

# Philosophy and the Black Experience



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APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Philosophy and the Black Experience

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STEPHEN C. FERGUSON II AND DWAYNE TUNSTALL, CO-EDITORS

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## FROM THE EDITORS

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This issue begins with "Footnotes to History." We shine our spotlight on the Black philosopher Wayman Bernard McLaughlin who was a close friend of Martin Luther King, Jr. They studied at Boston University during the same period, with McLaughlin getting his doctorate in philosophy.

We are also proud to present an unpublished essay by the late William R. Jones. The essay, "An Anatomy of ESP Oppression," was personally given to Stephen Ferguson by Jones. A fundamental part of Jones's work was the exploration of religious humanism and liberation theology. An internationally recognized and celebrated activist, scholar, philosopher, theologian, and educator, Jones dedicated his long career to the analysis and methods of oppression, and to working with others in their anti-oppression initiatives. In this essay, Jones provides an insightful and clear discussion of oppression. Oppression, for Jones, is a form of suffering, and suffering, in turn, is reducible to a form of inequality of power or impotence. In addition, the suffering that comprises oppression is (a) maldistributed, (b) negative, (c) enormous, and (d) non-catastrophic. He outlines the subjective and objective dimensions of economic, social, and political (ESP) oppression. Looked at in terms of its objective dimension, oppression exhibits a gross imbalance of power. The subjective dimension of oppression—that is, the beliefs and value systems—provides an anchor to support ESP oppression. The theory of oppression presented here is a further elaboration of principles laid out in his magnum opus *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (1973).

In "Another World Is Possible: A Marxist Philosophy of Revolution," Stephen Ferguson unravels a host of philosophical issues tied to the concept of revolution. Ferguson begins by challenging the normative presuppositions of contemporary political philosophy, for example, its commitment to either Rawlsian liberalism or Nozick's libertarianism. If Rawls or Nozick are the presumptive context for doing contemporary political philosophy, Ferguson argues, then capitalism—despite being the material cause of slavery, racism, Jim Crow segregation, gentrification, and poverty—functions as a

presumptive context for the solution to any and all social and political problems. Therefore, political philosophers—particularly in the African American tradition—will never attempt to develop a philosophy of revolution which sees the need to go beyond capitalism. Through a Marxist-Leninist lens, he argues that revolutions are (1) a historical process driven by class antagonism, (2) in which one ruling class is displaced by another, and (3) which produces a social transformation in the "productive capacities" and "social progressive potentialities" of society at large. Moreover, the justification for revolution cannot be based on moral outrage. Moral concepts and judgments play an explanatory role, but they are subordinate to social theory. Only a concrete analysis of concrete conditions can provide the rationale or justification for revolution. He concludes his essay with a critical commentary on how moral outrage drives the recent work of Ta-Nehisi Coates and Michael Eric Dyson rather than a political analysis and critique of capitalism.

We are also excited to have essays by Adebayo Ogungbure and Dalitso Ruwe. Both Ogungbure and Ruwe are doctoral students at Texas A&M University. Both essays will create a firestorm of controversy for their readings of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Alexander Crummell.

In "The Wages of Sin Is Death: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Rhetorics of Black Manhood and the Contemporary Discourse on Black Male Death," Ogungbure's Black nationalist reading ascribes a notion of Black manhood to Martin Luther King, Jr. which formed the groundwork for his overall political theory. Ogungbure argues for a close connection between manhood rights and economic empowerment. From Ogungbure's perspective, King attacks the logic of white paternalism and patriarchy as that which strips the Black man of his sense of self, value, worth, and humanity. Finally, Ogungbure argues that what he labels as "phallicist violence" is central to understanding King's death and the disposability thesis—the view that "America makes corpses of Black males"—in contemporary discourse on Black male death.

In "Between Africa and America: Alexander Crummell's Moral and Political Philosophy," Ruwe offers a spirited defense of Alexander Crummell's moral and political philosophy. Ruwe wants to correct the anachronist reading of Crummell offer by Anthony Appiah. Ruwe maintains that Crummell created a Black counter-discourse that argued the supposed racial superiority of whites, particularly the Anglo-Saxon race, and the supposed inferiority of Africans was rooted in imperialism and conquest. As such, Crummell's philosophy of race showed that Africans and their civilization could

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civilize the Anglo-Saxon race by challenging the imperial logic of enslaving Africans as laborers for white civilization.

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## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

The *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* is published by the committee on the status of Black philosophers. Authors are encouraged to submit original articles and book reviews on any topic in philosophy that makes a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors welcome submissions written from any philosophical tradition, as long as they make a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors especially welcome submissions dealing with philosophical issues and problems in African American and Africana philosophy.

All article submissions should be between 10 and 20 pages (double spaced) in length, and book reviews should be between 5 and 7 pages (double spaced) in length. All submissions must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *The Chicago Manual of Style* formatting. All submissions should be accompanied by a short biography of the author. Please send submissions electronically to [apa.pbe.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:apa.pbe.newsletter@gmail.com).

### DEADLINES

Fall issues: May 1  
Spring issues: December 1

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### FORMATTING GUIDELINES

- The *APA Newsletters* adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use *italics* instead of underlining. Use an "em dash" (—) instead of a double hyphen (--).
- Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style:

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90.

See Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

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## FOOTNOTES TO HISTORY

### *Wayman B. McLaughlin (1927–2003)*

Stephen C. Ferguson

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY

The Reverend Dr. Wayman Bernard McLaughlin, Sr., the fourth child of Agnes and Baptist minister Reverend Eddie Lee McLaughlin, was born in Danville, Virginia, on March 22, 1927. Nearly three months after retiring from teaching, he died after a battle with cancer on November 27, 2003. Although he was a relatively unknown figure as a philosopher in Black intellectual history, his story, is a significant chapter in the history of African-American philosophy.

After graduating from John M. Langston High School (Danville, Virginia) in 1941, McLaughlin became the first in his family to go to college and eventually received a BA degree cum laude in history with a minor in Latin from Virginia Union University (Richmond, Virginia) in 1948. After receiving a scholarship to attend the historic Andover Newton Theological Seminary, in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, McLaughlin graduated four years later in 1952, receiving a Bachelors of Divinity focusing on the Psychology of Religion. After leaving Andover, McLaughlin decided to pursue a doctorate in philosophy at Boston University. While there was a strong religious influence on McLaughlin, we are left without a clue as to why he decided to enroll in the philosophy department rather than the School of Theology. Although he received a scholarship, the pursuit of a graduate degree came as a result of great financial hardship. McLaughlin moved in a tireless circuit between classes, the library, his apartment, and various jobs he held. According to historian Taylor Branch, McLaughlin worked as a skycap in the evenings at Logan Airport. It is a testament to his diligence and hard work that he became the second African American to receive a Ph.D. from the philosophy department at Boston University. (The first African American was John Wesley Edward Bowen who earned the PhD in 1887.) While at Boston, he came under the influence of the African-American theologian Howard Thurman, who became dean of Boston University's Marsh Chapel and Professor of Spiritual Resources and Disciplines in 1953. Thurman was the first Black full-time professor hired by the school. Similar to Martin Luther King, Jr., McLaughlin was also influenced by Boston Personalists such as Edgar Brightman, Harold DeWolf, Walter Muelder, Paul Bertocci, and Richard Millard.

While at Boston University, he was a classmate and good friend of Martin Luther King, Jr. During their tenure at Boston University, King and McLaughlin, in conjunction with other African-American graduate students, organized a philosophical club called the Dialectical Society. In 1958, under the direction of Millard and Bertocci, McLaughlin finished his dissertation—*The Relation between Hegel and Kierkegaard*—at Boston University.

Despite having academic credentials from Boston University, McLaughlin faced limited employment opportunities because predominantly white institutions assumed—with

rare exception—that African Americans should not be considered for any academic appointment. The reality of Jim and Jane Crow meant that McLaughlin’s academic career—similar to other African-American scholars—was limited to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). As such, he found himself overburdened with administrative duties, a heavy teaching load, intellectual isolation, and, most importantly, little time for philosophical research or writing. McLaughlin spent his academic career at four HBCUs. His first stop was at his alma mater, Virginia Union, where he taught courses in the areas of philosophy and psychology from 1958 until 1959. From 1959 until 1962, he worked at Grambling State University as the coordinator of the Humanities Program. He also taught philosophy and humanities courses while at Grambling.

In 1962, he moved to North Carolina to work at Winston-Salem State Teaching College (later Winston-Salem State University). So, from 1962 until 1967, he worked in the Department of Social Sciences at Winston-Salem State developing and teaching philosophy and humanities courses. As a testament to his outstanding teaching abilities, in his final year at Winston-Salem State, he was selected as Teacher of the Year. And finally—beginning in 1967—McLaughlin taught at North Carolina A&T as a philosophy and humanities professor. For 35 years, McLaughlin was the only philosopher at the university. While at NCAT, he developed and taught several courses such as Culture and Values, Introduction to Philosophy, Logic, and Introduction to Humanities. He would remain at North Carolina A&T until he was forced to retire in 2003. McLaughlin worked with Rev. John Mendez and other members of the Citizens United for Justice to organize an event in 1992, “Festival of Truth: Celebration of Survival,” to protest the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s voyage to the Americas.

**WORKS BY WAYMAN B. MCLAUGHLIN**

*The Relation Between Hegel and Kierkegaard*. Doctoral Dissertation: Boston University, 1958.

“Symbolism and Mysticism in the Spirituals,” *Phylon* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1963): 69–77. (Later republished as “Human Riches of Slave Religion,” in *The Age of Civil War and Reconstruction, 1830–1900: A Book of Interpretative Essays*, edited by Charles Crowe, 139–44 (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1975).

“Plato’s Theory of Education: A Reevaluation,” *Winston-Salem State College Faculty Journal* (Spring 1967).

“Some Aspects of the Church’s Responsibility to Society,” in *Human Issues and Human Values*, edited by Randolph Tobias, 49–51 (Raleigh, North Carolina: Davis and Foy Publishers, 1978).

“History and the Specious Moment,” *North Carolina A&T State University History Magazine* 1 (Spring 1979).

“Is History a Good Training for the Mind?” *North Carolina A&T State University History Magazine* 3 (1982).

*Psychic Gifts of the Spirit: A Study in Philosophy and Parapsychology* (Manuscript in Progress, 1980?).

ARTICLES

*An Anatomy of ESP (Economic, Social, and Political) Oppression*

William R. Jones

We can obtain an overview of oppression if we do two things: reflect on why the worm has often been chosen to symbolize the oppressed and unpack some of the important nuances in the contrasting images of a worm’s eye and bird’s eye.

There is a singular reason why the worm is the preferred symbol for the oppressed, rather than the snake or some other creature that has to see things from the ground up, instead of from the sky down. The worm expresses the essence of defenselessness against the more powerful, wide-ranging, and far-seeing predator. Translating the issue into economic, social, and political (ESP) categories, the enormous armaments of the bird—its superior size and speed, its menacing beak—represent the immense surplus of death-dealing power and spacious access to life-enhancing resources of the elite in the society; all these express *objective* advantages that equip it for its role as exploiter of the oppressed. From the vantage point of the worm and its gross deficit of power and resources, it appears that not only the early bird gets the worm, but the late bird as well. Only in death, when the body returns to the earth from whence it came, does the worm have its day in the sun. The oppressed are always aware of the time-honored justification for the gross inequalities of power and privileges that marked the respective roles of the elites and the masses; these inequalities are legitimated by appealing to the heavens, the abode of the creator and ruler of the universe, and, not accidentally, as the worm sees it, the playground of the bird.

With this analysis before us, let us now take a “creature from Mars” perspective and indicate how we would explain oppression to our visitor.

I

Speaking in the most general terms, oppression can be seen as a form of ESP exploitation, as a pervasive institutional system that is designed to maintain an alleged superior group at the top of the ESP ladder, with the superior accoutrements of power, privileges, and access to society’s resources.

II

If we move from a general to a more detailed description of oppression, the following should be accented. Oppression can be analyzed from two different perspectives that are germane to our discussion. On the one hand, oppression can be reduced to *institutional structures*; this is its ESP, its *objective* dimension. On the other hand, one can examine oppression in terms of the *belief and value system*, that is, its anchoring principle. This, for our purpose, comprises its *subjective* component.

### III

It is important to examine the objective and subjective aspects in more detail. The objective elements can be reduced to pervasive ESP inequalities. But inequalities per se are neutral. There is nothing that forces one automatically or, as a matter of course, to appraise any inequality as negative or instinctively to seek its eradication. Both the negative and positive features lie outside the mere identification and description of the inequality. The most exhaustive and detailed description of the inequality will not uncover its unjust or negative quality; the same applies for the positive label. Both the negative and positive tags are generated by a particular worldview, a specific value system, a discrete theology or identifiable picture of ultimate reality—in short, something that is not part of the object in question.

Precisely because of this ongoing possibility of opposing labels for inequalities of power and privilege, liberation theology differentiates between the *pre-* and *post-enlightened oppressed*. The latter interprets the objective situation of inequality as negative and hostile to her/his highest good; the pre-enlightened do not. Wherein lies the difference? Not—as many believe—in a marked difference in the *objective* conditions of each; it is not the case that the post-enlightened oppressed suffer the more severe inequalities. The difference lies, rather, at the subjective level, with the dissimilar belief and value grid used to assess these objective inequalities.

### IV

The inner logic of oppression affirms a two-category system. It divides the human family into at least two distinct groups, hierarchically arranged into alleged *superior* and *inferior* classes: in-group, out-group; male, female; rich, poor; Greek, barbarian; Aryan, non-Aryan; master, slave are similar examples.

### V

This hierarchical arrangement is correlated with the gross *imbalance of power*, access to life-extending and life-enhancing *resources*, and *privileges*. The alleged superior group will possess the un-obscured *surplus* and the alleged inferior group, a grossly disproportionate *deficit*. To make the same point in different terms, the lead superior group will have the *most* of whatever the society defines as the *best*, and the *least* of the *worst*. In stark contrast, the alleged inferior group will have the *least* of the *best* and the *most* of the *worst*.

This feature of oppression helps us to understand the objective and subjective factors of oppression already discussed. Looked at in terms of its objective dimension, oppression exhibits a gross imbalance of power. This manifest inequality, however, need not be regarded as reprehensible. If, for instance, power is judged to be evil, as does the position of anti-powerism discussed below, the person with a deficit of power would conclude that s/he is already in the preferred ESP situation. This is the worldview of the pre-enlightened oppressed. The conviction that one is oppressed does not emerge in this context. To think that one's deficit of power constitutes oppression would require a radically different worldview and understanding of power. Likewise, if the ascetic life is elevated to ultimacy, those

with a paucity of material goods and societal privileges would hardly interpret this lack as something that requires correction.

### VI

The hierarchal division and the ESP inequalities it expresses are institutionalized. The primary institutions are constructed to maintain an unequal distribution of power, resources, and privileges. This is their inner design and the actual product of their operation.

### VII

Oppression can also be interpreted as a form of suffering, and suffering, in turn, is reducible to a form of inequality of power or impotence. In addition, the suffering that comprises oppression is (a) maldistributed, (b) negative, (c) enormous, and (d) non-catastrophic. Let me denominate this type of suffering as ethnic suffering.

Speaking theologically, maldistribution of suffering raises the issue of the scandal of particularity. The suffering that characterizes oppression is not spread randomly and impartially over the total human race. Rather, it is concentrated in particular groups. This group bears a double dose of suffering; it must bear the suffering that we cannot escape because we are not omnipotent and thus subject to illness, etc. It is helpful to describe this as ontological suffering that is, suffering that is part and parcel of our human condition of finitude. Additionally, however, for the oppressed there is the suffering that results from their exploitation and from their deficit of power. This, unlike the ontological suffering, is caused by human agents.

If we differentiate between *positive* and *negative* suffering, ethnic suffering would be a sub-class of the latter. It describes a suffering that is without essential value for one's well-being. It leads one away from, rather than towards, the highest good.

A third feature of ethnic suffering is its enormity, and here the reference is to several things. There is the factor of numbers, but numbers in relation to the total class. Where ethnic suffering is involved, the percentage of the group with the double portion of suffering is greater than for other groups. Enormity also refers to the character of the suffering—specifically that which reduces the life expectancy or increases what the society regards as things to be avoided.

The final feature of ethnic suffering to be discussed is its non-catastrophic dimension. Ethnic suffering does not strike quickly and then leave after a short and terrible siege. Instead, it extends over long historical eras. It strikes not only the parents, but the children, and their children, etc. It is, in short, *transgenerational*.

