed from this perspective, community is no longer an artificial construct, but rather an organic system of memory and responsibility.

This dissertation agrees with Holmes’ concern, which is that the worship style of black churches is being homogenized into a blended ahistorical weekly event that bears no traces of its complex and diverse Africana origins. There were points in history when it served black communities to mask its complexities. However, the survival of black church communities depends on spiritual diversity and versatility. A first step

---

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. expressed similar views when he said, “Two types of Negro churches have failed to provide bread. One burns with emotionalism and the other freezes with classism. The former, reducing worship to entertainment, places more emphasis on volume than on content and confuses spirituality with muscularity. The danger in such a church is that the members may have more religion in their hands and feet than in their hearts and souls. At midnight, this type of church has neither the vitality nor the relevant gospel to feed hungry souls. The other type of Negro church...boasts of its dignity, its membership of professional people, and its exclusiveness. In such a church, the worship service is cold and meaningless, the music dull and uninspiring, and the sermon little more than a homily on current events...This type of church tragically fails to recognize that worship at its best is a social experience in which people from all levels of life come together to affirm their ones and unity under God. At midnight [women and] men are altogether ignored because of their limited education, or they are given bread that has been hardened by the winter of morbid class consciousness.” Martin Luther King, *Strength to Love*, vol. 27 (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); excerpted in Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 501-502.

For example, in Malcolm X’s life, contemplative practices are linked to Islam. Malcolm X became aware of the contemplative aspects of his spiritual life when he was arrested in 1946. Feminist and Social Activist bell hooks offers an exclusive glimpse of the contemplative Malcolm in confinement: “Confinement in prison provides the space where Malcolm can engage in uninterrupted critical reflection on his life, where he can contemplate the meaning and significance of human existence. During this period of confinement, he comes face to face with the emptiness of his life, the nihilism. This time for him is akin to ‘a dark night of the soul.’ ...He is overwhelmed with longing, without knowing for what he longs. It is in that space of need that he is offered Islam.” Bell Hooks, “Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics,” (1991), 80.

Sociologist Michael Eric Dyson notes the difference between Malcolm’s spirituality and the spirituality of the black church in his discussion of Spike Lee’s 1992 film about Malcolm’s life. Dyson writes, “The markers of black spirituality have been dominated by the Christian cosmos; the themes, images, and ideas of black spiritual life are usually evoked by gospel choirs enthralled in joyous praise or a passionate preacher engaged in ecstatic proclamation. Never before in American cinema has an alternative black spirituality been so intelligently presented” (Michael Eric Dyson, *Making Malcolm: The myth and meaning of Malcolm X* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 1996), 141).
toward restoration of spiritual diversity includes the retrieval of contemplative practices that sustained black communities during slavery and during the formation of the black church, and eventually undergirded social activism and the secular arts. “Clearly, the black church was the foundation that nurtured the hope of what became The Civil Rights and Black Power movements, but the spark that ignited the justice movements did not come from the hierarchical institutional black church.” Trajectories of contemplative consciousness throughout the social activism of the 1960s led to the Civil Rights Movement and The Black Power movement. In many ways, the Black Panthers represented a precursor to contemporary generations of activists who use the language of faith but reject the black church’s homogenized, monothematic approach to liberation and worship.

Black churches need to craft more radical approaches to social (read: racial) injustice and structural economic oppression. Holmes writes:

Current issues – including police and intra-communal violence, and political disdain for the poor and for the environment – present justice seekers with the exhausting specter of unending struggle…there is a weariness that is so pervasive and so deep that it cannot be assuaged by the usual liturgy and shout…I want black congregants to embrace crucial spiritual linkages to contemplative practices that give its membership access to a greater variety and depth of spirituality…Retrieving this legacy is important because we can no longer assume that the tradition will be passed down through generations of church-going families. Increasing diversification of faith options makes it imperative that the

According to Barbara Holmes, [Malcolm] is grounded in a contemplative tradition that expects a practical translation of the spiritual into accessible resources for the community…his contemplative spirit is a call to the Africana community to recognize the sources of their own oppression, including their complicity in its perpetuation…decades later, his language has been translated into a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement: Stay Woke. Holmes, Joy Unspeakable, 137.