The transgenerational dimension differentiates oppression from catastrophe, which also can be enormous. Since, however, the catastrophic event does not visit the same group generation after generation, the factor of maldistribution is less acute.

Our reason for highlighting the category of suffering becomes clear once we understand the linkage between specific attitudes toward suffering and the successful maintenance of oppression. One common strategy to keep the oppressed at the bottom of the ESP ladder is to persuade them that their suffering is good, moral, valuable, or necessary for their salvation—in short, redemptive. To label any suffering redemptive is to preclude a negative label for it and, consequently, one is not motivated to eradicate it but rather to embrace it.

Given this linkage between suffering and the operation of oppression, any theology that purports to eradicate ESP oppression is severely limited in how it can treat suffering. Not all of the traditional theological treatments of suffering can be utilized, for they work at cross purposes with the goal of liberation. To be precise, the suffering/oppression to be attacked must be defined as negative, that is, of no value for one's salvation or highest good. It has no moral or soteriological merit. In addition, the suffering must be eradicable. This means that we must establish that the suffering in question is human in origin; it is not caused by or in conformity with the purpose of God or nature. If we are convinced that something is grounded in nature or supernatural, we are reluctant to try to change it; we accept, we conform.

Given this linkage between suffering and the operation of oppression, any theology that elevates redemptive suffering must walk a Teflon-coated trapeze wire. Minimally, the advocate of redemptive suffering must supply a workable criteriology that unerringly differentiates the redemptive suffering, i.e., that which is to be embraced and endured, from the negative suffering, that which is to be eradicated. More precisely, we must have a trustworthy yardstick or Geiger counter that clearly and cleanly separates redemptive suffering from ethnic suffering, the wheat from the tares. The difficulty of this theological and logical feat will become apparent to anyone who responds to the theological dilemma posed by Albert Camus in *The Plague*.

Camus's argument has the following steps: (1) Show that at least some illness in the Judeo-Christian tradition is deserved punishment. (In the novel this is established with reference to the plagues visited upon the Egyptians. This step establishes the possibility that any illness can be deserved punishment. However, the same dilemma can be posed with famines or any other catastrophe.) (2) This step in the argument identifies what actions are appropriate for the Christian if an illness deserves punishment. If deserve punishment or a form of testing as in the Job story, then we cannot oppose it. To do so would be challenging God's will and purpose. (3) Accordingly, before we can call the doctor, we must show that our illness is not deserved punishment or divine testing. But how is this accomplished? And though our call to the doctor is an affirmation that we know what these characteristics are, who has successively listed them for inspection?

The aforementioned mechanism of oppression should be examined from another perspective: its strategy to remove human choice, power, and authority as causally

involved in society's superstructures. To use Peter Berger's insightful distinction, oppression locates traditional norms and institutions in *objective reality*—that which is external to the human mind and not created by our hands—not objectivated reality,<sup>1</sup> all that is external to the human mind that we did create. Oppression, thus, reduces the conflict between the haves and the have-nots to a cosmic skirmish between the human and the supra-human. The theological paradigm in liberation theology, as we will see, relocates the fray, making it a struggle between human combatants.

What are the methodological consequences of this understanding of the suffering for liberation theology? In addition to establishing that the suffering is negative and eradicable, a liberation theology must also show that eliminating the suffering in question is desirable, and its eradication does not cause us more harm and grief than its continued presence.

### VIII

The two-category system, hierarchically arranged, the gross imbalance of power/privilege, and the institutional expression of these, are all alleged to be grounded in ultimate reality—the world of nature or the supernatural (God).

All of this is also to say that the oppressed are oppressed, in fundamental part, because of the beliefs, values, and theology they adopt, more accurately, are socialized to accept. Benjamin Mays's criticism of "compensatory ideas" in Afro-American Christianity is a classic statement of this insight:

The Negro's social philosophy and his idea of God go hand-in-hand. . . . Certain theological ideas enable Negroes to endure hardship, suffer pain and withstand maladjustment, but . . . do not necessarily motivate them to strive to eliminate the source of the ills they suffer.

Since this world is considered a place of temporary abode, many of the Negro masses have been inclined to do little or nothing to improve their status here; they have been encouraged to rely on a just God to make amends in heaven for all the wrongs they have suffered on earth. In reality, the idea has persisted that hard times are indicative of the fact that the Negro is God's chosen vessel and that God is disciplining him for the express purpose of bringing him out victoriously and triumphantly in the end.

The idea has also persisted that "the harder the cross, the brighter the crown." Believing this about God, the Negro . . . has stood back and suffered much without bitterness, without striking back, and without trying aggressively to realize to the full his needs in the world.<sup>2</sup>

This analysis pinpoints the mechanism that oppression uses to maintain itself; the oppressor must persuade the oppressed to accept their lot at the bottom of the ESP totem pole and to embrace these inequalities as moral,

inevitable, and for the good of the oppressed. In this way, the oppressor is not motivated to attack or eradicate these ESP inequalities. In all of this, responsibility is conveniently lifted from the shoulders of the oppressor.

### OPPRESSION AND THE INNER LOGIC OF QUIETISM

How is this accomplished? A review of a classic novel, written centuries ago, gives us the formula: "Altogether *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre*," the reviewer tells us, "is preeminently an anti-Christian proposition. There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which as far as each individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God's appointment."<sup>3</sup>

This review reveals that the inner logic of oppression requires an attitude of *quietism*, which we will discuss now, and a philosophy of *anti-powerism*, which we will treat next. Oppression maintains itself by claiming that its fundamental institutions and its hierarchy of roles and statuses are the product of and in conformity with reality itself. By invoking the supernatural/divine order—one could just as well appeal to nature, the created order—as its foundation, we accomplish several things that the maintenance of oppression requires. On the one hand, we establish a superhuman foundation that, by virtue of its superior power, compels our conformity and obedience. Human power can never win against divine omnipotence; "Our arms are too short to box with God." On the other, we guarantee the goodness and moral superiority of the existing social order.

It is helpful to look briefly at the inner logic of quietism and its kith and kin relation to oppression. Quietism is a refusal to reform the status quo, especially where traditional institutions and values are involved. Conformity, accommodation, and acquiescence are its distinguishing marks.

Quietism becomes our operating principle if we believe that ESP correction is (a) *unnecessary, impossible, or inappropriate*. Corrective action is unnecessary, for instance, if we believe that some agent, other than ourself, will handle it. Another quietist tendency is found in the familiar adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." This bespeaks the attitude that correction is gratuitous if the good, the ideal, is already present or in the process of being realized.

We are also pushed a quietism if remedial action is thought to be impossible. We reach this conclusion, it appears, when we encounter an invisible force or when the item to be corrected is a structure of ultimate reality. Finally, change is rejected if changing things will make it worse.

As the review of *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* shows us, rearranging the social inequalities is unthinkable if the ESP order expresses the will of God. Even if one had the power to reform things, ESP remodeling would still be inappropriate. Whatever status we have is just; it is the station that God intends for us; what is, is what ought to be.

This understanding of oppression parallels Peter Berger's analysis of social legitimation:

The historically crucial part of religion in the process of legitimation is explicable in terms of the unique capacity or religion to "locate" human phenomena within a cosmic frame of reference. . . . If one imagines oneself as a fully aware founder of a society. . . . How can the future of the institutional order be best ensured. . . ? That the institutional order be so interpreted as to hide, as much as possible, its constructed character. Let the people forget that this order was established by man and continues to be dependent upon the consent of men. . . . Let them believe that, in acting out the institutional programs that have been imposed upon them, they are but realizing the deepest aspirations of their own being and putting themselves in harmony with the fundamental order of the universe.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, set up religious legitimations.

### IX

Historically speaking, oppression is initiated through the violence of the oppressor. The pattern that history reveals is this: there is an original violence that initiated and established the economic, social, and political inequalities that comprise oppression. "With the establishment of a relation of oppression, violence has *already* begun."<sup>5</sup> However, the oppressor invariably suffers historical amnesia regarding this original violence, or that violence is transmuted into a more "benign" action through the oppressor's power to legitimate. That is, through methods of social control like commemorations, the oppressor, like the alchemists of old, can effectively transmute base actions, e.g., deeds of violence and oppression, into meritorious actions that are celebrated. In all of this, the status quo, replete with the basic ESP inequalities that were created to the original violence of the "discoverer," remain intact.

Allied with this understanding is a particular conclusion about how power is transferred in human history, namely, that force is required to affect a more equitable distribution of economic, social, and political power, resources, and privileges. No upper class, Gunnar Myrdal concludes, has ever stepped down voluntarily to equality with the lower class, or as a simple consequence of moral conviction given up their privileges and broken up their monopolies. To be induced to do so, the rich and privileged must sense that demands are raised and forcefully pressed by a powerful group assembled behind them.<sup>6</sup>

### OPPRESSION AND ANTI-POWERISM

### X

To explain the next dimension of oppression it is necessary, first, to differentiate between two antithetical philosophies: *anti-powerism* and *powerism*.

Anti-powerism regards power as essentially negative or evil. The essence of this position is best expressed by Jacob Burkhardt: "Now power, in its very nature, is evil, no matter who wields it. It is not stability but lust and, ipso facto, insatiable. Therefore, it is unhappy in itself and doomed to make others unhappy."<sup>7</sup>

Powerism expresses a quite different understanding about the role, status, and value of power in human affairs. Power, from this perspective, is neutral, neither evil nor good; rather, its quality depends upon who wields it and for what purpose. Advocates of this position advance power as a preeminent interpretive category for all aspects of human affairs as well as the natural and supernatural world.

Disciples of powerism will consider the following an appropriate description: "In any encounter of man with man, power is active, every encounter, whether friendly or hostile, whether benevolent or indifferent, is in some way a struggle of power with power."<sup>8</sup> Or the equally comprehensive scope of power that is affirmed by Romano Guardini: "Every act, every condition, indeed, even the simple fact of existing is directly or indirectly linked to the conscious exercise of power."

Part of the mechanism of oppression is to socialize the oppressed to adopt a philosophy of anti-powerism, though the oppressor lives by the opposite philosophy of powerism. The consequence of this maneuver is to keep intact the oppressor's massive surplus of power. The underclass can be kept "in its place" to the degree that it adopts the inner logic of anti-powerism. Based on anti-powerism's characterization of power as evil, the oppressed are indeed in the best place by virtue of their deficit of power.

## XI

An analysis of the oppressor's own deeds and dogma reveal a fundamental inconsistency or hypocrisy.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Any strategy must attack both the conceptual framework (the belief and value system) and the institutional factors, e.g., the gross imbalance of power, that are the foundation of oppression.

A self-conscious purpose to eradicate ESP oppression dictates a precise theological method, namely, a method of antithetical correlation in contrast to Tillich's model of "question-answer correlation." Liberation theology adopts a virus/vaccine (or more precisely, a toxin/anti-toxin) strategy to abolish oppression. The toxin/anti-toxin strategy is a two-phase model. In phase one, attention is focused on isolating the infectious agent and acquiring as much knowledge as we can about its biological composition and processes. The objective in phase one is to develop a specific antibody or antitoxin that can neutralize or destroy the noxious agent. Obviously, if our findings in phase one are inaccurate, phase two will be a hit-and-miss operation. Translated into the categories of our discussion, oppression is the toxin for which liberation theology is formulated as the effective antitoxin. Accordingly, it is particularly important to decipher the inner logic and operation of oppression to comprehend the content of liberation theology and its strategies of social change.

A total and comprehensive audit of the faith must be executed. Like the discovery of the single med-fly, or Mediterranean fruit fly, nothing at the outset can be regarded as uncontaminated. Rather, each theological and moral imperative must be provisionally regarded as suspect and accordingly must be quarantined until it has been certified to be free of contamination.

The suffering that lies at the heart of oppression must be appraised as (a) negative; (b) capable of being corrected or eliminated, i.e., not grounded in nature or the supernatural; and (c) its elimination must be regarded as desirable. The worldview components that frustrate the development of (a), (b), and (c) must be replaced.

The gross imbalance of power that constitutes oppression must be corrected in the direction of a more equitable distribution of ESP power and privileges. Since institutions in the culture are the ultimate distributors of power and benefits, they must be refashioned to reflect a central norm of liberation theology: the individual/group as co-equal centers of freedom (power), authority, and value.

### NOTES

1. Peter Berger's distinction between objective and objectivated reality is employed here. Objective reality is everything existing outside the human mind that human beings did not create, and objectivated reality, everything outside the human mind that human beings did create. Oppression involves the interpretation of institutionalized objectivated reality as if it were objective reality. However, the features of oppression that the one desires to eradicate must be designated as objectivated reality or else quietism will result. Institutions made by humans can be changed by other humans. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 33.
2. Benjamin Mays, *The Negro's God* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 155.
3. Cited in W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 6.
4. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 33.
5. Denis Collins, *Paulo Freire: His Life, Words and Thought* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 41.
6. Gunnar Myrdal, *Beyond The Welfare State* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1960), 227.
7. Jacob Burkhardt, *Force and Freedom* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1943), 184.
8. Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 87.



## *Another World Is Possible: A Marxist Philosophy of Revolution*

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“Revolutions are the locomotives of history.”

– Karl Marx, *Class Struggle in France, 1848–1850*

“For Marx was before all else a revolutionist.”

– Frederick Engels, Speech at the Grave  
of Karl Marx, Highgate Cemetery,  
London. March 17, 1883

### **ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE: A MARXIST PHILOSOPHY OF REVOLUTION**

The Reggae singer Dennis Brown once sung, “Do you know what it means to have a revolution? A revolution comes like a thief in the night—sudden and unexpected.” The Russian revolutionary V. I. Lenin vividly reminds us, “Revolutions are the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other time are the masses of the people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order.”<sup>1</sup>

Huey Newton, one of the founding members of the Black Panther Party, argues to engage in revolutionary change is to commit revolutionary suicide. For Newton, once an individual decides to engage in revolution, death is inevitable. He explains:

We have such a strong desire to live with hope and human dignity that existence without them is impossible. When reactionary forces crush us, we must move against these forces even at the risk of death.

Newton’s position is rightly interpreted as defeatist and fatalistic. In response to such criticisms, Newton offers the following:

The concept of revolutionary suicide is not defeatist or fatalistic. On the contrary, it conveys an awareness of reality in combination with the possibility of hope—reality because the revolution must always be prepared to face death, and hope because it symbolizes a resolute determination to bring about change.

Though seductive to some, the argument put forward by Newton, I would argue, is counter-revolutionary and counterproductive to understanding revolution. The courage to participate in a revolution does not derive from the realization of possible death. Rather, as Che Guevara understood, the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love for the people and the necessity for them to be free from the chains of oppression and exploitation.<sup>2</sup> The “professional revolutionary” comes to have a clear (rational) understanding of the “line of march,” the conditions and the

ultimate general results of the revolution. The “professional revolutionary” does not have time to fall into the defeatism, nihilism, and pessimism of Huey Newton.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the decision to participate in a revolution derives from a self-consciousness of the material existence of oppression and exploitation. Moreover, the individual decides to side with the oppressed and exploited and comes to see the necessity for solidarity and collective organization to eradicate oppression and exploitation in order for freedom to exist. She comes to see her individual plight as not just limited to their individual circumstances or something divined by the gods. She comes to an awareness that oppression and exploitation are social in nature and, consequently, a better world is possible.

The philosophical problem comes in identifying what constitutes revolution. What exactly is revolution? Is revolution necessary to bring about freedom? What type of justification is necessary before one engages in revolution? What means are necessary to bring about revolution? Is violence a necessary means to bring about a revolution? These and other questions are central to what we could call the philosophy of revolution.