361 Holmes, Joy Unspeakable, 113.
stories and practices be retained. But even more crucial than the retention of practices is the healing of the wounds of generations past.362

“Any spirituality which does not engage in justice is unbiblical and only reinforces the political and psychic structures of oppression.”363 In the silent aftermath of the justice movements of the 1960s that culminated in the Panthers’ historic rise, another generation of activists emerged to challenge the violence of the police against unarmed members of the community, decrying Black Lives Matter (BLM). BLM’s call for contemplative confrontation is also the call to change lives. Because cooperation with injustice has not ever produced peace, the movement erupts “from a place of rage, but also from a place of deep love for black people.”364

Historically, the black church served as a bastion for spiritual and civil activism. However, as the civil rights generation aged, church became less relevant to a generation raised on technology and increased global connections. As the deaths of unarmed black people continued, the millennial generation sparked BLM on social media. Although justice seeking is intergenerational, BLM activists identified clear differences between their movement and those of the civil rights generation that preceded them. In contrast to the patriarchal leadership model of King and the Panthers, BLM is a decentralized,


leader-full network of local organizations. BLM replaces the charismatic male figure with many voices, especially those of black women, inviting the gifts of the community and the emergence of unlikely local leaders. Like the Panthers, BLM’s demand is for the state to stop killing black people. Its social media platform has become a way for its members to tell counter-narratives. BLM actions disrupt everyday life, shutting things down and putting the bodies of its supporters at risk. Like the Panthers, BLM also works with allies, but from vanguard positionalities.

BLM engages in cross-racial collaboration and focuses on the denial of black humanity by the systems structured to support oppression. Unlike the Panthers, BLM does not operate from a comprehensive social theory, nor does it enact revolutionary services that provide an alternative to capitalism. Over time, this may or may not change. Given that black churches represent the oldest and largest economic institution in the black community, black churches and BLM can work together to establish concrete economic aims that would benefit black people. According to James Cone, the spirit of black resistance is a transcendent force rooted in black history and found today in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Much like Chapter Four’s discussion of the

365 According to Angela Davis, BLM has “developed new models of leadership that acknowledge how important Black Feminist insights are to the development of viable twenty-first-century radical black movements. [BLM] understands the clandestine racialization and gendering of putatively universal categories. They recognize, for example, that those who counter the slogan ‘Black Lives matter’ with that they assume is a more all-embracing slogan, ‘All Lives Matter,’ are often embracing a strategy that glosses over the particular reasons why it is important to insist quite specifically on an end to racist violence…More often than not universal categories have been clandestinely racialized. Any history of racism requires us to understand the tyranny of the universal. For most of our history the very category ‘human’ has not embraced black people and people of color. Its abstractness has been colored white and gendered male” (Davis, Freedom is a Constant Struggle, 86-87).

366 Holmes, Joy Unspeakable, 154.

367 Cone, Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell, 139.
sociopolitical differences between black and Womanist liberationists and the Panthers, what is missing from an approach to collective liberation in black churches is the ability to form *common connections* with contemporary secular racial justice movements like BLM.

According to Angela Davis:

> You have to develop organizing strategies so that people identify with the particular issue as their own...If *[common connections]* are not created, no matter how much you appeal to people, no matter how much you genuinely invite them to join you, they will continue to see the activity as yours, not theirs.\(^3\)\(^\text{68}\)

Unfortunately, instead of providing religious support for “secular” radical agendas that serve the struggle for economic liberation and racial justice, black churches find themselves in a particular type of dissonance with new movements like BLM.\(^3\)\(^\text{69}\)

Nonetheless, “BLM activists are the progeny of the contemplative black church.”\(^3\)\(^\text{70}\) By modeling communities of love and justice, they offer a vision for a new world of racial equality. Black churches can articulate more concrete approaches to social justice by joining their movement as a way to offer practical guidance for poor communities of color. “Every change that has happened has come as a result of mass movements.”\(^3\)\(^\text{71}\)

Gilkes argues that black churches should be in the forefront of movements and strategies to uplift African Americans economically.\(^3\)\(^\text{72}\)

“African American women and their

\(^{3\text{68}}\) Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 20.

\(^{3\text{69}}\) Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 20153-155.

\(^{3\text{70}}\) Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 20162.

\(^{3\text{71}}\) Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 2036.
communities stand to benefit from advocacy for economic justice more than any other group of women.”

Black churches can be open to growing church membership through economic practices and commitments that center on poor black persons and communities in both theory and in practice, as well as modify rituals like tithing to engender devoted giving rather than ritualistic expectation. Until then, it will not be easy to find a central locus of spiritual support for black communities.

Black churches can apply themes of “wholeness” and “self-direction” with contemplative activism that includes visions of economic justice. To confront realities of capitalism, black churches can engage in projects that unite both religious and secular arms of communal liberation and foster the self-determination of black and marginalized communities. They can nurture social development that is rooted in communities and committed to self-sufficiency, building on the cooperative principle that people work more efficiently when they have a stake in the enterprise. The point is for black churches to provide better choices and to create a political culture that is more democratic and ecologically conscious than capitalism. No other community can do so as effectively.

To this day, religious communities still reflect a racial divide, a division that for Christian communities is no more evident than on a Sunday morning. In Divided By Faith, Sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith set out to learn more about life in the U.S. by examining the role of white Christian evangelicalism in race relations. They argue that although evangelicals desire to end racial division and inequality, and attempt to think and act accordingly, in the process, they likely do more to perpetuate the racial divide than they do to tear it down. Their examination of the role that the structure of religion in the U.S. plays in racial division and inequality is based on historical analyses, a national survey and hundreds of personal interviews with evangelicals and other citizens of the United States.

Emerson and Smith explore the ways in which culture and norms that are characteristically evangelical and American (Emerson and Smith connect a notion of core American ideals such as having a nice home in a quiet neighborhood with parks and good schools with processes of racialization in the U.S.)

---

372 Gilkes, If It Wasn’t for the Women, 204.

373 Gilkes, If It Wasn’t for the Women.

374 To this day, religious communities still reflect a racial divide, a division that for Christian communities is no more evident than on a Sunday morning. In Divided By Faith, Sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith set out to learn more about life in the U.S. by examining the role of white Christian evangelicalism in race relations. They argue that although evangelicals desire to end racial division and inequality, and attempt to think and act accordingly, in the process, they likely do more to perpetuate the racial divide than they do to tear it down. Their examination of the role that the structure of religion in the U.S. plays in racial division and inequality is based on historical analyses, a national survey and hundreds of personal interviews with evangelicals and other citizens of the United States.

Emerson and Smith explore the ways in which culture and norms that are characteristically evangelical and American (Emerson and Smith connect a notion of core American ideals such as having a nice home in a quiet neighborhood with parks and good schools with processes of racialization in the U.S.)
that appropriate American ideals to mean ending up in “whiter” neighborhoods and schools) have negative effects on race relations. Their study focuses primarily on white evangelicals as a representative sample of a religious population that historically lives apart from other races, especially black people. They assert that religion, as structured in the U.S. is unable to make a great impact on its racialized society. “The structure of religion in America is conducive to freeing groups from the direct control of other groups, but not to addressing the fundamental divisions that exist in [the] current racialized society.” In other words, religion can serve as a moral force in freeing people, but not in bringing them together as equals across racial lines. They contend that evangelicals view their primary task as evangelism and discipleship, and at times they have been able to call for and realize social change, but they most consistently call for changes in persons that leave the dominant social structures, institutions, and culture intact (for example, most evangelicals were not outspoken abolitionists – or integrationists for that matter – although they tended to oppose slavery; thus, the evangelical faith motivated racial beliefs and practices, but the common faith was expressed within the dominant social milieu, giving it different emphasis). Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 11, 18, 21-34.

During and after the Civil Right movement, evangelical Christians developed a formal theology of reconciliation. The move to reconcile racial divides, however, did not fully come into fruition. Through their analysis and interviews with evangelicals, Emerson and Smith find that white evangelicals attribute the race problem – if they are willing to acknowledge that one exists – to one or more of the following three ideas that would eventually be connected to the failure of racial reconciliation: prejudiced individuals who do not repent, resulting in bad relationships and sin; non-white, usually African-American, groups trying to make race problems a group issue when it is an individual problem; and a fabrication of the self-interested non-white groups, but also the media and government. The view that prejudiced individuals are the kernel of racism reflects a focus on the individual as opposed to larger social structures. Given that racial problems are a social issue that affects structures in society and not simply individuals, Emerson and Smith introduce the concept of cultural tools to account for why white evangelicals tend to not see racism as a social, structural issue. They write, “Sociologist Ann Swidler argues that culture creates ways for individuals and groups to organize experiences and evaluate reality. It does so by providing a repertoire, or ‘tool kit’ of ideas, habits, skills, and styles. … The racially important cultural tool in the white evangelical tool kit are accountable free will individualism,’ ‘relationalism,’ (attaching central importance to interpersonal relationships), and antistructuralism (inability to perceive or unwillingness to accept social structural influences).” Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 52-68, 74; Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* (1986): 273-286.

Absent from the accounts of white evangelicals was the incorporation of social structures and institutions in the way society functions. Emerson and Smith also report that their ahistorical worldview persists because of their racially homogenous social worlds. The white evangelicals interviewed had few interracial contacts that undoubtedly helped to solidify their neglect of structural factors within society. Conversely, “nonwhite respondents had no trouble producing specific examples of [institutional or structural] racism, neither did the relatively non-isolated whites.” Emerson and Smith conclude that the individualist perspective does not eliminate the ability to see racial problems. What it does do, in the context of a racialized society, is eliminate the ability to see advantage, therefore creating a society where all are seen as autonomous individuals who can pray and hope for God to change society and fix racial problems. Accordingly, Emerson and Smith found the main theme within the Christian solution to racial problems was called the “‘miracle motif.’ The miracle motif is the theologically rooted idea that as more individuals become Christian, social and personal problems will be solved automatically” (Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 88, 117).