In this essay, I explore, from the Marxist perspective, the philosophy of revolution. My aim is not to be comprehensive but to paint the contours of the Marxist philosophy of revolution. The Marxist perspective presupposes that all future revolutions are premised on the negation of bourgeois civil society. It is a historical necessity given the historical limitations and nature of capitalism as a mode of production. Consequently, the study of past revolutions provides the basis for understanding future revolutions. A serious historical study and philosophical reflection on the French Revolution or the Haitian Revolution or the October Revolution of 1917 or the Cuban Revolution demonstrates that social revolutions are accompanied and in part effectuated through class upheavals from below. Following Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, V. I. Lenin, Kwame Nkrumah, Fidel Castro, and Thomas Sankara, I argue that a necessary condition for a revolution is that the same class cannot remain in power. In other words, a social revolution occurs when the political and economic power of the class which controls the dominant means of production is replaced by socialist democracy, that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

### **BEYOND THE HORIZON OF BOURGEOIS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

The dialectical unfolding of world history has been rift with political revolutions from the English Revolution to the Haitian Revolution to the Cuban Revolution. Indeed, the October Revolution of 1917 was one of the defining moments of the twentieth century. But it is rare to find a philosophical discussion of revolution in anthologies and/or readers focused on political philosophy. Topics like freedom, individualism, political legitimacy, rights, and abortion are the norm. It is rare to find articles in political philosophy readers by socialists and/or Marxists such as Claudia Jones, C. L. R. James, Kwame Nkrumah, Fidel Castro, Eugene C. Holmes, or Lucy Parson.<sup>4</sup> There has been a purge of Communist political thinkers and Marxist political philosophy from the canons of

political philosophy. This is not surprising for, after all, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels note:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.<sup>5</sup>

What we take to be “common knowledge” or canonical serves the interests of the politically dominant class. Bourgeois ideological consensus reigns supreme. In order to participate in the conversation the participants must first accept that they cannot go beyond the horizon of bourgeois civil society—otherwise they do not have the right to speak. The bourgeois horizon is truly the limit!

Rawlsian liberalism has basically set the parameters of contemporary bourgeois political philosophy. Since the publication of Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, many African-American philosophers have been lost in Rawlsland. Today, in a weird, twisted reality, we are to believe that “Black radical liberalism” is more radical than so-called “white Marxism.” From Bernard Boxill to Charles Mills to Tommie Shelby, capitalism—despite being the material cause of slavery, racism, Jim Crow segregation, gentrification, and poverty—functions as a *presumptive context* for the solution to any and all social and political problems. By *presumptive context*, I mean a systematic cluster of founding presuppositions.

Much of what passes for revolutionary theory is pseudo-historical analysis, militant posturing, and philosophical gobbledygook. Under the pen of Peniel Joseph and Ta-Nehisi Coates, Malcolm X’s critique of American bourgeois democracy as a nightmare is magically transformed into the imperialist dreams of Barack Obama. Being committed to revolutionary change has been replaced by self-righteous virtue ethics (“be woke”) and internet signifiers like #StayWoke. Today, if you want to sound progressive or “woke,” then you use empty (abstract) notions like Blackness, radical democracy, intersectionality, and distributive justice peppered with Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, Michel Foucault’s theory of bio-power, Jürgen Habermas’s public sphere, and Cedric Robinson’s racial capitalism. In a nutshell, theoretical eclecticism passes for revolutionary philosophy today.

It is for this very reason that Raymond Geuss called for a return to V. I. Lenin in political theory and philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Lenin understood that eclecticism and sophistry often constitute the prerequisites for opportunism in *realpolitik*. For Lenin, systematic theory and political debate are necessary for building a political movement because they clarify

differences, dispel confusion, and result in real political solidarity and common action.

Cultural struggles, hashtag activism, and symbolic politics have become the dominant form of political activism. Identity politics and single-issue campaigns have made socialist solidarity appear incomprehensible. Any notion of socialist politics has been drowned out by the noise of social media and televisionaries. With each new hashtag, all the real revolutions of days past are forgotten; they become esoteric funeral mementos and superstitious lies. The reality of past revolutions is presented as incomprehensible mirages or utopian dreams.

Some cultural critics and public intellectuals promote a range of political nonsense. For example, we are all witnessing a revolution fueled by social media. The “Twitter Revolution” is framed as storming the Bastille. In the same manner, hustling is a form of revolutionary politics. Jay-Z, for instance, claims that he is a revolutionary because he is a self-made millionaire in a racist society; he is like Che Guevara with bling on!<sup>7</sup> And epistemological relativism is promoted as the new Truth—in a period in which irrationalism is the most dangerous form of politics. Alas, as C. L. R. James astutely notes, “Because it is only where you have Bolshevik ideas, Marxist ideas, Marxist knowledge, Marxist history, Marxist perspectives, that you are certain to drive out bourgeois ideas, bourgeois history, bourgeois perspectives.”<sup>8</sup>

## PHILOSOPHY OF REVOLUTION

To proceed we must raise the important and controversial question of the definition of revolution. Prior to our contemporary political understanding of revolution, revolutions referred to the circular motion of the planets. I. Bernard Cohen’s tour de force *Revolution in Science* provides a detailed examination of the concept of scientific revolutions. Similar to scientific revolutions, early conceptions of political revolutions were viewed as synonymous with cycles of change; it was a restoration or return of order. After the French Revolution there was a seismic shift in our understanding of revolution.

Admittedly, political revolutions have been the object of study for the historians, political scientists, and sociologists. Both E. H. Carr and Walter Rodney have examined the October Revolution.<sup>9</sup> The historian Albert Soboul places the ultimate cause of the French Revolution in the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production.<sup>10</sup> And, more recently, the Marxist historian Neil Davidson has written the challenging work *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* We could point to studies of the Haitian revolution by C. L. R. James and Laurent Dubois. C. L. R. James has also written on the “History of Negro Revolt,” the Ghana Revolution (led by Kwame Nkrumah), as well as a critical assessment of Guyanese Marxist historian and activist Walter Rodney. In “Walter Rodney and the Question of Power,” C. L. R. James rightly criticizes Walter Rodney for underestimating the extent to which the ruling class is prepared to use any means necessary via the State to destroy a revolutionary movement. Rodney’s political mistake, according to James, was that he “had not studied the taking of power.”<sup>11</sup>

So what constitutes a revolution in political terms? The Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker offers the following definition of revolution:

By revolution we mean an historical process leading to and culminating in social transformation, wherein one ruling class is displaced by another, with the new class representing, as compared to the old, enhanced productive capacities and social progressive potentialities.<sup>12</sup>

Aptheker's definition brings to our attention that revolutions are (1) a historical process driven by class antagonism, (2) in which one ruling class is displaced by another, and (3) which produces a social transformation in the "productive capacities" and "social progressive potentialities" of society at large.<sup>13</sup>

It should be noted that the abstract conceptualization associated with philosophical inquiry is not equipped to specify the concrete content of "productive capacities" and "social progressive potentialities." This is the job of the empirical sciences. For philosophy to engage in such empirical undertakings would be to engage in rampant idealist speculation and arid metaphysical contemplation. So, while philosophical inquiry and definition are necessary, eventually we must engage in an empirical assessment of a particular social formation in order to flesh out the concrete content of "productive capacities" and "social progressive potentialities."

In Vol. 1 of *Capital* in conjunction with works like *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Marx and Engels took extreme care to point out that under capitalism (1) there is an effective control by one class (the bourgeoisie) of the means of production; (2) there is an extraction of surplus labor over and above that allocated to the producers (the workers) for their survival; and (3) given the historical limits of capitalism, all future revolutions must be led by the working class if a revolution is to enhance the "productive capacities" and "social progressive potentialities" of society.

Aptheker's definition also provides a means to assess past revolutions. For instance, we would conclude that—since one ruling class was not displaced by another—the "American" colonists' fight against the British empire was not a revolution; it actually rolled back the wheel of history. As Gerald Horne has demonstrated, by further consolidating the "peculiar institution" of slavery, it may be more appropriate to characterize the "American revolution" as a counter-revolution.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Nelson Mandela's "Long Walk to Freedom" was a betrayal of the principles of revolution. When South Africa became a "non-racial" democracy in 1994, the Apartheid regime *à la* the National Party was merely replaced by a liberal democratic State in the hands of the African National Congress. When the National Party replaced by the African National Congress, the white bourgeois minority rule by white South Africans was replaced by a multi-racial South African bourgeoisie. Political power was not put into the hands of the South African working-class—whether white, Colored, or Black. By shifting the anti-Apartheid movement to the political

Right rather than to the Left, Mandela effectively sold out the international anti-Apartheid movement, the national democratic struggle of Black South Africans, and the struggle for socialism in South Africa. Moreover, "regime change," the watchword of Washington neo-conservatives, does not count as a revolution.

### THE ARGUMENT AGAINST REVOLUTION

The necessity for revolution should not be seen as a foregone conclusion. There are those who see bourgeois civil society as the best of all possible worlds. In other words, what is, is what ought to be. Oppression and exploitation are explained away as the result of deficits in character or the lack of human capital. As philosopher William R. Jones points out, these subjectivist explanations fail to adequately explain the transgenerational dimension to oppression and exploitation. Why does oppression or exploitation impact the parents, the children, and their children, generation after generation? Why are the presence of racism and capitalism a repetitive issue in Black life?

Marx and Engels bring to our attention how the contradiction between social production and private (capitalist) appropriation manifests itself as the antagonism of proletariat and bourgeoisie, that is, wage labor and capital.<sup>15</sup> As David Harvey observes, "The common wealth created by social labour comes in an infinite variety of use values, everything from knives and forks to cleared lands, whole cities, the aircraft we fly, the cars we drive, the food we eat, the houses we live in and the clothes we wear." The social labor of workers is subsequently appropriated and accumulated by private "persons" in the form of corporations, banks, and land owners. It is this contradiction which is foundational to understanding racism, national oppression, and class struggle today.

For supporters of capitalism, private property has an intrinsic value. Any society which would do away with private property goes against human nature. Here it is usually presupposed that any society that does not recognize that all human beings by nature are "possessive individuals" is bound to fail. Consequently, because socialism would do away with private property, it necessarily undermines the value and the rights of the "possessive individual."<sup>16</sup>

This argument is presented with great subtlety in Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974), a bible of sorts for the New Right. Nozick defends the libertarian position that justice consists simply in the respect for property rights and those rights that can be derived from them: justice in original acquisition, justice in transfer and rectificatory justice. In his famous Wilt Chamberlain thought experiment, Nozick proposes that we imagine a situation  $D_1$  in which we have what he calls a "patterned theory" of fair distribution of economic justice. Under such "patterned" economic arrangement, we could imagine a society which has an optimal Gini coefficient which is close to zero along the lines of John Rawls's Difference Principle:

Now suppose that Wilt Chamberlain is greatly in demand by basketball teams, being a great gate attraction. (Also suppose contracts run only for a year, with players being free agents.) He signs the

following sort of contract with a team: In each home game, twenty-five cents from the price of each ticket of admission goes to him. . . . The season starts, and people cheerfully attend his team's games; they buy their tickets, each time dropping a separate twenty-five cents of their admission price into a special box with Chamberlain's name on it. They are excited about seeing him play; it is worth the total admission price to them. Let us suppose that in one season one million persons attend his home games, and Wilt Chamberlain winds up with \$250,000, a much larger sum than the average income and larger even than anyone else has. Is he entitled to this income? Is this new distribution  $D_2$  unjust?

Nozick argues that this new distribution  $D_2$  is just because each individual *freely chooses* to give twenty-five cents of their money to Chamberlain. Therefore, individuals—no matter what social arrangements they find themselves in—will *freely choose* a society with income and wealth inequalities. With the entrepreneur *a la* Wilt Chamberlain as the ideal-type for all persons, Nozick has led us from a commitment to egalitarianism to the position (barring the influence of historical inequities) that the individual right to private property and the existence of income and wealth inequalities in a free-market capitalist economy is inherently just.

Nozick's argument in support of private property is flawed because it conflates individual (personal) property with private ownership of the means of production. Capital is not equivalent to personal property. While capital can assume a money form, money in and of itself is not capital. Money as a means of exchange and a measure of value is not necessarily attached to capital accumulation. And money may function as a facilitator of circulation of commodities wherein workers buy the necessary means for their survival or personal property such as cars, cosmetic makeup, or books. But the circuit of money in the hands of a worker does purchase the means of production. To argue otherwise reflects a failure to understand political economy and the ancillary philosophical critique provided by materialism.

This leads us to what could be called the *paradox of bourgeois formal equality*. On the one hand, bourgeois democracy is grounded on the principle that all people are formally equal and should have the same political rights. On the other hand, the formal equality of individuals under bourgeois democracy does not mean an equal distribution of income, wealth, and property.

The normative ideal of capitalism should not be the starting point for the positive value of capitalism. Even more importantly, the assessment of capitalism should not be limited to its normative ideal, that is, the freedom of the "possessive individual." This is even more important in the context of the United States, a country built on class exploitation and national oppression. As Angela Davis once argued, "One of the striking paradoxes of the bourgeois ideological tradition resides in an enduring philosophical emphasis on the idea of freedom alongside an equally

pervasive failure to acknowledge the denial of freedom to entire categories of real, social human beings."<sup>17</sup>

We are traditionally presented with the myth that the United States is a singular national entity with a corresponding State apparatus, i.e., a nation-state. However, as many Black Studies scholars have demonstrated, the mythical melting pot in which a diversity of ethnics groups were blended into a cultural gumbo of sorts has never existed. From a Marxist perspective the United States is a *multinational state*—based on national oppression and an unequal distribution of wealth grounded in bourgeois property relations.<sup>18</sup> Think of Native Americans, African Americans, and Puerto Ricans. Whatever guarantees the United States Constitution provides for individual rights, the issue of national democracy remains unresolved. National oppression cannot be solved under capitalism.<sup>19</sup>

### WHAT'S MORALITY GOT TO DO WITH IT?

The Black philosopher Jesse McDade offers one of the rare glimpses into the philosophy of revolution.<sup>20</sup> McDade argues that the normative or ethical justification of revolution is inextricably tied to philosophical anthropology. He explores the "ethicality of revolution" through the works of Frantz Fanon.<sup>21</sup> McDade concludes that Fanon offers a normative argument for revolution which grows from a Hegelian-existentialist philosophical anthropology—closely related to the French philosophers Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. McDade argues that the ethicality of revolution rests on bringing about freedom, which is a necessary condition for the self-realization of personhood. McDade concludes: "Insofar as the end sought is acknowledge as a desirable goal, revolution as a means, takes on an ethical dimension. It is not an intrinsic value; its value is instrumental to the realization of a higher value."<sup>22</sup>

The Marxist justification for revolution would not disagree with McDade on the necessity for revolution. The dispute would be over whether, in today's philosophical jargon, "ought implies can." McDade's approach assumes what Raymond Geuss labels as an "ethics-first" view. From the "ethics-first" view "one can complete the work of ethics first, attaining an ideal theory of how we should act, and then in a second step, one can apply the ideal theory to the action of political agents."<sup>23</sup> Here political philosophy becomes a branch of applied ethics.

In opposition to the "ethics-first" view, I argue for political ethics, that is, the view that general political-theoretical postulates should guide and inform ethical theory and moral thinking. This Marxist metaethical position rejects a conception of ethics as grounded on abstract individualism and individual conscience. This ahistorical and individualist presupposition grounds most philosophical approaches to ethics and moral questions. In his discussion of Maurice Cornforth's contribution to a Marxist metaethics, Renzo Llorente points out: "[N]orms for individual conduct should be derived from—that is, should be conceived as dependent upon—logically antecedent choices concerning the socio-political structure of society."<sup>24</sup> Relatedly, Maurice Cornforth observes: "In practice and in logic the answers to questions about the rights and wrongs of personal behaviour depend on the answers to questions about the rights and wrongs of

social organization."<sup>25</sup> Cornforth argues that philosophical ethics tends to separate ethics from politics:

[This] approach which sees morals as primarily a personal matter in effect separates morals, which is personal, from politics, which is public, and for practical purposes turns morals into a system of exhorting individuals to act on one set of principles while the society on which they depend for their health, education and happiness is managed on quite contrary principles (if, indeed, it is managed on any principles at all).<sup>26</sup>

The justification for revolution, for Marx, is not a question of moralism. The moral outrage of James Baldwin alone cannot provide a justification for revolution. Revolution is a question of social interests and primarily class interests. Isn't it the case that capitalists see capitalism as a just social system? Wouldn't a Rawlsian morally object to divisions of income that fail to benefit the least advantaged? Wouldn't the utilitarian morally object to the deprivations of the poor if it undermined overall or average happiness? In *Anti-Duhring* Engels wrote:

If for the imminent overthrow of the present mode of distribution with its crying contrasts of want and luxury, starvation and debauchery (schreienden Gegensätzen von Elend und Uppigkeit, Hungersnot und Schwelgerei), we had no better guarantee than the consciousness that the mode of production is unjust (ungerecht) . . . we should be in a pretty bad way. The mystics of the Middle Ages who dreamed of the coming millennium were already conscious of the injustice (Ungerechtigkeit) of class contrasts.<sup>27</sup>

It is not moral outrage which provides the justification for revolution. Moral concepts and judgments play an explanatory role, but they are subordinate to social theory. Only a concrete analysis of concrete conditions can provide the rationale or justification for revolution. As Maurice Cornforth explains,

If, then, we are to find good reasons for current judgments about what is socially desirable, and what interests should prevail, this requires, first of all, an accurate description of the current state of society—its economic basis, the interests and conflicts of interest contained within it, the individual and collective needs which people have acquired in it and the ways in which and extent to which the current social relations permit their satisfaction, and the possibilities of maintaining social stability or of effecting social changes.<sup>28</sup>

What is critically important in justifying revolution is the avoidance of dogmatism and recognizing the limits of philosophy. As John H. McClendon warns,

The essence of all dogmatism is to attach and employ a prior principle (philosophical, religious, political, moral, and so on) to reality (natural or social) and not deriving one's principles from

scientific and concrete (materialist) analysis. The proposition "Marxism is not a dogma but a guide to action" turns on the presupposition that one makes "a concrete analysis of concrete conditions."<sup>29</sup>

Hence, from *Das Kapital* to *The Eighteenth Brumaire* to *Class Struggle in France* to *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* to *Black Jacobins*, Marx, Engels, Lenin, C. L. R. James and so many others provide the historical (empirical) foundation for an analysis, interpretation, and critique of the internal contradictions which plague bourgeois civil society, viz. the contradiction between private appropriation and socialized production. As Engels lucidly points out, "the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in men's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought not in the *philosophy*, but in the *economics* of each particular epoch."<sup>30</sup>

Marx's analysis of exploitation, the extraction of the unpaid labor of the working class, provides an interpretation of the source of class divisions and class struggle. The working class creates the surplus value which is taken away from them and which provides the basis for the leisure, the luxury, and the culture of the ruling class, that is, the bourgeoisie. The working class cannot attain political power within the existing structure of capitalism; they can only attain power by abolishing bourgeois civil society and taking control of the State.