Emerson and Smith provide a foundational analysis of religious faith’s effect on racial perspectives. By recognizing white evangelical cultural tools as a key factor in how Christians understand current racial problems, they demonstrate the way in which racialized faith can be a hindrance in social projects of racial healing and equality. Their investigation builds upon elements of racial formation theory’s idea of racialization to the point that it sees projects of racial reconciliation as racial projects rooted in
Black Power transformed the rules of old economism. Collective liberation as “wholeness” and “self-direction” can facilitate the tradition of new Black Power praxis. Black and Womanist liberationists, and the black churches they represent, can carry forward gains toward projects that restrain social and economic abuse of unequal power. Such praxis is a quintessential social Christian project.

**Beloved Community: “To be a Christian means, at least, not being pro-capitalism…”**

According to Angela Davis, “[T]he black struggle in the U.S. serves as an emblem of the struggle for freedom. It’s emblematic of larger struggles for freedom.”

Collective liberation beyond a focus on black communities means openness to new knowledge and thought forms that are a necessary characteristic in today’s world, which is becoming more interconnected. Processes of globalization bring “religion” (and all of its concomitant Christian and secular parts) into larger conversations around the possibility of a *beloved community*. *Beloved community* refers to transnational aspects of culture that appear throughout the world and point not only to nongovernmental service organizations but also to a broader sense of global belonging. In this sense, one can assume that there are forms of culture that are worldwide, and that there is an

---

cultural tools of the dominant race. This chapter appreciates Emerson and Smith’s study for its way of acknowledging the racial aspects of evangelical theology and its moral applications. Furthermore, while Emerson and Smith may have chosen to study evangelicals because they are self-professed evangelicals, this chapter locates their choice to study Christian evangelical culture as a strategic move that can speak to broader issues within the very culture of whiteness and hegemony that plays a foundational part in how religious and political faith operates within the modern world.

---


376 Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 39.
international community that, in some way, serves as a civil society on a global scale.

While a capitalist, or neoliberal, might understand that worldwide culture as predicated on the inalienable rights of the individual, which includes property rights, freedom from state-imposed constraints, etc., black and Womanist ethicists use the lens of collective liberation and the study of religion as a factor in this global culture and its attendant civil society.

Religion is a part of globalization in many ways. Global civil society is possible insofar as all members of a global community can be subsumed into an overarching political order of religious (read: theo-ontological) identification. The possibility of a

377 Religion plays diverse roles in today’s globalized society. It is not only globalization’s foe, it can also facilitate the understanding and tolerance necessary for globalization’s culturally different communities, and it can offer alternative visions of global values of its own. If this global interaction of people and information is leading to something more than just a mixing of cultural stew – if there is a new global society emerging – then this emerging syncretic soup will have religious sensitivities and moral values as one ingredient. This means that the religious factor in globalization is often a puzzling one. Its role is frequently contradictory. In some cases, it provides the resources for shared values – including a universal sensibility toward spirituality and the elements of a global ethic – that provide the cultural basis for transnational laws and regulations, agencies of economic and social accountability, and a sense of global citizenship. In some cases, it helps to ease the cultural difficulties experienced in culturally diverse societies by providing the shared values that allow people of divergent cultures to live together in harmony. In other cases, it sounds a prophetic note by warning against the superficial aspects of a homogeneous global culture. And, yes, in extreme cases it also fosters ideologies of rebellion that embolden its proponents to reject globalization and reassert traditional allegiances, sometimes with quite violent methods. Mark Juergensmeyer, ed., Religion in Global Civil Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), introduction.