Despite Marx and Engel's critique of the moralism associated with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Eugen Dühring and Ferdinand Lassalle, we should not lose sight of the following: (1) Marxism does not offer a moral critique of capitalism; (2) Marx and Engels's metaethics is realist in character; (3) Marxism does not view social philosophy as a branch of applied ethics; and (4) political ethics has as its starting point the social individual whose human essence is a reflection of and derived from the ensemble of social relations within a given social formation. As Alan Gilbert outlines,

Moral realism recognizes the objectivity of moral judgments about human needs and capacities, progress in morality and moral theory, the dependence of ethical progress on advances in social organization and social theory, and the role of moral conceptions, especially true ones in social explanations and political strategy.

He continues,

Realism acknowledges some merit in past and current views about justice but offers a theoretical reformulation of those views; it shows how dramatically moral differences between liberals and the ancients, for example Montesquieu's rejection of Aristotle's social biological defense of slavery, or between Marxists and liberals, pivot on issues of social theory rather than on incommensurable ethical premises. The moral

realist account recognizes historical progress but is not historicist or relativist. Unlike empiricist or neo-Kantian moral philosophy, moral realism emphasizes the discovery of moral knowledge a posteriori based on observable human social practice and denies it any *a priori* status.<sup>31</sup>

A revolution is justified if the socio-political analysis demonstrates that the current mode of production cannot eliminate oppression and exploitation. The legitimacy of the revolution lies in the fact that it brings an end to class exploitation and creates conditions in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

### VIOLENCE AND REVOLUTION

One might properly ask at this point, is the use of violence a necessary component of a revolution? In other words, is violence ever justified? The call for revolution is apt to be attacked because it is assumed that it will be violent. After all, Malcolm X keenly noted, "Revolutions are based on bloodshed. . . . In the past, revolutions have been bloody. Historically you just don't have a peaceful revolution. Revolutions are bloody, revolutions are violent, revolutions cause bloodshed and death follows in their paths."<sup>32</sup>

Violence is not a necessary condition for the birth of a revolution. But, historically, the ruling class does not surrender power willingly. Historically, ruling classes have used any and all means necessary to maintain their rule, whether through cooptation, violent repression, or assassination. The contemporary bourgeoisie is no different. They will not willingly hand over power to the working class. It is for this reason that Marx observed that "force is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with the new."<sup>33</sup>

We should be aware that violence is necessary for the defense of a revolution against counterrevolutionary forces, particularly the old class which is being overthrown by the revolution. For instance, the United States has used covert and overt means of overthrowing revolutions in Greece (1946–1949), Egypt (1952), Lebanon (1959), Bolivia (1971), Chile (1973), El Salvador (1980–1992), Nicaragua (1982–1989), and Grenada (1983) which it deemed opposed to its class interests. Not to mention the United States government's involvement in the assassinations of individuals it saw as threats to the political status quo such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, Patrice Lumumba, and the attempted assassinations of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez. Did these countries and individuals have a right to use violence in defense of their revolutions and revolutionary aims?

### DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT

The great scandal of all bourgeois philosophy is its inability to go beyond the horizon of Marxism. To paraphrase Jean-Paul Sartre, Marxism is the philosophy of our time; we cannot go beyond it because we have not gone beyond the circumstances which created it, viz. capitalism. Therefore, the fall of communism in 1989 was not the "End of History." Rather, it was the first stage in the working class's struggle against capital.

The materialist dialectic as developed by Marx and Engels gives concrete content to the notion of revolution. In the preface to volume one of *Capital*, Marx makes explicit: "In its rational form, [the materialist dialectic] is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary."

Marx's dialectical insights placed the working class at the center of future revolutions; they are "a class with radical chains, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society."<sup>34</sup> In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels give voice to the historic mission of the working class. The fate of humanity rests in the hands of the working class who will destroy capitalism, viz. the contradiction between private appropriation of the means of production and socialized production.

It is important to understand that Marxism does not view the proletariat as gods. Rather, the conditions of life of the proletariat sum up all the conditions of life of society today in their most inhuman and acute form. . . . It cannot abolish the conditions of its own life without abolishing all the inhuman conditions of life of society today which are summed up in its own situation. . . . It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment considers as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is irrevocably and clearly foreshadowed in its own life situation as well as in the whole organisation of bourgeois society today.<sup>35</sup>

Given their objective position within bourgeois civil society, the working class represents the gravediggers of the bourgeoisie. Just as Victor Frankenstein created his own monster, through the exploitation of the working class, the bourgeoisie has created its greatest horror, its own deadly monster—the men, women, and children of the working class. The capitalist of today when confronted with the possibility of a socialist revolution draws back in horror—like Victor Frankenstein: "by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; . . . How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe . . . ?"<sup>36</sup>

In Marx's ideological critique of the "Gotha Programme," he observes: "Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*."<sup>37</sup> The dictatorship of the proletariat is the dialectical negation (or sublation) of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. It is premised on the destruction of private property, that is, the private ownership of the means of production. A socialist revolution does not abolish personal property; capital is not personal property. Socialists do not want to collectively own someone's private collection of Steve Wonder or Roy Hargrove albums. A socialist revolution abolishes the private ownership of the things we all need

and use such as factories, banks, offices, natural resources, utilities, communication, and transportation infrastructure. By abolishing capital, we turn the private ownership of the means of production into socialist property for the benefit of all. As Lenin explains,

The first phase of communism, therefore, cannot yet provide justice and equality: differences and unjust differences in wealth will still persist, but the exploitation of man by man will have become impossible because it will be impossible to seize the means of production—the factories, machines, land, etc.—and make them private property. In smashing Lassalle’s (early leader of German worker’s movement) petty-bourgeois, vague phrases about “equality” and “justice” in general, Marx shows the course of development of communist society which is compelled to abolish at first only the “injustice” of the means of production seized by individuals and which is unable at once to eliminate the other injustice which consists in the distribution of consumer goods “according to the amount of labor performed” (and not according to needs).<sup>38</sup>

The dictatorship of the proletariat provides the material foundation for the realization of a society in which “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”

The point is to overthrow the political rule of the bourgeoisie in order to lay the ground for the enhanced “productive capacities” and “social progressive potentialities” of society. With the dictatorship of the proletariat, several things follow. First, society is organized on the socialist principle “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” This principle is sensitive to the fact that each person differs from others in important ways, both in their abilities and needs. And, yet, society should provide for the “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” Second, “with the abolition of class distinctions all social and political inequality arising from them would disappear of itself.”<sup>39</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Let me conclude my discussion of the philosophy of revolution. Throughout the world, the anarchy of capitalism has become, as James Joyce’s Stephen declared in *Ulysses*, a nightmare from which we are trying to wake. The world is caught in a seemingly bottomless state of crisis in which “Dante would have found the worst horrors in his Inferno surpassed.”<sup>40</sup> And, yet, in these times, there are still Black public intellectuals such as Ta-Nehisi Coates and Michael Eric Dyson who view it as ridiculous to talk of revolution. They willfully ignore the difference that class makes. Instead of talk about class, class struggle, and socialist solidarity, they feel obligated to take on the mantle of the “Racial Voice,” interpreting the Black mind for whites.<sup>41</sup> From the sales of *Between the World and Me* and *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* we see that the moral outrage of the Black petit bourgeois intellectuals is directed at whiteness; neither Coates nor Dyson offer much moral outrage toward or political analysis of capitalism.

Consequently, Coates and Dyson are living high off the hog—as they say—by perfecting the illusion that (by default) capitalism—despite its failures—is the only alternative. They are content to repeat *ad nauseum* that whiteness and/or racism reproduces itself independently of the “laws of motion” of capitalism. They are consumed by whiteness, but some of their best friends are white people. For Coates, Dyson, and the “liberals who like them” the word “revolution” never comes out of their mouth because whiteness, “white America,” or some ingrained white attitude about the Black body is the problem. From the vantage point of Coates’s racial reductionism, white people just can’t get over their possessive investment in whiteness.

In this respect, one of the most puzzling aspects of Coates’s *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* is the manner in which he obscures the nature of power. The first question that has to be asked is, who is the “we” that was in power for eight years? On behalf of which class did Obama govern? Coates’s blurred vision can’t see the *class* nature of the State apparatus. All he sees is a ruling (white) race. It is tragic that Coates does not want to understand the truth. Obama wielded power not on behalf of working-class people, whether white, Black, Native American, or otherwise. Rather, he used his presidential power in the interests of capital; as you would expect, for any president of the United States.

Ta-Nehisi Coates writes sweetly, very sweetly, proclaiming: “treating a racist injury solely with class-based remedies is like treating a gunshot wound solely with bandages. The bandages help, but they will not suffice.”<sup>42</sup> But what is this but another poetic way of saying capitalism has nothing to do with racism? For Coates the fight against racial inequality is independent of and takes precedence over class struggle, the fight against class exploitation, or the elimination of capitalism. Both Coates and Dyson are unable to see beyond the horizon of bourgeois society. They are not able to accept the simple fact that “there can be no real, actual equality until all possibility of the exploitation of one class by another has been totally destroyed” by a socialist revolution.<sup>43</sup>

## NOTES

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## *The Wages of Sin Is Death: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Rhetorics of Black Manhood and the Contemporary Discourse on Black Male Death*

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"I am a man," a young preacher said.  
"I am no better than my brother,  
but I am no less than any other."

– Eve Merriam—*Ode to Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 1971

### INTRODUCTION

One of the main issues of Black political activism and protest against racial injustice in the United States during the civil rights era centered on the measure of manhood. This was a period when manhood was fundamentally regarded as the prerogative of whiteness—such that white males were deemed as the normative measure of manhood, which gave them entitlement to the economic, political, and social gains accruable from the white supremacist patriarchal-capitalist society. However, within this socio-political arrangement, Black males (especially adult males) were considered as not-men, sub-humans, and lesser men and boys in order to maintain the social hierarchies and power structure that would sustain white male social, political, and economic dominance and racial supremacy. It is in such a milieu, where manhood rights and privileges were reserved strictly for white males, that Martin Luther King, Jr. espoused his counter-hegemonic rhetorics of Black manhood in direct confrontation of the white male power structure. For instance, in his "I've been to the Mountaintop" speech, King reminds the Black striking sanitation workers in Memphis what the crux of the protest was all about, stating, "we aren't engaged in any negative protest and in any negative arguments with anybody. We are saying that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people."<sup>1</sup> From this and other similar assertions concerning Black manhood, it is deducible that King's grave "sin" against the American empire was that he dared to assert his Black manhood while championing the cause for the socio-economic and racial emancipation of Black folks, in a society that classifies Black males as sub-human, not-man, and exploitable laborers. Ultimately, the price for committing such a "sin" is death and King paid for this sin with his life—his flesh and blood. My task in this essay is to explore what I will call "phallicist violence" to underscore the philosophical underpinnings and the gendered symbolism of King's death and to show its connection to the *disposability thesis* in contemporary discourse on Black male death.

It is important to note that King deployed masculinist rhetoric to highlight the questions of racial and economic equality that lay at the heart of the struggle for civil rights in the United States.<sup>2</sup> King believed that masculinity and strength exist in non-violent direct action protest. So,

from the civil rights protests in Atlanta to Birmingham, Montgomery, Selma, and Mississippi, King deployed the rhetorics of Black manhood to inspire Black folks to fight for their political and economic emancipation from a social system that stifles Black progress and sought to negate Black existence through austere economic and working conditions. In his first speech to the sanitation strikers in Mississippi, King had equated low pay and racist treatment with the tradition of white emasculation of Black workers that stretched back to the time of slavery. King's primary motive for addressing the emasculation of Black men was to attack the dehumanizing effects of paternalistic racism and low pay.<sup>3</sup> King saw that there was a strong connection between manhood rights and economic empowerment; that is, underneath the question of economic prosperity is the consciousness of manhood especially within America's white-male supremacist, patriarchal capitalism that operates a so-called "free" market economy which profits largely by exploiting Black labor just as in the time of slavery. This explains why King was largely committed to the cause of Black workers throughout his life. But King's desire to achieve socioeconomic progress for Black folks by emphasizing the assertion of Black manhood was seen as a grave threat to white hegemony because portraying Black males as criminals served the Black inferiority narrative, maintained Jim Crow segregation, and promoted the violent enforcement of racist ideology.

King's civil rights activities presented a massive threat to the white power structure, particularly the white male power structure. Even King's dream of humanity as a network of mutuality bound together by "brotherhood" was deemed as threatening to white masculinist hegemony because King's philosophy assumed that racist white men were "brothers" with Black males who were seen by them as not-men, beasts, and morally and socially deviant brutes. This was an affront on the patriarchal sensibilities of white folks, especially the self-proclaimed "pious" Southern Christian white males. It was also an assault on the white family structure that essentially benefits economically from denying the humanity and manhood of Black males in order to restrict them to the working class or labor class. The racial and social hierarchies within America's capitalist patriarchy was best maintained by the markers of oppression and exploitation that King and his allies in the civil rights movement seek to truncate.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the philosophy of "brotherhood" that King espouses was deemed as an attempt to undercut the supremacy of white male power in the racialized and genderized social arrangement in America, particularly during the civil rights struggle. So, in the sense of affirming Black manhood in the context of the civil rights struggle, both the advocacy of violent and non-violent strategies was seen as conterminous and threatening.

### I AM A MAN: THE RACIAL COST OF TRANSGRESSING THE WHITE MEASURE OF MANHOOD

In *Measuring Manhood*, Melissa Stein writes about the fatal destiny of subordinated Black males within America's racist practice of the science of masculinity that confines what it means to be a "man" within the domain of whiteness. She

documents how white ethnologists classified Blacks using anthropometric scientific experiments and ethnological assumptions to castrate Black males with the sole aim of unsexing the Black race. This includes literal and social castration utilized by white males<sup>5</sup> to show that Black males were anything but “men.” A Black man is considered a caricatured human being with an invisible pigmentation which marked him a person to be hunted, hanged, abused, discriminated against, kept in poverty and ignorance, in order that those whose skin were white, would have readily at hand a proof of their superiority<sup>6</sup> and masculinity. So the measure of manhood becomes the epicenter of inter-racial conflict and inter-group oppression. This context is important in order to underscore the historical significance of King’s rhetorics of Black manhood, especially with its focus on the use of nonviolent resistance to oppose and protest Jim Crow laws and the racial segregation of the South. In “Gender Trouble: Manhood, Inclusion and Justice,” Shatema Threadcraft and Brandon M. Terry underline the salience of King’s rhetorics of manhood in advancing civil rights, especially King’s need to prove and perform manhood and manliness within his philosophical commitments, which connects the idea of manhood to self-worth and human dignity.<sup>7</sup>

King accentuates the centrality of advocating for people to respect Black manhood in the civil rights movement during the 1968 Memphis sanitation strike when he professes in *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* that “for hundreds of years Negroes had fought to stay alive by developing an endurance to hardship and heartbreak. In this decade, the negro stepped into a new role, he gained manhood in the nation that had always called him boy.”<sup>8</sup> King recognizes the affinity between economic means and the denial of manhood as a power-tactic used by the white politicians to keep Black males undermined and to make them less socially and economically viable. By so doing, they are able to strip Black men of the basic element of the concept of manhood, which is the ability or willingness to protect their family. Thus, the slogan of the striking Memphis sanitation workers in 1968—“I AM A MAN”—illustrates the saliency of questioned manhood as an issue also for Black working classes.<sup>9</sup> The gender component of their rhetoric was not simply a matter of semantics, however. In fact, the struggle for Black equality since the era of slavery has also had specific implications for gender relations and gender identity in America. The “I AM A MAN” slogan represents a demand for recognition and respect of Black manhood as well as Black humanity. This demand and the racial oppression that inspires it reflect the way that race and racism have contributed to our understanding of both Black and white manhood in America.<sup>10</sup>

King believes that true freedom can only come to Black males when they affirm their masculinities even in the face of great adversity, systemic oppression, and poverty. In King’s opinion, “the Negro will only be truly free when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive selfhood his own emancipation proclamation. With a spirit straining toward true self-esteem, the Negro must boldly throw off the manacles of self-abnegation and say to himself and the world: ‘I am somebody. I am a person. I am a man with

dignity and honor.”<sup>11</sup> This affirmation of Black manhood is crucial to understanding white racism and patriarchy as the negation of Black manhood/Black male existence. King attacks the logic of white paternalism and patriarchy as that which strips the Black man of his sense of self, value, worth, and humanity. King often addresses questions of poverty in ways thoroughly inflected by his conception of gender. Intertwined with these arguments about poverty as corrosive of dignity, poverty as engendering of humiliation, and ghetto poverty being uniquely galling are claims about what economic inequality means for the achievement and consolidation of gender norms. The “castration” or “diminished manhood” frames for understanding injustice that King productively unsettles in the domain of violence, for instance, come roaring back in the realm of political economy.<sup>12</sup>

For King, “[i]f a man asserts that another man, because of his race, is not good enough to have a job equal to his or to live next door to him, he is by implication affirming that that man does not deserve to exist. He does not deserve to exist because his existence is corrupt and defective.”<sup>13</sup> Here, King is confronting the Jim Crow practices in America that undermines Black existence while ignoring the contribution of Black labor to America’s industrial wealth. According to King, “the tendency to ignore the Negro’s contribution to American life and strip him of his personhood is as old as the earliest history books and as contemporary as the morning’s newspaper. To offset this cultural homicide, the Negro must rise up with an affirmation of his own Olympian manhood.”<sup>14</sup> This is both a powerful rhetoric offered by King in defense of Black manhood and a direct call to action for Black males to participate in the struggle for freedom in all its ramifications. When King compares Black manhood to “Olympian” manhood, he is not merely engaging in the literal romanticizing of Black manhood into a mythological phantasm that has no actual bearing in the material world where Black livity is perpetually contested and undermined by anti-Black forces. What King is referring to here is a metaphoric sense of virile masculinity, a revered sense of manhood that is greater than that of decadent white males, whose minds were too small to comprehend the fact that Black males were indispensable within the American empire just as the Olympian gods in Greek pantheons were considered indispensable to the lived experience of the people of ancient Greece. King also imagines Black men as “greater gods” or “greater men” when compared to powerful white males whose main preoccupation is to destroy Black male bodies. King believes Black men were “greater men” because they were able to demonstrate radical love and embrace the philosophy of non-violence even though they were confronted by white-male violence, terrorism—phallicist violence. Thus, King imagines Black men greater than white males because of their ability to fight for their freedom and to struggle against suffering through radical loving.

What the foregoing depicts is King’s audacity to deploy rhetorics of manhood to give Black men a renewed sense of self-affirmation and a new understanding of manhood that places economic demands on the social fabric of the American society. As King laments concerning the economic status of the Black male in *Where Do We Go From*

Here, “when a man is able to make his way through the maze of handicaps and get just one foot out of the jungle of poverty and exploitation, he is subject to the whims of the political and economic giants of the city, which move in impersonally to crush little flower of success that has just began to bloom.”<sup>15</sup> As a way to destabilize such exploitative system, King calls for what he refers to as “the American racial revolution.” For King, “the American racial revolution has been a revolution to “get in” rather than to overthrow. We want a share in the American economy, the housing market, the educational system, and the social opportunities.”<sup>16</sup> Though, this was not a demand that sat well with powerful white males whose political, economic, and social interests were being threatened by King’s rhetorics concerning Black manhood. Hence, for King and, by extension, Black men to assert their manhood in an American society where what manhood means is equated with white-maleness is to commit a sin—a sin that transgresses the patriarchal white power structure and its economic, social, and political forces that guarantees dominance; but the racial cost for such transgression is death. In what follows, I will discuss the significance of phallicist violence to the *disposability thesis* in contemporary discourse on Black male death.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KING’S RHETORICS OF BLACK MANHOOD FOR THE DISCOURSE ON BLACK MALE DEATH

Contemporary discussions on Black male death have been centered around the *disposability thesis*—the view that “America makes corpses of Black males.”<sup>17</sup> However, what King, Jr.’s rhetorics of Black manhood and his eventual death demonstrates is that the *disposability thesis* is a function of phallicist violence. Phallicist violence is a form of gendered violence perpetrated by dominant white males against emasculated/subordinated Black males. Phallicist violence is essentially state-sanctioned violence against Black males, which guarantees their death and complete silencing in order to quell any appearance of such threats that they may pose to white male privilege and the white power structure guaranteed by patriarchy. In this context, patriarchy functions as a system of white male domination that utilizes racism, capitalism, militarism, mass incarceration/hyperincarceration, racialized policing, and sexual violence to subjugate and kill Black males who are deemed as degradations of the white man. So when Black males attack/challenge patriarchy, in the way and manner King, his associates, and other Black men did, the consequence is often phallicist violence.

King was primarily targeted by the state for daring to affirm Black manhood in a racist society that thrives on the denial of Black manhood and the exploitation of Black people as the underclass. King’s swift rise to prominence as a Black leader determined to challenge Jim Crow laws aroused the hostility of FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover, the racist who had targeted Marcus Garvey for prosecution. Hoover would later place King under secret surveillance as a “communist.”<sup>18</sup> In 1956 Hoover initiated a program called COINTELPRO. Its operations included infiltration of suspect civil rights and liberal groups, disruption of their activities, and propaganda designed to destroy their credibility. One of Hoover’s objectives was to prevent the rise of a

“black messiah” who could “unify and electrify a coalition of militant black nationalist groups.” There was no doubt his target was Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>19</sup> This state targeting of King was well documented in the FBI file<sup>20</sup> on Martin Luther King, Jr. of January 11, 1975. The evidence from this file shows that “on November 1, 1975, William C. Sullivan, former Assistant Director, Domestic Intelligence Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, testified before the Senate Select Committee to study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities. He related that from late 1963 and continuing until the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., King was the target of an intensive campaign by the FBI to neutralize him as an effective civil rights leader. Sullivan stated that in the war against King “no holds were barred.”<sup>21</sup> Although, there is some controversy about whether the FBI were solely responsible for the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., the evidence from the FBI secret file kept in the personal office of Hoover shows that the FBI set up a program to “neutralize” King barring no holds.

The negative crusade against King was because he was considered a major threat to the United States government and the American establishment during the civil rights era because he dared to organize and mobilize Black rage over past and present crimes against humanity targeting Black folk and other oppressed people.<sup>22</sup> It also demonstrated an awareness, on the part of the state, of the massive threat posed to the American racist economy, especially King’s ability to genially connect manhood rights to political and economic prosperity. Although much of America did not know the radical King—and too few today—the FBI and US government did. They called him “the most dangerous man in America.”<sup>23</sup> Throughout the years of his admirable leadership the philosophy and actions of Martin Luther King, Jr. were consistent with unapologetic optimism. He deeply believed that the strategy of nonviolent resistance to racial injustices would disturb the conscience of white Americans and eventually result in granting “the Negro, all of his rights, here and now.”<sup>24</sup> Even with the peaceful activism of King, he was still deemed a very dangerous man by the state; this is because King’s leadership of the civil rights had combined the philosophy of non-violence with the rhetorics of manhood. King was deeply involved in organizing a Poor People’s campaign to demonstrate in a mass way for economic as well as civil rights, which he had always considered dependent upon each other.<sup>25</sup>

King’s Poor People’s Campaign was designed, in part, to answer his critics and to reverse the drift toward violence. He planned to take thousands of Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and poor whites to the capital and camp there until Congress passed a multi-billion program of national reconstruction. In King’s view, the Poor People’s Campaign was going to be a litmus test for nonviolence. It was going to prove, once and for all, whether nonviolence could attack the structural roots of racism and provide an alternative to violence.<sup>26</sup> For doing this, he was considered an enemy of the state because he was trying to free Black people, especially Black men, from the lowest stratum of the American economy and thereby attempting to rupture the inequalities inherent in America’s classism and capitalist patriarchy.

Due to his struggle against racial and economic oppression, King was widely condemned by whites (including white liberals) who thought that King's proposed "Poor People's March" went too far beyond civil rights and hinted at a kind of "Un-Americanism," fostering class struggle and socialism. They anxiously inquired, what happened to the King of "I Have a Dream"? King's historic and memorable elocution, wherein his rhythmic cadence about the "American Dream" brought hope of a liberal America, an America bereft of racism. Now, they declared, King had betrayed the liberal dream. In fact, his critics shouted King had fallen into the hands of the "Un-Americans," that motley and unsavory crew of antiwar activities, socialists, and Communists.<sup>27</sup> King's reply to this smear campaign against him was that he was simply trying to make social reality out of the laws of both man and God as he understood them; the trouble was created by white people who were determined to deny Black men justice<sup>28</sup> through racial violence.

Although Black men have been the victims of violence at the hands of the state since the time of slavery,<sup>29</sup> King's death is a symbolic reflection of phallicist violence that involves a double negation—the negation of Black existence and negation of Black manhood. Phallicist violence is the ultimate reflection/display of white male power which is demonstrated through the organ of the state. Phallicist violence is a vestige of phallicism—the understanding of racism as sexualized hatred or violence against Black and other non-white males. It is a consequence of an inter-group social relation where white males who consider themselves as dominant males target those they consider as subordinate males, especially when they feel threatened by such subordinated males. Phallicist violence is demonstrated through the necrophilia which is the consequence of the death-psychology imposed on Black males by powerful white males. It is this same pattern of phallicist violence that is apparent in the persistent killings of Black males by the police (mostly white male police officers), with impunity—without facing any criminal liabilities. What this suggests is that the lives of Black men and boys are disposable. Many unarmed Black men and boys have been killed since Trayvon Martin's tragic death six years ago. Many of the killings occurred after police officers arguably engage in racial profiling—stopping and harassing these men for no explainable reason other than the color of their skin. In all of the cases where Black men were shot and killed, the officers claimed that they felt threatened, even though the men were unarmed and often running away or retreating. In almost all of the cases, the police officers were never arrested or charged with a crime.<sup>30</sup> The fact that these agents of the state (mostly white male police officers) continue to claim that they "feel threatened" as the rationale/justification for such blatant murder, thereby avoiding jail time, highlights the fact that Black male death is triggered by phallicist violence.

Thus, King's death is symbolic in the sense that it shows that so long as patriarchal logic is embedded in the fabric of the American society, Black males will always be viewed as threats to white manhood and will ever be exposed to phallicist violence—violence perpetrated by white males, especially using the weapons of the state like prisons, guns, discriminating political and economic policies, and courts

to destroy and "neutralize" such perceived threats. This explains why Black men are disproportionately imprisoned and receive longer sentences compared to any other racial group. African Americans make up approximately 35 percent of the prison population in the United States,<sup>31</sup> and by the end of 2015, Black men constituted 34 percent of the American prison population.<sup>32</sup> In 2015, 5,165 in 100,000 Black men ages twenty-five to twenty-nine were imprisoned compared to 2,165 Hispanic men and 921 white men of the same ages.<sup>33</sup> One in three Black men born in 2001 can expect to be incarcerated in his lifetime.<sup>34</sup> Black men serve more time for their crimes than others similarly situated. Data collected by the US Sentencing Commission between December 2007 and 2011 revealed that Black men in federal prisons received sentences 19.5 percent longer than white men sentenced for the same crime.<sup>35</sup> Black males are also disproportionately sentenced to death. As of 2014, the national death row population is approximately 42 percent Black, while the overall Black population is only 13.6 percent.<sup>36</sup> What all of these statistics shows is how the state deploys phallicist violence to destroy and guarantee the death and disposability of Black males.

The mass incarceration or hyperincarceration of Black males is a strategy employed by the white power structure to take back the gains made from the civil rights movement. Since "the institutional decimation of Black men through police violence and incarceration emerges from a political economy that deliberately confines young Black men to poverty,"<sup>37</sup> they are more likely to be imprisoned. High incarceration rates among Black and low-education men have been traced to similar sources. The slim economic opportunities and turbulent living conditions of young disadvantaged and Black men may lead them to crime.<sup>38</sup> In "Poverty, Violence, and Black Incarceration," Jeremy Travis and Bruce Western observes that mass incarceration now lies at the intersection of violence and poverty in contemporary African-American life. The historic expansion of state violence with rising prison and jail populations was concentrated almost entirely among the economically disadvantaged.<sup>39</sup> The findings in a study conducted by Becky Pettit on the intersection of race and class inequality in the US incarceration suggest that there is penal inequality in the growth in the US prison population—over the past 25 years by estimating lifetime risks of imprisonment for Blacks and white men at different levels of education. Among Black men born during this period, 30 percent of those without college education and nearly 60 percent of high school dropouts went to prison by 1999.<sup>40</sup> It is important to note here that the building of the hyperactive and hypertrophic penal state that has made the United States world champion in incarceration is at once a delayed reaction to the civil rights movement and the ghetto riots of the mid-1960s.<sup>41</sup> Michelle Alexander also expresses a similar sentiment in *The New Jim Crow*,<sup>42</sup> where she describes mass incarceration as the most damaging manifestation of the backlash against the civil rights movement.

King's death, which was a consequence of his assertion of Black manhood, also underscores the fact that the *disposability thesis* in contemporary discourse about Black male death and decimation, centers on manhood rights and the preservation of white male racial hierarchy.

This explains why, between the early nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, white terrorism in the forms of lynchings and castration was used by white males to demonstrate white male power, and the preservation of white male supremacy—the racial hierarchy within the American patriarchal empire. During this period, thousands of African Americans were lynched in the United States. Lynchings were violent, public acts of torture that traumatized Black people throughout the country and were largely tolerated by state and federal officials. It is crucial to note that lynchings were also a form of phallicist violence sanctioned by the state; although the white male perpetrators of such inhumane crimes and terrorism no longer hide under hooded masks, they are now cloaked under state-designed apparels under the guise of preserving “law and order”—a code word used to mask racist utilization of state power to target Black people, especially Black males who are deemed “dangerous criminals” that deserve to be killed or tamed to ensure a “safe” society. Since phallicist violence is ever present in the American society, Black male existence will always be engulfed in tragedy—the tragedy of death, especially death as a result of being unable to mask their manhood in the presence of powerful white males who control and manipulate the racial rules that govern the American state.