378 For example, Arvind Mandair’s Religion and the Specter of the West underlines contexts out of which religion scholars produced knowledge of ‘religion,’ only to forget that the category itself exists within a secular Christian worldview of ideas about life. He grapples with the politics of knowledge production from the standpoint of Indian Sikhism. Mandair writes, the “root of this problem [of religious studies’ adherence to the concept of secularism] is that [sub]disciplines [of religious study] view the distinction between religion and secularism in terms of a conventional narrative that states that modernity, humanism, and its offspring, secularism, constitute a radical break with prior traditions of thought, especially theology. What this story misses, however, is the essential – i.e., ontotheological or metaphysical – continuity between different moments in the Western tradition: specifically, the Greek, the medieval-scholastic, and the modern humanist.” Mandair challenges the “spector of the West,” or ‘[the phantasm of] religion’ as construed by Western cultural influence, by conceptualizing the identification Indians make with ‘religion’ or ‘world religions’ as an “aporia, an experience that is simultaneously possible and impossible...This aporetic response would be one that on the one hand accepts without resistance the translatability of the term ‘religion,’ and at the same time must resist what is encompassed by the term ‘religion.’” Arvind-Pal
global civil society depends upon the extent to which all human beings can be formed, whether through voluntarily participation or coercive power, into the kind of subject the Western political acknowledges, and to a certain extent requires. According to Carl Schmitt, religion, or the theological, is key to the political.\(^ {379}\) In the West, religion defines the fundamental value system that also embodies the unity of a people who will rally around strong leadership that will speak on behalf of the community.\(^ {380}\) The word “religion” in itself affirms an epistemological domain of power that privileges Western modalities of being in community. In modernity, communities reflexively center on tropes of nationality, which signify a secularization of the formal and concrete relationships between sovereignty and masses of the ruled. Religion, therefore, is now a paradoxical force of identity that simultaneously incorporates and cancels out in many respects the particularities of the components of modern nationalism because of the way in which it undergirds a particular universalized ontology out of which civil society came to exist.\(^ {381}\) Global identities are important ideas in light of religion’s imprint on the world. Given the way in which global politics of identity privilege Western Eurocentric modes of being, resynthesizing religion as an ethic of racial difference becomes a way to ground human agency in a more collective, inclusionary way. By acknowledging a theory of


\(^{380}\) The role of religion plays an important part in the lives of people in a racial state. For many who experience racism, religion can offer tools for survival against oppressive social conditions.

\(^{381}\) For example, it is because of the settler condition of Western civilization that participation in governing political structures are known as sovereign, a direct theological reference to Christian worldviews of dominion and providence.
differences that involves appreciating the myriad ontic epistemologies across races and communal contacts, a science, or principle, analysis of religion in human contact has sociopolitical effects that can form human agency as a process through which an individual or community intentionally shapes their projects.

Christian liberation ethics begins with the experiences of marginalized peoples as a way to account for the structural dimension of social oppression. The structural dimension of social oppression reifies a history of colonial exploitation. In an increasingly global world, liberationist values of “wholeness” and “self-direction” can extend the notion of a beloved community to more intentionally account for the sociopolitical realities of economic principles across areas of intersectionality. A just globalized world would need to include an equitable economic foundation that would not only center the economic well-being of poor (black) women and facilitate human agency wedded to meaningful approaches to work and labor, but would also have to relate to radical modes of religion in ways that need to be more critical of the economic context out of which it arises. Formulating an adequate ethical response to sociopolitical difference must include a focus on the economically disenfranchised, or the world’s “underclass” in all manifestations of power. The colonial context in which theories of religion developed has left traces of Western epistemic power around the use of the term faith, which impacts the possibilities of agency at individual, social, and political levels.

Faith now occupies sacred as well as secular domains of social applicability. A liberationist focus on such sociopolitical differences suggests a total way of being attentive to these realities, while also resisting cultural complicity with Western epistemic power, undergirded by an effervescent approach to racial equality that should be further
reinforced by interpretations of faith of the same accord. Religion as a science of contact has implications for faith that, when applied in a global system of cultural exchange, can over-ride divisions of race, class, and gender politics. A new way of envisioning religion and the application of religious faith can provide insight into socializing communal behaviors in ways that account for domains of power that attenuate even the deepest vestiges of the colonial secular order. Historical processes of secularization have concretized an ideal of rationality that codes the creation of a Western

382 What is at stake here is a more basic recognition of the relationship between religion and race as modern categories rooted in Western colonialism, hegemony, and white supremacy. This relationship implies a political shaping of what we have come to know as human faith and consciousness. Being aware of the fundamental inseparability of religion to race and vice versa means recognizing the ways in which the politics of race, especially when looking at the U.S. as the dominant model of politicized race relations, is also a political form of religion in the public sphere. Howard Winant, The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice (University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Joe R. Feagin, White Party, White Government: Race, Class, and US Politics (Routledge, 2012).

Through processes of secularization, the Enlightenment worldview organized human life around notions of public and private social dimensions. Because of the rise of science and cultural emphases on empirical “truth,” religion was relegated to the private spheres of life as it made claims about human experience that were considered irrational and unverifiable. The concept of reason became the dominant mode of human subjectivity, and human subjects were reasonable insofar as their individuality communicated an autonomous, responsible self along European standards of what it meant to be a human being. What emerged, therefore, was a way of being human that implied a public posture grounded in Enlightenment notions of reason. However, this Enlightenment notion of reason reflected a description of individualized consciousness that was derived from a white, Christian theological worldview that privileged Eurocentric thought forms and modes of difference. This historical racialization of religion should not be overlooked when applying theories of race to any analysis of religion in the modern world as it is so intertwined with the socialization of politics and anthropological faith.

383 A way forward into an approach to the deep structural issues affecting racialized faith communities involves an extension of political problems and of Western, or white, supremacy to settler colonialism, perhaps only then can the possibility of racial justice exist within the religio-historical context of socially politicized public spaces. For religious faith in the public sphere to truly challenge the realities of racism, it must not necessarily presume the ideological givenness of settler states. “When we do not presume the givenness of settler states, it is not difficult to recognize the racial nature of [politics itself] while simultaneously maintaining a non-pessimistic approach to ending white supremacy.” Expanding racial relations to an account of colonial settler realities not only offers more political and conceptual room to problematize normative religious epistemes, but it also subverts the notion that Native peoples, whose existence should trouble black-white binaries and efforts to subsume racial diversity into whiteness, are either gone or in the process of disappearing. “The consequence of not developing a critical apparatus for intersecting all the logics of white supremacy, including settler colonialism, is that it prevents us from imagining an alternative to the [current] racial [read racist] state.” Daniel Martínez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett and Laura Pulido, eds., Racial Formation in the Twenty-first Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 72, 75.
social and economic organization of exploiters and exploited. Secularization’s industrial and social frame of government set in motion an application of anthropological faith that indiscriminately emboldened forms of vertical and horizontal cultural oppression. Nonetheless, the faith problematically associated with secularization, modernization, and colonization can be resuscitated in favor of radical values of love and justice.

Faith in rationality and reason must now be re-engaged as the central aspects of the colonial secular order with analyses grounded in social structure. Social construction resides at the heart of secularization. Religion, as a social construct in the modern world, is in many ways entangled with historical realities that have concretized categories of difference, making religion, especially theology, a racialized, classist, and gendered category, even when these components of intersectionality are not overtly on the table. In a world saturated with social exchange, appreciating the relationship of religion and difference becomes even more complex at the specific intersections of race, religion, and economics. The relevance of this connection speaks not only to class struggle in places throughout the West, especially the U.S., but also to those who are either “in or out” across the global North and South. The hegemonic religious subjectivity of Western identity politics lays the groundwork for human nature and all social systems. As a (Western) science of human contact, there is purchase to view religious and economic faith as one in the same. Said differently, economics functions like a religion because it,

---

too, is seen as both an overarching system of nature that rests on faith in human reason, as well as a particular kind of system.\textsuperscript{385}

**Framing (Antiracist) Cosmopolitanism**

de la Torre’s Latina/o ethics deal with present-day capitalism in very informative ways. He developed a paradigm for doing economic justice in the Latina/o community that serves as an invitation for other marginalized communities of color to follow and to model. Like all liberationists, de la Torre concedes that capitalism, specifically neoliberalism (as presented in Chapter Two),\textsuperscript{386} is a culture, not merely an economic system. This chapter agrees with de la Torre and re-frames Western hegemonic subjectivity as a science of human contact to make the following analogy: Christianity is to religion as neoliberalism/capitalism is to economics. Modern racialized economic relationships reveal cultures signified as a community, or a people, of class (caste). Class systems refer to the economic conditions wherein people encounter their position and status in any given society, whether local or global. Black and Womanist Christian liberationist ethics can contribute to developing an approach to realities of class systems as a basis for racial equality and economic exchange. As a way to build a platform for black and brown communities to do justice together, much like the rainbow coalition of


\textsuperscript{386} See Chapter 2, footnote 30.
the Black Power movement, this approach contributes to notions of antiracist cosmopolitanism. From the standpoint of communal “wholeness” and “self-direction,” antiracist cosmopolitanism refers to the state of people being citizens of the world. Instead of