### PHALLICIST VIOLENCE AND BLACK MALE DEATH: THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Phallicist violence, as I have described in this essay, is the mechanism by which America robs Black males of human decency, dignity, and the “gift” of life. Its philosophical significance rests on the fact that it provides an existential lens for viewing the impact or “racial cost” of white institutional violence on the lived experience of Black males, especially those who dare to speak against the evils of racism, and the attendant socio-economic inequalities engendered by exploitative racial capitalist patriarchy. Now, fifty years after King’s death, phallicist violence continues to overdetermine the existence of Black males in various ways. Black males are racially profiled as “criminals” when they walk into stores to buy basic food items. Black boys are shot and killed for merely acting as “boys” and playing with toys as other boys. But the difference is that they are not allowed to be boys in a society that perceives Black boys and men as underserving of existence. They are viewed through a pathological lens as social deviants who are dangerous to social well-being and deserve to be put down or perpetually silenced. They are destroyed and killed with extraordinary state-sanctioned violence, apparently signified by the United States police force. While more whites are killed by law enforcement than people of color, African Americans are killed at a disproportionate rate. In fact, Black men are 21 times more likely to be killed by police than white men. Between 2010 and 2012, Black boys ages fifteen through nineteen were killed at a rate of 31.17 per million compared to 1.47 per million for white boys of the same age group. In addition, a significant number of Black men killed by the police were unarmed.<sup>43</sup> In *Chokehold: Policing Black Men*, Paul Butler used the term “Chokehold” to describe how phallicist violence is employed to destroy and decimate Black males. In this regard, he opines that for many cops, politicians, and ordinary people—who see

African American men as a threat—the Chokehold is the legal and social response. It contains a constellation of tools that are used to keep them down—including a range of social practices, laws, punishments, and technologies that mark every Black man as a thug or potential thug. The state (especially the police) is authorized to control them by any means necessary.<sup>44</sup> The Chokehold is a way of understanding how American inequality is imposed. It is the process by which Black lives are made vulnerable to death imposed by others.<sup>45</sup>

Butler’s assessment of Black male death echoes King’s statements about this topic in an address delivered at a meeting launching the SCLC Crusade for Citizenship at Miami’s Greater Bethel AME Church, on February 12, 1958. In this address, King goes on to denounce the scourge of Black male death as America’s very own problem. In his words,

Already this struggle has had its sacred martyrs: The Reverend George Washington Lee shot and killed in Mississippi; Mr. and Mrs. Harry Moore, bombed [sic] and murdered here in Florida; Emmett Till, a mere boy, unqualified to vote, but seemingly used as a victim to terrorize Negro citizens and keep them from the poles. While the blame for the grisly mutilation of Till has been placed upon two cruel men, the ultimate responsibility for this and other tragic events must rest with the American people themselves.<sup>46</sup>

Here, we see King literally calling out white Americans who perpetrate such phallicist violence against Black men and boys as terrorists who have blood on their hands, who halt the progress and frustrate the advancement of its people by coercion and violence, and who rob these children of God of human decency.<sup>47</sup> King also underscores the deep roots of America’s hatred for Black males, which leads to the barbaric acts of violence perpetrated by white racist men. This explains why Tommy J. Curry attributes this grim reality and facticity of Black male existence and death to the framework of manhood in America. For Curry, “the milieu from which manhood springs is saturated with racist caricatures that all seem to legitimate the fear Americans have of Black men. The images and perception of Black men as dangerous to society, women, and themselves ultimately create a pattern of thinking that allows the seeming inevitability of death for the young Black male to be justified.”<sup>48</sup>

The truth of the matter is that the crisis of Black men has been made evident in public debate about whether they should be permitted to live. A rash of killings of African-American males at the hands of police officers and citizens claiming to act in defense of their communities has been in the purview of the public for several years.<sup>49</sup> But what is missing from the public conversation on this epidemic is how this becomes the defining feature of Black male existence—dehumanization rather than humanization. When the society restricts the discourse of Black male existence to when they are disposed of by institutional violence, it speaks to the saliency of such dehumanization. In “The Eschatological Dilemma: The Problem of Studying

the Black Male Only as the Deaths That Result from Anti-Black Racism," Tommy Curry decries this type of dehumanization which, he argues, "finds its extremity in making the lives of the oppressed [Black males] inconsequential; it is not being able to think of the Black male beyond their corpse that is the real result of racism's dehumanization. Racism "thingifies" Black life, and the reduction of Black men and boys to the event of their dying leaves the aim of racism, accepting the racially oppressed as not human—nothing—lost unquestioned."<sup>50</sup> It follows from this logic that if Black males are viewed as "nothing" or "non-human," then they ought not to "transgress" the boundaries of racial hierarchy and structural inequalities within America's Jim Crow capitalism and economic repression. Although King was convinced that oppressed people have a moral obligation to resist nonviolently the evil system that dehumanizes them.<sup>51</sup> In this circumstance, to exist while resisting, for Black males, is to come in direct contact with the raw force of phallicist violence, which reminds them about the absence of their humanity—and in extreme cases, robs them of their humanity.

In his recently published book, *Backlash*, a follow-up to his widely read letter, "Dear White America," George Yancy depicts how such phallicist violence targets Black males who dare, just like King, to "speak" or resist in any manner or form against the evils of white supremacy, patriarchy, and structural racism in contemporary America. Yancy originally conceived of his letter as a message of love—a gift for which he asked for love in return, in the same vein as King conceived of loving white people in the face of vitriolic racial hatred. In *The Strength to Love*, King describes such love as that which confronts evil without flinching and overcomes the world even from a rough-hewn cross against the skyline.<sup>52</sup> However, what Yancy got back in return, just like King, is the brazenness of America's virulent hatred for Black men—his existence was reduced to that of a "nigger" and a "subhuman." This then leads Yancy to conclude that "the history of white supremacy in America belies this gesture of black gift-giving, this gesture of non-sentimental love. Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered even as he loved."<sup>53</sup> He goes further to highlight the plight of Black male existence in America when he avows that within the context of the long history of white racist America, Black people generally, and Black males specifically, have been perceived, constructed, and treated in ways that reduce their complex lives to that which white people have imagined them to be. And for so many of them, we [Black males] are just that—niggers<sup>54</sup>—an imagination that carry the horrid messages that deem [Black male] existence "sub-human," and for some, not human at all. And perhaps it is those messages that often trigger a response that can render [Black males] dead.<sup>55</sup> This implies that it does not really matter what coping mechanism or strategy Black males deploy to make racist white people "feel comfortable" in their presence, or what level of educational attainment they have attained, they will always be viewed as a threat that needs to be tamed, silenced, subdued, and killed. This is the reality of Black male existence today. It is a reality that is traumatic, painful, and perplexing.

The philosophical import of the discussion in this section comes to this pivotal question: What does it then mean to think of Black male existence in the context such omnipresent violence? Some social psychologists like Philip D. Johnson have suggested the notion of "somebodiness" in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s political philosophy as a way of grappling with the existential crisis that confronts Black males in America. This notion of "somebodiness" essentially focuses on the psychological functioning of African-American men to enunciate ways of thinking about developing a sense of dignity and self-worth even in the face of socio-political and economic structures that strips away their manhood. While citing the work of Joseph L. White and James H. Cones III—*Black Man Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*,<sup>56</sup> Johnson argues that such term as "somebodiness" that King used to define the psychological meaning of the civil rights movement, can be used to bolster the self-image of Black males, by emphasizing salient characteristics like self-determination, self-definition, self-acceptance, self-love and resilience.<sup>57</sup> The idea is that emphasizing such characteristics as salient can help to combat the negativity surrounding Black male existence within America's capitalist patriarchy. But the problem with this advocacy of resilience by Johnson is that it further complicates Black male existence when looked at from the standpoint of phallicist violence. The mere consideration of Black male existence in terms of "somebodiness," characterized by the psychological functioning of Black males does not discountenance the omnipresent negrophilic power that white males wield over Black male bodies that aims to reduce their existence from "somebodiness" to "nothingness." It is such negrophilic attraction, demonstrated through phallicist violence aimed at destroying Black male bodies, that creates an existential reality for Black males in America, which can be likened to that of Albert Camus's absurd hero who is eternally trapped in a vicious cycle. Thus, psychological dispositions such as Johnson suggested cannot overpower the weight of such anti-Black misandric and racialized violence. Even if Black males consider themselves in terms of "somebodiness," America will always see them as what they are in the white imagination—niggers. As Yancy describes it in a very personal fashion, "the act of repudiation [and resilience for that matter] will not protect me from a white cop's bullets that are capable of penetrating the fragility of my Black body, leaving me dead. I become the victim, the causality of white police violence because he or she 'knows' that I'm a 'criminal,' 'up to no good,' a 'nigger.'"<sup>58</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As King rightly noted in *Where Do We Go From Here*, "the job of arousing manhood within a people that have been taught for so many centuries that they are nobody is not easy."<sup>59</sup> For too long, Black males have been socialized that their survival depends on their ability to mask their manhood, to become invisible in order not to experience the terrorism of state-sanctioned violence against their bodies. The Black male is feared even though he is unarmed because the image of Black manhood in the hegemonic white man's mind is that of a brute that lacks humanity, an animal that deserves to be put to death. In this instance, the state cannot find its agents (white male police officers) guilty of killing unarmed Black men because it sanctions such killings in order to

preserve white male supremacy and dominance within the American empire. King was right to note that espousing the rhetorics of Black manhood in a social context that thrives on anti-Black misogyny is a herculean task because, within America's racial rules, the Black male body has been marked for destruction. This is the tragedy of Black male existence. Black men cannot live authentic lives because the racial rules that govern American society is blinded to Black humanity and disavows Black manhood. Even though King deciphers that affirming Black manhood is not an easy task, he was courageous in the face of great adversity and racial hatred to emphasize the centrality of Black manhood to the civil rights movement. I have argued, in this essay, that this courage that King showed in affirming Black manhood was the racial transgression that ultimately led to his death and that exploring King's death as a consequence of the rhetorics of Black manhood exposes how phallicist violence works to destroy and silence Black males who dare to question the racialized measure of white manhood. It also highlights how this form of gendered violence—phallicist violence—connects to the *disposability thesis* in contemporary discourse on Black male death.

**NOTES**

1. In his final public speech, "I've Been to the Mountaintop" delivered on April 3, 1968, to striking sanitation workers in Memphis, King prophetically speaks of his impending death as a racial sacrifice for achieving civil rights for Black folks in America.
2. Kenneth B. Clark, *King, Malcolm, Baldwin: Three Interviews* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 23.
3. Steve Estes, *I Am A Man: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 139.
4. In a speech titled "A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations," delivered at St. Louis Freedom Rally, April 10, 1957, King highlights how the American exploitative capitalist economy aims to keep the Negro and the Negro family in poverty. He laments that the poverty of the Negro is still appalling, in spite of all our growth. We must face the fact that 43 percent of the Negro families of America still make less than two thousand dollars a year. Compare that with the fact that just 17 percent of the white families make less than two thousand dollars a year. Twenty-one percent of the Negro families still make less than a thousand dollars a year. Compare that with the fact that just 7 percent of the white families make less than a thousand dollars a year. Eighty-eight percent of the Negro families of America make less than five thousand dollars a year. Compare that with the fact that 60 percent of the white families make less than five thousand dollars a year. To put it in another way, just 12 percent of the Negro families of America make five thousand dollars or more a year, while 40 percent of the white families of America make five thousand dollars or more a year. We've come a long, long way, but we have a long, long way to go in economic equality. (See Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.; Vol. IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957–December 1958* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 172.)
5. White women were also involved in the castration of Black males. Louise Newman and Vincent Woodward and Calvin Hernton have all documented how white women also engaged in such violent practice of castrating Black males in their works. See Calvin C. Hernton, *Sex and Racism in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965); Vincent Woodward, *The Delectable Negro: Human Consumption and Homoeroticism within US Slave Culture*, ed. Justin A. Joyce and Dwight A. McBride (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Louise Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
6. Melissa N. Stein, *Measuring Manhood: Race and the Science of Masculinity, 1830–1934*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 25.
7. Shatema Threadcraft and Brandon M. Terry, "Gender Trouble: Manhood, Inclusion and Justice," in *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 212.
8. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 16–17.
9. Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith, eds., *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 111.
10. Estes, *I Am A Man*, 4.
11. King, *Where Do We Go From Here*, 44.
12. Threadcraft and Terry, "Gender Trouble: Manhood, Inclusion and Justice," 228.
13. *Ibid.*, 74.
14. *Ibid.*, 44.
15. King, *Where Do We Go From Here*, 124.
16. *Ibid.*, 138.
17. Scholars of Black male studies have articulated Black male life as disposable from the point of view of policing, sentencing, economic policy, and countless terrifying form of disregard. See, for instance, Melvin L. Rogers, "Disposable Lives," *Theory & Event* 17, no. 3 (2014): 1–6; Tommy J. Curry, *The Man-Not: Rae, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017), 1; and Derrick R. Broom and Armon R. Perry, "It's Simply because We Are Black Men: Black Men's Experiences and Responses to the Killing of Black Men," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 24, no. 2 (2016), 166–84.
18. Jules Archer, *They Had a Dream: The Civil Rights Struggle from Fredrick Douglass to Marcus Garvey to Martin Luther King and Malcom X* (New York: Puffin Books, 1993), 137.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Report of the Department of Justice Task Force to Review the FBI Martin Luther King, Jr., Security and Assassination Investigations. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts: The Martin Luther King, Jr. File: 100-106670, Section 103. January 11, 1977. The content of this file also shows that the FBI undertook a systematic program of harassment of Martin Luther King, by means both legal and illegal, in order to discredit him and harm both him and the movement he led.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Cornel West, ed. *The Radical King* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 11.
23. *Ibid.*, 10.
24. Kenneth B. Clark, *King, Malcolm, Baldwin*, 3.
25. Coretta Scott King, *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: New Market Press, 1983), 13.
26. Lerone Bennett, Jr., *What Manner of Man: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing, 1968), 235–36.
27. Stephen C. Ferguson II, 103.
28. Louis E. Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man* (Los Angeles: Holloway House, 1968), 87.
29. Angela J. Davis, "Introduction," in *Policing the Black Man: Arrest, Prosecution and Imprisonment*, ed. Angela J. Davis (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017), xi.
30. *Ibid.*, xiii.
31. US Department of Justice Statistics, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Prisoners in 2015*, by E. Ann Carson and Elizabeth Anderson. NCJ 197976 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2016), 1.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. US Department of Justice Statistics, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Prevalent of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974–2001*, by Thomas Bonczar. NCJ 197976 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2003), 1.

35. Joe Palazzolo, "Racial Gap in Men's Sentencing," *Wall Street Journal*, February 14, 2013.
36. Deborah Fins, *Death Row U.S.A.* (Criminal Justice Project of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2016), 1.
37. James B. Stewart and Joseph W. Scott, "The Institutional Decimation of Black American Males," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 2 (1978): 481.
38. Becky Pettit, "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in the US Incarceration," *American Sociological Review* 69, no. 2 (2004): 152.
39. Jeremy Travis and Bruce Western, "Poverty, Violence, and Black Incarceration," in *Policing the Black Man: Arrest, Prosecution, and Imprisonment*, ed. Angela J. Davis (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017), 295.
40. Pettit, "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course," 151.
41. Loïc Wacquant, "Class, Race & Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America," *Daedalus* 139, no. 3 (2010): 74.
42. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness*, (New York: New Press, 2010), 11.
43. Angela J. Davis, "Introduction" in Angela J. Davis, Ed., *Policing the Black Man: Arrest, Prosecution, and Imprisonment* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017), xv-xvi.
44. Paul Butler, *Chokehold: Policing Black Men* (New York: The New Press, 2017), 9.
45. *Ibid.*, 5.
46. Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.; Vol. IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957–December 1958* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 369.
47. *Ibid.*, 370.
48. Tommy J. Curry, "The Eschatological Dilemma: The Problem of Studying the Black Male Only as the Deaths That Result from Anti-Black Racism," in *I Am Because We Are: Readings in African Philosophy*, ed. Fred L. Hord and Jonathan S. Lee (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 483.
49. Alford A. Young, Jr., *Are Black Men Doomed?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 22.
50. Curry, "The Eschatological Dilemma," 485.
51. John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (New York: Orbis Books, 1982), xiv.
52. This quotation from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *The Strength to Love* is excerpted from James Melvin Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986), 513.
53. George Yancy, "Dear White America," *The New York Times*, December 24, 2015, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/24/dear-white-america/#more-158804>. Retrieved May 9, 2018.
54. George Yancy, *Backlash: What Happens When We Talk Honestly about Racism in America*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 2.
55. *Ibid.*, 3.
56. Joseph L. White and James H. Cones III, *Black Man Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*, (New York: Routledge, 1999).
57. Philip D. Johnson, "Somebodiness and Its Meaning to African American Men," *Journal of Counselling & Development* 94, no. 3 (2016): 333.
58. Yancy, *Backlash*, 3.
59. King, *Where Do We Go From Here*, 42.

## *Between Africa and America: Alexander Crummell's Moral and Political Philosophy*

Dalitso Ruwe

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

"May it inspire in all the children of the Black race around this big world the love of progress, justice, and liberty. . . . I bear them all in mind, both the downtrodden of today and the giants of tomorrow."

– Anténor Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*

Kwame Appiah's *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* precipitated current debates concerning the concept of race in the political philosophies of nineteenth-century Black philosophers.<sup>1</sup> Appiah's polemic began by arguing that Alexander Crummell's Pan-Africanist views, which heralded him as one of the fathers of African nationalism, ironically retained racist views of Africans similar to the views held by European colonialists.<sup>2</sup> Using Crummell's 1860 speech titled "The English Language in Liberia: The Annual Address Before the Citizens of Maryland County, Cape Palmas, Liberia," Appiah argued Crummell's championing of English language as the medium of civilizing Africa devalued African languages.<sup>3</sup> Appiah argues that Crummell's lionization of English in Liberia makes Crummell a racist who parroted Western anthropological views of African inferiority.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Crummell's privileging of colonial languages seems to be problematic for twenty-first-century post-colonial African intellectuals who seek to repudiate colonialism and neocolonialism by building twenty-first-century African nationalism using African languages.<sup>5</sup>

While most of the scholarly responses to Appiah thus far have focused on correcting his misreading of the concept of race in W. E. B. Du Bois's work, little effort has been given to correcting Appiah's reading of Crummell and the subsequent impact Crummell's ideas on race had on Du Bois.<sup>6</sup> In this essay, I argue that by understanding how Crummell applied the moral and political sciences of his day to develop a Pan-African concept of race and African commerce, we can better comprehend Crummell's political philosophy as grounded in the empirical study of African peoples and in demonstrating Black racial development.

### **TWO ISSUES WITH APPIAH'S METHODOLOGY IN READING CRUMMELL**

Methodologically, Appiah's critique of Crummell is rooted in an anachronistic understanding of the role of language and the concept of race in Crummell's intellectual thought. First, Appiah wrongly reads the debates between post-colonial African intellectuals about decolonizing colonial languages and the development of African literature as the same challenge eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black intellectuals had showing that, despite being enslaved, Africans in the New World were capable of racial progress



as seen through the development of Black literature and Black nation-states. For Appiah, the post-colonial debates between Anglophone and Francophone African intellectuals about decolonizing colonial languages and the development of African literature is rooted in their training in Western philosophical traditions that privilege Western knowledge as the standard of civilization.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Appiah postulates that the development of African literature and African nationalism in the nineteenth century is a result of African intellectuals adopting colonial languages and European ideals of literature and nationalism as makers of civilization.<sup>8</sup>

This tradition for Appiah has roots in early Black intellectuals like Crummell who retained Victorian ideals of African civilization being inferior to English civilization. As Appiah states,

For Crummell, as “The English Language in Liberia” makes clear, it is not English as the *Sprachgeist* of the Anglo-Saxon that matters; it is English as the vehicle of Christianity and—what he would have seen as the same thing—civilization and progress.

For Crummell inherited not only the received European conception of race, but as I have said, the received understanding both of the nature of civilization and of the African’s lack of it. Crummell’s use of the term *civilization* is characteristic of educated Victorian Englishmen or Americans. Sometimes he seems to have in mind only what anthropologists would now call “culture”: the body of moral, religious, political and scientific theory and the customary practices of a society.<sup>9</sup>

Appiah offers no explanation why Christianity, progress, and civilization are ideas Crummell engaged with. Rather, he postulates Crummell blindly endorses African inferiority through the use of English to Christianize and hence civilize Africans. This is misleading given the historical context of what Christianity, progress, and civilization meant in terms of understanding racial progress in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Christianity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served as the universal history of the origins of the races. Debates around the racial origins of Black people occurred between monogenists who argued Black people were part of the human race and polygenists who ruminated that Black people were descendent from either the curse of Ham or sexual liaisons between beasts.<sup>10</sup> Christianity also raised questions about racial progress from biblical times to modernity. Andrew Curran, in *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment*, argues biblical debates about the origin of Black people inaugurated Victorian scientific studies that sought to show that, unlike other races, Black people showed no signs of racial progress or civilization since their ancestors were cursed by Noah.<sup>11</sup> To confirm these beliefs, the scientific experiments conducted on Africans by scientists influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment not only focused on anatomical studies to prove racial difference between Africans and white Europeans, but also studied Africa as

a place to test scientific theories of racial degeneration since the continent had no civilization given the purported underdevelopment of literature, arts, government, and commerce.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black intellectuals, their task was to show that Africans in the past were capable of producing civilization and could do so in the modern world. Consequently, the use of European languages did not serve as a sign of coloniality. On the contrary, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black intellectuals argued that the ability for enslaved Africans in the New World to produce literature in Latin, French, and English showed that even enslaved Africans were capable of racial progress and civilization, as seen through their creation of literature, arts, and nation-states like Haiti. Works such as William H. Ferris’s *The African Abroad*, William Wells Brown’s *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius and His Achievements*, Antenor Firmin’s *The Equality of the Human Races*, and William Sanders Scarborough’s *First Lessons in Greek and Questions on Latin Grammar* showed that the use of European language did not mean that Africans or their languages were inferior to Europeans or European languages. Rather, they showed that Africans in the New World had the moral and intellectual capability to produce arts and civilization. It is from this vantage point that Pan-Africanism developed as a political philosophy of Black self-governance, as well as moral and intellectual development.

P. J. Staudenraus, in *The African Colonization Movement 1816–1865*, argues that nineteenth-century Pan-Africanism grew as a response to American colonization schemes that sought to undermine the efforts of freedmen to end slavery. Staudenraus contends that American policy makers from 1816 to 1865 created policies, theories, and societies that argued free Africans were a degenerate race who, if left to intermix with whites, would create social and economic inequality in the US.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, free Blacks presented a problem to white slave owners because they feared that free Blacks would foment slave revolts and engage in political agitation. To abate Southerners’ fear of the economic instability of freeing slaves, proponents of African colonization argued that the best way to ease this fear was to send free Africans back to Africa by establishing Liberia as a colony for them.<sup>14</sup> Under the guise of philanthropy and benevolent manumission, colonization of Africa emerged as a solution to the problem of free Africans living in a country that still permitted the enslavement of their kin and people who looked like them.

Appiah’s reading of Crummell’s Pan-Africanism distorts Crummell’s work precisely because he neglects to situate Crummell’s understanding of Christianity and his engagement with the ethnography of his day. Appiah’s reading of Crummell’s Pan-Africanism ignores how Crummell’s Pan-Africanism was formed at a time when nineteenth-century Black thinkers were wrestling with slavery, colonization, and the emergence of new Black nations. This is evident in Crummell’s first publication, *The Future of Africa: Being Addresses, Sermons, Etc., Etc., Delivered in the Republic of Liberia*,<sup>15</sup> where he reflects on his twenty-year stay in Liberia and the challenges of building a modern Black nation. In this work and elsewhere,

Crummell sought to show that Africans were capable of racial development and adding to modern civilization. Secondly, Appiah's criticism of Crummell's Pan-Africanism (that is, it is rooted in Western scientific notions of African inferiority) raises questions about how best to understand Black intellectual engagement with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sciences. As Britt Rusert has argued in *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture*, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black intellectuals countered the natural science, natural history, and physical sciences' scientific discourses that argued Africans were inferior by coming up with their own scientific methods to study Black racial development.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Stephen Hall, in *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*, argues nineteenth-century Black thinkers used the Bible to develop providential arguments showing that God did not exclude Africans from adding to ancient civilizations nor did God exclude them from adding to the modern civilizations.<sup>17</sup> Crummell was groomed in an intellectual milieu of Black providential thinkers who saw God playing a role in regenerating Africa.

Wilson Jeremiah Moses, in *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent*, explains how Crummell was trained in the moral and political sciences of his day and how he was influenced by the works of William Whemell's *History of the Inductive Sciences* and William Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* while studying theology at Queens College in Cambridge.<sup>18</sup> Crummell used his training in moral and political sciences to engage in the debates of Black racial origins, Black racial progress, and civilization. Crummell argued that Africans in Liberia and the New World were capable of moral, intellectual, and political development without the paternalism of whites. These themes dominated the speeches, addresses, and sermons that Crummell compiled in *The Future of Africa*.

### **SOME IMPLICATIONS OF READING CRUMMELL THROUGH THE MORAL SCIENCES OF HIS DAY**

Because most contemporary philosophers of race consider the claims that humans are biologically similar and that genome studies into racial differences have no biological justification to be axiomatic ones, they deem arguments over racial difference to be morally repugnant and unscientific.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, contemporary philosophers of race have approached eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sciences that showed the existence of biological differences between races to be pseudosciences since they do not comport with our contemporary moral sentiments of human similarity or the results of contemporary genome studies.

Appiah's work has aided in this reading of racial difference as morally repugnant and based in pseudoscience by claiming that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers, be they white or Black, who extolled racial difference are racist.<sup>20</sup> By restricting our understanding of racial difference to biology, contemporary philosophers of race have failed to account for the intellectual development of racial theory from the Bible, natural history, zoology, moral sciences, phrenology, biology, and ethnology. In

other words, biology is only one science that developed during the enlightenment period to figure out racial origins and racial differences between peoples.

Ironically, contemporary philosophers of race's belief in human similarity through genome studies and our kneejerk rejection of arguments for racial differences between peoples offers us a contemporary reiteration of the debates about racial differences and origins that began with the Bible. They are likely the ones who are the monogenists, and proponents of racial difference are the polygenists. Like the preceding debates rooted in the modern sciences, this belief of biological similarity has political ramification in terms of how we think about organizing societies under concepts of racial equity and equality and the responsibility the state and government have to different racial groups in society.<sup>21</sup> Ours is an age where most people believe racial equality ought to be a governing principle of society, as we have overcome racial difference and the effects of segregation on Black people. Subsequently, we read our apparent consensus about racial equality and deem all preceding philosophies of racial difference as repugnant and unscientific.

Unlike our current milieu, in Crummell's milieu the moral sciences and phrenology were the most prevalent scientific theories used to prove racial differences that Crummell engaged in to counter the racist claims of the inferiority of Africans.<sup>22</sup> The moral sciences highlighted racial difference as a way to show the different moral capacities and virtues each race had to offer to the civilization process.<sup>23</sup> The moral sciences as developed in the Scottish Enlightenment relied on a great Chain of Being showing a hierarchy of racial difference and the moral capacity of each racial group.

The encounter with Africans during the Enlightenment Age brought about questions of the origins of Black people, Blackness, and racial degradation.<sup>24</sup> In essence, Africans studied under the moral sciences of the Enlightenment deemed Africans to be a race with no moral capacity to engender human sentiments. What troubled Black thinkers like Crummell was that racial differences were studied from a Eurocentric view that credited whites as the only race whose moral virtues and civilization should be emulated by other races. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black thinkers like Crummell rejected this claim and proposed a new way to study racial difference and the unique contributions each race had to offer the world.<sup>25</sup>

By reading racial difference through the moral sciences, and not biology as Appiah would have us do, we can better understand Crummell's philosophy of racial difference as rooted in studying the material conditions that showed Africans across the diaspora were capable of adding to the world civilization on their own terms and not as a subordinate race under white imperial interests. Crummell created a counter discourse that argued the supposed racial superiority of whites, particularly the Anglo-Saxon race, and the supposed inferiority of Africans was rooted in imperialism and conquest. Crummell's philosophy of race showed that Africans and their civilization could civilize the Anglo-Saxon race by challenging the imperial logic of enslaving Africans as laborers for white civilization.

## THE FUTURE OF AFRICA: ALEXANDER CRUMMELL'S CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY

Robert July, in *The Origins of Modern African Thought; Its Development in West Africa During the Nineteen and Twentieth Century*, contends that Alexander Crummell was part of a body of African intellectuals educated in England who thought "Christian humanitarianism was to join hands with sound practical methods and western scientific agriculture to regenerate Africa."<sup>26</sup> July's insight into the general sentiments of African intellectuals educated under the spirit of Christian humanitarianism is insightful on account of the shifting scientific attitudes to Africa the English were developing during the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> However, July's contention is limited in that it does not fully articulate the origins of Christian humanitarianism as a new imperial economic policy that emerged during the Scottish Enlightenment.

Silvia Sebastiani, in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, argues that, in relation to race, the Scottish Enlightenment sought to find the sources of human difference through moral and economic causes.<sup>28</sup> Scottish thinkers argued that racial and moral differences could be seen in the four-stage theory of civilization: hunter gathers, pastoral, agriculture, and commerce. Moreover, Scottish thinkers argued that a society based on commerce was the most evolved society given the division of labor, acquisition to property, and international trade that commerce allowed for.<sup>29</sup> They even built moral and economic philosophies based on that view of society.

Commerce for Enlightenment thinkers not only meant producing goods, but also the idea of exchange of virtues and vices that structured race, gender, and class relations.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, with the development of colonies and the enslavement of Africans, debates among thinkers within the Scottish Enlightenment centered on how to understand the moral worth of Africans while using them as a labor source for commerce. Abolitionists in England, however, required merchants to develop a new philosophy of commerce to preserve their interest in Africa.

Responding to the Abolitionists' attacks on the slave trade in Britain, British merchants developed Christian humanitarianism as a "legitimate policy of commerce" to atone for slavery by opting to trade with African nations and territories through agriculture. Christian humanitarianism through agricultural commerce with indigenous groups in Africa emerged as a new imperial strategy by Britain to revamp its image on the world stage after the revolutionary war.<sup>31</sup>

It is against this backdrop that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black thinkers educated in England used moral philosophy and political economy to show that Africans did not need a new paternalism in Africa couched in Christian humanitarianism. These thinkers argued African nations were capable of self-governance and could use the civilization principles of Christianity and commerce to champion the regeneration of Africa.<sup>32</sup> Ottobah Cugoano, James Africanus Beale Horton, Hilary Teage, and Alexander Crummell were among the Black intellectuals who wrote

works critical of Christian humanitarianism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Cugoano, a Ghanaian enslaved in Grenada, ended up a Freedman in England and published his 1787 polemic *Thoughts and Sentiments of the Evil of Slavery*. Cugoano's work, generally considered the first anti-slavery treatise against Christian humanitarianism, argued biblical principles were misapplied to justify the capitalist enterprise of slavery, and economic restitution was owed to Africans through repatriation.<sup>33</sup> James Africanus Horton was a Sierra Leonean medical doctor, scientist, and soldier. In *The Political Economy of British West Africa: With the Requirements of Several Colonies and Settlements and West African Countries and People, British and Native: And a Vindication of the African Race*, Horton sought to show that Africans in Sierra Leone and Nigeria were capable of self-governance. Hilary Teage's writings in the *Liberia Herald* also challenged the new British imperial policy of Christian humanitarianism through agriculture as a legitimate form of trade with African nations.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, for Crummell the use of moral philosophy and political sciences in his writing resulted in the creation of moral and political philosophy that sought to affirm that Africans were capable of moral, intellectual, and political development both in Africa and America. Crummell's *The Future of Africa* reflects his belief in the regeneration of Africa through the use of moral and political sciences. In the preface of the book, Crummell states the reason he compiled the sermons and addresses was to

first to show that the children of Africa have been called, in the Divine providence, to meet the demands of civilization, of commerce, and of nationality; and second that they bring at last to grapple with the problems which pertain to responsible manhood, to great work of civilization, to the duties and requirements of national life, and to the solemn responsibility of establishing the Christian faith amid the rude forms of paganism.<sup>35</sup>

Crummell's sermons and addresses relied on providential arguments that saw God playing a role in the demands for Black civilization, commerce, and nationality that was unique to Africans. These three themes—meeting the demands of civilization, commerce, and nationality—were the driving motifs of the addresses and sermons in the book.