387 Continental philosopher Immanuel Kant introduced the concept of cosmopolitanism in his discussion about modern race. In “A Renewed Attempt to Answer the Question: ‘Is the Human Race Continually Improving?’” from The Contest of the Faculties, Kant believes that the human race is improving and that all human communities will ultimately move towards a universal cosmopolitanism. Because every race [in this case means geographic community] is included in this prophetic vision of Kant’s anthropology, and given Kant’s “ugly” comments about non-Europeans despite the fact that he opposed colonialism, it is important to speculate critically about what Kant actually means by this predictive conviction: is he talking about different races within the human race, or is he speaking about nations? If he is talking about the category of race, then does he believe that all races will co-exist as equals? Or is he implying that there will be no need for a conception of race as a result of the new, inherent make-up of the cosmopolitan society? In either case, what are his standards for civilizations that would be included in the possibility of universal cosmopolitanism? In Kant’s mind does every racial group even have the moral capacities to reach this envisioned place? On the one hand, it could be said that Kant believes that only a select few group of peoples could “graduate” to the level of cosmopolitanism. One the other hand, it could also be said that because of Kant’s low opinion of some racial groups, he is only concerned with a select few group of peoples that he believes could “improve” to the level of cosmopolitanism. In both cases, Kant leaves conceptual room for one to be uncertain as to whether he considered some groups to be capable of possessing the spiritual energy, or enthusiasm, as Kant would say, to achieve a high level of moral functioning in the world. If his formation of race is a providential condition of human existence, in which natural, preformed and irreversible developmental possibilities separate humankind throughout history, then Kant does not reconcile his vision of a cosmopolitan society with how the groups included within that society would be counted or acknowledged without contempt. Whether or not Kant’s concept of race was ever meant to endow all humans with equal God-given faculties creates an uncertainty that cannot be ignored. Immanuel Kant, “A renewed attempt to answer the question: ‘Is the human race continually improving?’” Political Writings (1798), 183.

This section acknowledges Immanuel Kant as a philosophical progenitor of the idea of cosmopolitanism, and wrestles with the possibility that at the root of modernity comes a teleological view of the providential and progressive unfolding of nature and history that entails the necessity of race; however, this dissertation disagrees with any exclusionary configuration of cosmopolitan thought. Rather, here, cosmopolitanism is an inclusive idea that views all communities and peoples as equal and capable of living in a global civil society.

388 Philosopher and cultural theorist Kwame Appiah is an advocate of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is an important concept for theories of globalization because it provides a meaningful backdrop for grasping interconnections in present day, global realities. Processes of globalization seek to integrate countries and individuals into a larger sort of cosmopolis of human networks. Kwame Appiah highlights how up until late modernity, limits of global communication made it difficult to realize a robust meaning of cosmopolitanism. Appiah writes, “Only in the past couple of centuries as every human community has gradually been drawn into a single web of trade and a global network of information, have we come to a point where each of us can realistically imagine contacting any other of our six billion conspecifics and sending that person something worth having.” Kwame Anthony Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (Issues of Our Time) (WW Norton & Company, 2010).
being from a particular nation or city-state, cosmopolitanism signifies the way in which people identify as citizens of the entire universe. While libertarians and economic liberals might agree with this definition, de la Torre provides an approach to peoples from different communities showing up as “whole” allies in the struggle for cross-racial “self-direction.”

Cosmopolitan thinking acknowledges universalism and difference in ways...
that are both aided by neoliberalism and can work against its normalization of hegemony.

The universalizing base of neoliberal ideology undermines rationalities and moralities beyond the marketplace, which can ironically be applied to work in favor of some aspects of cosmopolitan ideology. Neo-liberalism entails an epochal shift in the relation of capital, labor, consumption, and place; it entails more reliance than ever on abstract media: on the transaction of quasi-monetary instruments across space and time in the electronic economy, and on means such as the market in futures and the extraction of profit from intellectual property. As sites of manufacture and consumption have been dispersed across the earth, their connection has become increasingly opaque, undermining the very idea of a national economy in which local interest groups recognize each other as interdependent components of a commonwealth.390

succeed in the crucial work of dismantling the racist and ethnic discriminative institutionalized structures undergirding law enforcement until brown folk stand in solidarity at Ferguson, and black folk stand in solidarity on the border. Fighting with each other for the crumbs that fall from the master’s table only reinforces our subservience and focuses our energies against those who are more our allies than our competitors. I refuse to enter meaningless debates as to who has suffered more in this country, blacks or browns. It’s not a numbers game, for if just one black or brown life is lost due to institutionalize violence, then that is one life too many, and all our resources must be committed to fight full force to prevent the death of another life, regardless of skin pigmentation. ‘Black lives matters’ must continue. ‘Brown lives matters’ must develop further. And just as important, black lives and brown lives must begin a conversation and strategize together for the liberation of all lives from oppressive law enforcement structures that, ironically, see no difference between blacks or browns.” Being Brown While Black Lives Matter Madl - https://ourlucha.wordpress.com/2015/08/29/being-brown-while-black-lives-matter/4

[Also,] what is needed is more widespread participation by predominantly white democratic socialist organizations in antiracist struggles, whether those struggles be for the political, economic, and cultural empowerment of Latinos, blacks, Asians, and Native Americans or antiimperialist struggles against U.S. support for oppressive regimes in South Africa, Chile, the Philippines, and the occupied West Bank. Cornel West, Toward a Socialist Theory of Racism (New York: Institute for Democratic Socialism, 1989).

As a result, the spatial articulation of politics and economy has been fundamentally disrupted, and globetrotting capital has renegotiated the terms of its relation to the nation-state. Now political networks are often blurred or overlapping, and ever more intense, disarticulated flows of bodies, goods, finances, and media link “communities” in highly convoluted circuits of exchange that governments are increasingly less able or willing to regulate.\textsuperscript{391} In undermining rationalities and moralities beyond the market, neoliberalism expedited processes of globalization and deterritorialization.\textsuperscript{392} Cosmopolitanism is an important idea for Western, non-Western, and non-European economic thought because processes of globalization and deterritorialization create quandaries of human identity. Given the way in which global politics of identity privilege Western or Eurocentric modes of thinking, cosmopolitanism becomes a way to ground human agency in a more collective, inclusionary way. By

\textsuperscript{391} Although new formulations of economic nationalism have cropped up in Europe and the U.S. (i.e., Brexit), the historical inertia of capitalist relations still produces economic outcomes that are difficult to regulate in today’s digital age.


Here, the term deterritorialization is borrowed from French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Deterritorialization describes the crux of the current condition of globalization that leads to the concept of cultural heritage itself to be understood as a historically constructed hybrid social product. Deterritorialization speaks of the loss of the “natural” relation between culture and the social and geographic territories, and describes deeps transformation of the link between our everyday cultural experiences and our configuration as preferably local creatures. This reflects a change produced by the impact that growing cultural transnational connections have on the local realm, which means that deterritorialization generates a relativization and a transformation of local cultural experiences.

Deterritorialization becomes, therefore, a general cultural condition that derives from the dissemination of global modernity, whose existential implications affect more people than ever, deeply transforming their everyday lives. The vague or ambivalent character of deterritorialization should be emphasized, as, while it generates benefits, it also produces evident costs such as feelings of existential vulnerability or of cultural rootlessness, especially if you consider that individuals have ties to a locality, and this locality remains important for them. As a consequence, deterritorialization does not mean the end of the locality at all, but its alteration into a more complex cultural space, characterized by varied manifestations, tendencies or cultural effects. \textit{A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia} (Bloomsbury, 1988).
acknowledging a theory of differences that involves appreciating the myriad ontic epistemologies across races, classes, and communities, antiracist cosmopolitan thinking has sociopolitical effects that can form human agency as a process through which an individual or community can intentionally shape their projects through nodes at intersections of inter-communal networks, over and against hegemonic systems of domestication.

When thinking about human agency in this way, antiracist cosmopolitanism becomes important for black liberationists and economic thinkers who prioritize disadvantaged communities because it grounds a moral imperative to center community-oriented agency and form an individuated collective identity necessary for social movement beyond universalizing neoliberal ideology. Cosmopolitanism, therefore, is an ideational viewpoint of philosophical anthropology that recognizes both the centrality of difference within human identity and the fundamental moral unity of human relationships. More importantly, it can be a fruitful way to think about equitable principles of market exchange.

Couched within a Christian ethic of liberation, antiracist cosmopolitanism is an idea capable of disrupting divisions of identity politics based on socioeconomic, national, religious, and political social locations. Moreover, as a constructive way forward, a Christian liberationist ethic of collective liberation, of “wholeness” and “self-direction,” would even further an understanding of how antiracist cosmopolitan praxis relates to Western institutional power structures, which include (black) churches in society, while still acknowledging its recovery from a Western episteme of social privilege. The hope is a “vision of transforming the worlds of poor black women and men into worlds that
uphold their dignity, ensure fair access to economic opportunity, and enable them to participate in a common humane existence.”

The good news is that black and Womanist ethicists can carry forward, in hopefully radical ways, what was/is at-hand in the Black Panther Party’s social, cultural, and economic revolution.

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Committee for Lowndes County, Support the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, pamphlet 313-661108-006, Yuen Collection.


Cone, J., and Michael Harrington. *The Black Church and Marxism: What do they have to say to each other*. Institute for Democratic Socialism, 1980.


Definition of Religious Literacy. https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/definition-religious-literacy


———. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. University of Nebraska Press, 1996.


Garrow, David J. The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From” Solo” to Memphis. Open Road Media, 2015.


Gilkes, Cheryl. If It Wasn’t for the Women--: Black Women’s Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community. Orbis Books, 2001.


Ralf Wadenström –http://www.wadenstrom.net/texter/madi.htm


The Panthers and the Patriots 1969: When Black Panthers Aligned with Confederate-flag-wielding, Working-class Whites Colette Gait

https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/05/black-panthers-young-patriots-fred-hampton/

The Socialism of the Black Panthers.

https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/black-panther-party-revolution-fred-hampton/