In a sermon titled "God and the Nation" delivered in 1854 at Trinity Church in Monrovia, Crummell argued:

A prime consideration here, is the fact that we are members of but a rising race, whose greatness is yet to be achieved—a race which has been spoiled and degraded for centuries, and in consequence of which has been despised. For the name, and fame, and character, and well-being of this race, in every quarter of the globe, let us as we in duty bound, strive, by means of this our nationality, to afford them cheer, by the sight of manhood and of progress here.<sup>36</sup>

For Crummell it was incumbent on Africans in the diaspora and continental Africa to heed the call of divine providence to meet the demands of civilization, commerce, and nationality. Crummell stressed these demands this way: “first the national greatness is always correlative with the ideas of God and religion, second, that the true ideas of God and religion, if maintained in purity by a nation, will make that nation immortal. Moreover, that the greatness and renown generated by these ideas, depend upon the individual character, spirit and enterprise of the people.”<sup>37</sup>

For Crummell, the greatness of a nation is aligned with its belief in a God who plays an active role in human affairs and the governing of a nation. Nations prosper if they are obedient to God’s laws and do not allow moral decay to be law of the land. Thirdly, labor showed the moral character and value of a people, while commerce allowed for the propagation of these values. Crummell went on to state:

But then the question arises, what leads to commerce? to agriculture? to manufactures? to wealth? to art? I am speaking now, understand, not of the mere supply of natural wants, by fitful activity, as in the savage state—I refer to society, if you please in the budding of civilization. What leads, I ask, to these developments of organized society? Why, the enterprise of men. But what is the main spring of human enterprise? Thought. But then, again, what is the generative principle of the mind’s active power and activity? The idea of God.<sup>38</sup>

This is in line with what Jacob Viner argues in *The Role of Providence in The Social Order: An Essay in Intellectual History*, nineteenth-century providential elements in commerce argued “1) providence favors trade between peoples as a means of promoting the universal brotherhood of man; 2) to give economic incentives to peoples to trade with each other providence has given to their respective territories different products.”<sup>39</sup>

Crummell’s allusion to agriculture is important given Viner’s second insight into providential elements in nineteenth-century commerce. Crummell’s 1855 speech, “The Duty of a Rising Christian State: To Contribute to the World’s Well-Being and Civilization, and the Means By Which It May Perform the Same,” which was delivered on Liberia’s independence day, argued cultivating agricultural products for the modern world was unique a task God called on Africans to do. Crummell argued:

We grow here sugar and coffee; the cane has a richness and endurance in this land, as is acknowledged, beyond that of Cuba or Louisiana; and coffee here gives a larger yield to the tree, and for a longer period, than in most other countries. Other articles arrest our attention: Indigo, with small capital, under the French process of preparation, can be made to yield at least \$400 per acre: for Indigo brings, at Liverpool and New York, night three dollars per pound. The Cinnamon will grow here; the experiment of its growth has been proved successful at Cape Coast and we should have larger groves of it.<sup>40</sup>

Crummell believed the development of commerce coming from Africans could challenge both slavery and the new imperial policy of Christian humanitarianism. Philip Gould, in *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Anti-Slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Atlantic World*, argues Black thinkers in the eighteenth century developed economic critiques that “challenged the compatibility of commercial society, slave-trading society, with enlightened civilization.”<sup>41</sup> Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black economic criticisms of slavery raised the question: How could England and the US claim to be civilized nations when their very foundations were based on stealing and trafficking Africans?

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black economic critiques of slavery challenged the foundations of European national identities and commerce based on slavery by arguing that contrary to the belief that European nations and the US were civilized nations, the trafficking and enslavement of Africans revealed that European nations and the US were barbaric nations.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black thinkers developed economic alternatives to commerce that sought to combat the trafficking of Africans globally and the looting of natural resources by emphasizing the importance of African agricultural commerce.<sup>43</sup>

For Crummell this meant that Africans had to realize the worth of the natural resources that Europeans and Anglo-Saxon sought to exploit through the new policy of Christian humanitarianism and agriculture. For example, in his speech “The Duty of a Rising Christian State,” Crummell provided statistics of the value of African resources that were being sold in London in 1857 from Lagos. Using statistics in his address, Crummell sought to disprove the benevolence of the legitimate trade under Christian humanitarianism. If Africa was to regenerate, then understanding the importance of African natural resources to the New World would have to be an imperative task for Africans and African Americans to develop modern African nations. Crummell used statistics showed that palm oil and elephant tusks and cotton were the main exports from Lagos to Britain in 1857.

13,097 casks of Palm Oil	4, 942 tons	£222,390
1,053 Elephant Tusks	24, 118 lbs.	£4,220
868 bales of Cotton	114,848 bs.	£3,400
50,000 native Cotton Cloths		£230,200
		£25,000
Total Value		£255,200

Palm Oil	
Benin River	2,650 tons
Palma region	3,250 tons
Badgary region	1,250 tons
Porto Novo, Appi, Vista	4,500 tons
Whydah	2,500 tons
Ahguay and neighboring ports	2,500 tons
Total	16,650 tons, £732,600
150,000 country cloths of native manufacture from above pots	75,000
Total	£1,062,800

Crummell thought that in extolling Africans in Liberia to engage in commerce by dictating the terms of the value of their produce, Africans and Americo-Liberians would become a blessing “to our race and to the world, by the ‘disturbing element’ of thousands of bales of cotton, competing with the oppressors of our race in the ports of Liverpool and Glasgow, and beating down their ill-gotten gains.”<sup>44</sup> Learning to cultivate African natural resources and setting their value on the marketplace would allow African nations to shape their economic fortune and control African produce. Thus, for Crummell it was important to educate both diasporic and continental Africans in the mercantile fields of their day.

It is precisely in this context that Crummell argued for the use of English in Liberia in his 1860 speech “The English Language in Liberia.” For Crummell, English not only brought Black migrants, white Americans, European merchants, and Americo-Liberians together, but it was becoming the language of commercial trade and exchange of civilization ideals.<sup>45</sup> By championing the education of African school children into the mercantile fields and English, Crummell was challenging the British apprenticeship system that was used to exploit Black child labor in slavery. The exploitative use of child labor in slavery was couched under the apprenticeship law in British common law. In England, under common law, poor parents offered their child to a wealthy family to work as an apprentice in exchange for the poor families’ debts to be wiped off. Slavery, however, meant Africans were barred from this method of paying off their families’ debts. Servants and apprentices to a white nuclear family exploited the fact that African families could not offer their children to a wealthy family to work as an apprentice in exchange for them wiping out their debts, making the entire enslaved African family a permanent labor source.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the English apprenticeship system used in slavery, Crummell was advocating for an industrial education for young Africans in which their labor was linked to the moral, intellectual, and political development of the race and the nation. For Crummell, if Africa was to

regenerate, it was imperative that that task be taken up solely by Africans in the diaspora and the continent.

Crummell, in the address “The Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men in America to Africa,” noted the growing debates among Black intellectuals on the question of whether emigration to Liberia or a different country in the Western hemisphere was feasible argued:

When the colored men question the duty of interest in Africa, because they are not Africans, I beg to remind them of the kindred duty of self-respect. And my reply to such queries I have mentioned above is this: 1) That there is no need of asking the interest of Englishmen, Germans, Dutchmen and others in the land of their fathers, because they have this interest, and are always proud to cherish it. 2) I remark that the abject State of Africa is a most real and touching appeal, however for sympathy and aid. It is an appeal, however, which comes with a double force to every civilized man who has negro blood flowing in his veins. Africa lies low and is wretched . . . her condition in every point calls for succor—moral, social, domestic, political, commercial and intellectual.<sup>47</sup>

Since Africa was the fatherland for Africans across the diaspora, diasporic Africans had an obligation to help regenerate Africa in the modern world. If European nations developed out of religious and political factions, African nations were to develop through the work of diasporic and continental Africans fighting the pillaging of Africa by Europeans. Africa offered the opportunity for regeneration through the “social, domestic, political, commercial and intellectual” development of Africa. One way of intersecting these developmental needs, Crummell argued, was through commerce.

Crummell went on to argue in this address: “the chief item of commerce in this continent has been the ‘slave trade’ . . . this trade is now almost universally regarded as criminal; but in the light of commercial prudence and pecuniary advantage the slave-trade was a great piece of folly as it was a crime; for beneath their eyes, yea, doubtless, often immediately in their sight, were lying treasures, rivalling far the market value of the flesh and blood they had been so eager to crowd beneath their hatches.”<sup>48</sup> The opportunity to cultivate products like palm oil, sugarcane, cotton, and maize offered the ability to stop the exploitation of African resources under the trading policy of Christian humanitarianism. As Crummell stated:

If ever the epoch of negro civilization is brought about in Africa, whatever external influences may be brought to bear upon this end, whatever foreign agencies and aids, black men themselves are without doubt to be the chief instruments. But they are to be men of force and energy; men who will not suffer themselves to be outrivalled in enterprise and vigor; men who are prepared for pains, and want, and suffering . . . men who can exaggerate the feeblest resources into potent agencies and fruitful capital.<sup>49</sup>

Crummell implored freedmen to take seriously the regeneration of Africa through agricultural commerce, stating, "if first, then, I remark that if individuals are unable to enter upon a trading system, they can form associations. If one has not sufficient capital, four or six united can make a good beginning. If a few persons cannot make the venture, then a company can be formed."<sup>50</sup> Crummell was advocating for the development of a different political economy than the economy based on slavery and Christian humanitarianism that sustained European nations and the US. Crummell thought the development of economic cooperatives that developed in the US through benevolent societies, such as Black churches that raised funds to manumit enslaved Africans, could be used to develop companies to help spur agricultural trade in Africa. For Crummell, the funds raised from those economic cooperatives had to develop beyond manumission and towards the development of African economies and nations.<sup>51</sup> By doing this, Africans in the diaspora and continental Africans would show that they were capable of self-governance, moral development, and intellectual development. They would show that Africans can meet the modern demands of civilization through commerce and nationhood.

## CONCLUSION

Crummell was part of a cadre of Black intellectuals who engaged with the racial discourse of their times by showing how the moral sciences from a Black perspective could be used to study Black racial development and the moral and intellectual virtues Africans had to offer the modern world. Reading Crummell's *The Future of Africa* requires we expand our scope of study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black intellectual life beyond viewing Blacks as victims of scientific racism and acknowledge them as proponents of scientific studies of race.

The legacy of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Pan-Africanism requires us to think through the different strategies developed to eradicate slavery, build modern Black nations, the problem of education, labor, health, and commerce that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black thinkers proffered. By doing that, we are better able to expand our understanding of how slave narratives, Black periodicals, newspapers, poems, literary societies, mutual aid societies, and scientific societies reflect the intellectual outlook that nineteenth-century Black thinkers presented in their political philosophies.<sup>52</sup>

## NOTES

1. Tommy J. Curry, "On Africana Philosophy: Key Themes and Sources in the Development of the Discipline in the United States," *Choice Magazine* 54, iss. 9 (May 2017): 1275–80, 1282–83.
2. As Appiah states, "His title was 'The English Language in Liberia' and his theme that the Africans 'exiled' in slavery to the new world had been given by divine providence 'at least this one item of compensation, namely, the possession of the Anglo-Saxon tongue'. Crummell who is widely regarded as one of the fathers of African nationalism, had not the slightest doubt that English was a language superior to the 'various tongues and dialectics' of the indigenous African populations; superior in its euphony, its conceptual resources, and its capacity to express the 'supernatural truths' of Christianity. Now, over a century later, more than half of the population of black Africa lives in countries where English is an official language, and the same providence has decreed that almost all the rest of Africa should be governed in French or Arabic or Portuguese." Kwame Appiah,

*In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

3. *Ibid.*, 9.
4. Using Appiah's definition of racist and racist states, Crummell was certainly a racist because he believed "that there are heritable characteristics, possessed by member of our species, which allows us to divide them into a small set of races, in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race" (*ibid.*, 13). Crummell would also fit Appiah's definition of a racist. Yet Appiah had reservations about whether Crummell was an extrinsic racist or an intrinsic racist: "But it was not always clear whether his racism was extrinsic [that is "extrinsic racists make moral distinctions between members of different race because they believe that the racial essence entails certain morally relevant qualities" (*ibid.*)] or intrinsic [that is, the form of racism in which "people who differentiate morally between members of different races, because they believe that each race has a different moral status, quite independent of the moral characteristics entailed by its racial essence" (*ibid.*, 14)]. Despite the fact that he had such low opinions and such high hopes of the Negro, however, we may suspect that the racism that underlay his Pan-Africanism would, if articulated, have had been fundamentally intrinsic, and would therefore have survived the discovery that what he believed about the connection between race and moral capacity was false" (*ibid.*, 15).
5. *Ibid.*, 4.
6. See Lucius Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996). For a reading of Appiah's latest work, see Tommy Curry's essay "Empirical or Imperial? Issues in the Manipulation of DuBois's Intellectual Historiography in Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Lines of Descent*" *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 35, nos. 1–2 (2014): 391–419.
7. Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 3.
8. *Ibid.*, 3.
9. *Ibid.*, 22.
10. Charles Caroll, *The Tempter of Eve: or, The Criminality of Man's Social, Political, and Religious Equality with the Negro, and the Amalgamation to Which These Crimes Inevitably Lead. Discussed in the Light of the Scriptures, the Sciences, Profane History, Tradition, and the Testimony of the Monuments* (Adamic, 1902).
11. Andrew Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 74.
12. *Ibid.*, 29.
13. P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement 1816–1865* (Columbia University Press, 1961), 1–12.
14. *Ibid.*, 12.
15. Alexander Crummell, *The Future of Africa: Being Address, Sermons, Etc., Etc., Delivered in the Republic of Liberia* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1862).
16. Britt Rusert, *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture* (NYU Press, 2017), 5.
17. Stephen Hall, *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
18. William Jeremiah Moses, *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 71–75.
19. Naomi Zack, *Philosophy of Science and Race* (Routledge, 2002).
20. Kwame Appiah, "The Uncomplete Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 21–37.
21. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (Routledge, 2014).
22. Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 71.
23. David Hume, "Of National Character," in *The Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (Liberty Fund, 1985); and Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and*

*Other Writings*, ed. Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

24. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness*, 3–7.
25. *The American Negro Academy Occasional Papers*, 1–22 (Arno Press, 1969); and Anténor Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races: Positivist Anthropology*, trans. Asselin Charles (University of Illinois, 2002).
26. Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 105.
27. Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender and the Limits of Progress* (Palgrave MacMillian, 2013), 15–19.
28. *Ibid.*, 7.
29. Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013).
30. Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 140.
31. Christopher Lesile Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
32. See July, *Origins of Modern African Thought*.
33. Paget Henry, "Between Hume and Cugoano: Race, Ethnicity and Philosophical Entrapment," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2004): 129–48.
34. Carl Patrick Burrowes, *Black Christian Republicanism: The Writings of Hilary Teage 1805-1853, Founder of Liberia* (Know Yourself Press, 2016).
35. Crummell, *Future of Africa*, 4.
36. *Ibid.*, 167.
37. *Ibid.*, 153.
38. *Ibid.*, 155.
39. Jacob Viner, *The Role of Providence in The Social Order: An Essay in Intellectual History* (American Philosophical Society, 1972), 32.
40. Crummell, *Future of Africa*, 84.
41. Philip Gloud, *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Anti-Slavery in 18th Century Atlantic World* (Harvard Press, 2001), 4. See Chapter 4 "Liberty, Slavery, and Black Atlantic Autobiography."
42. See, for example, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments of Evil of Slavery* (Penguin Classics, 1999); and David Walker, *Appeal to Coloured Citizens of the World* (Penn State University Press, 2000).
43. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta University Pres, 1907).
44. Crummell, *Future of Africa*, 85.
45. *Ibid.*, 33.
46. Robert Steinfield, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870* (University of Carolina Press, 2002).
47. Crummell, *Future of Africa*, 210.
48. *Ibid.*, 223.
49. *Ibid.*, 234.
50. *Ibid.*, 233.
51. As Crummell writes, "Let me refer to the means and facilities colored men have for an entrance upon African commerce. And 1st, I would point out the large amount of capital which is lying in their hands, dead and unproductive. There is, as you are doubtless aware, no small amount of wealth possessed by the free colored population of the United States, both North and South. Notwithstanding the multitudinous difficulties which beset them in the way of improvement, our brethren have shown capacity, perseverance, oftentimes thrift and acquisitiveness. As a consequence, they are, all over the Union, owners of houses, farms, homesteads, and drivers' other kinds of property; and, stored away safe quarters, they have large amounts of gold and silver deep down in large stockings, in the corners of old chests, in dark and undiscoverable nooks and crannies, besides large

sums invested in banks, and locked up in the safes of city saving banks" (237–38).

52. Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Duke University Press, 2002).

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## Contributors

**William R. Jones (1933–2012)** received his undergraduate degree in philosophy at Howard University. He earned his Master of Divinity at Harvard University in 1958, and was ordained and fellowshiped as a Unitarian Universalist minister in that year. Jones went on to do doctoral work at Brown University, receiving his PhD in 1969. After receiving his PhD, Jones was an assistant professor at Yale Divinity School from 1969 to 1977 in addition to serving as coordinator of African American Studies. After leaving Yale in 1977, Jones became professor of religion and the director of Afro-American Studies program in the College of Social Sciences at Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee. He was a regular participant in the Philosophy Born of Struggle conferences, and received the Philosophy Born of Struggle Award in 2011. During the course of his long academic career, Jones held visiting professorships at Princeton Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary, and Iliff School of Theology. Jones received an honorary doctorate from Meadville/Lombard Theological School in 1990. Upon his retirement in 1999, Jones was honored by FSU with the title Professor Emeritus. Dr. Jones's magnum opus *Is God a White Racist?* (1973) and his "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations" are foundational contributions to Black Liberation Theology and African American philosophy, respectively. He died on July 13, 2012, at the age of 78.

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