

# APA Newsletters

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## NEWSLETTER ON PHILOSOPHY AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

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# Philosophy and the Black Experience

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John McClendon & George Yancy, Co-Editors

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## FROM THE EDITORS

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As co-editors, it is with a deep sense of sadness and yet with abiding honor that we dedicate this issue of the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* (spring issue, 2013) to the memory and legacy of the late Dr. William R. Jones. It was actually our intention to devote a special issue to Dr. Jones over two years ago; however, he was intent on revising and reformulating his ideas and the project never came to fruition. In the next issue of the newsletter, we intend to continue our efforts to acknowledge the philosophical heritage that Jones has provided.

Our contributors in this issue span the generational spectrum of African American philosophers and students of philosophy and we greatly appreciate their insightful contributions toward honoring the memory and thought of Dr. Jones. In “The Honor Was All Mine: A Conversation with William R. Jones,” Dr. George Yancy briefly reflects on his richly textured 1996 conversation with William R. Jones, which is followed by the interview that has never before been published. Dr. Lewis R. Gordon, in his “Remembering William R. Jones (1933–2012): Philosopher and Freedom Fighter,” provides a personal and moving remembrance of Bill Jones. Gordon’s reflective piece beautifully captures the spirit of love and freedom that Jones embodied and provides a context for understanding the philosophical, humanist, and theological magnitude of Jones’s thought. Dr. Stephen C. Ferguson II, in his essay “On the Occasion of William R. Jones’s Death: Remembering the Feuerbachian Tradition in African-American Social Thought,” astutely situates Jones’s philosophical work within the context of African American philosophical tradition and alerts us to how the Feuerbachian Tradition in German philosophy is apropos in the assessment of Jones’s philosophy of religion. Dr. J. Everet Green’s “William R. Jones: Philosophical Theologian Extraordinaire of the Twentieth Century” introduces us to how Jones was a formidable thinker in the context of twentieth-century philosophical theology and Africana thought. Dr. Greene was a student of Dr. Roy D. Morrison II, who in turn was not only a very close friend of Jones but also a co-worker in the field of philosophical theology. Green shares with us his personal vision of the intellectual landscape that frames Jones’s legacy in philosophical theology. Ms. Brittany L. O’Neal’s “William R. Jones’s Humanocentric Theism: Reconceptualizing the Black Religious Experience” continues the discussion on the import of Jones’s magnum opus, *Is God a White Racist?* by locating its significance for reconceptualizing Black religion in non-theistic terms in contrast to classical theism. Ms. Kimberly A. Harris, in her “The Legitimacy of Black Philosophy,” provides a critical assessment of Jones’s seminal contributions to the affirmation of Black philosophy as an academic pursuit and its

metaphysical implications. Dr. John H. McClendon III, in his “Dr. William Ronald Jones (July 17, 1933–July 13, 2012) On the Legacy of the Late ‘Dean’ of Contemporary African American Philosophers,” offers a personal and historical account of Dr. Jones’s legacy. McClendon argues that Jones stands at the apex of the African American philosophical tradition both as a scholar and activist, and thus deserves the honor of “Dean.”

In this issue, we are also delighted to include six book reviews. Tim Golden reviews James Cone’s *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*; Jessica Patella Konig reviews George Yancy’s *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?*; Floyd Hayes reviews John H. McClendon and Stephen C. Ferguson’s *Beyond the White Shadow: Philosophy, Sports, and the African American Experience*; Chike Jeffers reviews Robert Birt’s *The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King Jr.: Critical Essays on the Philosopher King*; Michelle V. Rowley reviews George Yancy and Janine Jones’s *Pursuing Trayvon Martin: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Manifestations of Racial Dynamics*; and, Chris Mountenay reviews Jacqueline Scott and Todd Franklin’s *Critical Affinities: Nietzsche and African American Thought*.

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## ARTICLES

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### ***The Honor Was All Mine: A Conversation with William R. Jones***

**George Yancy**  
*Duquesne University*

The following is part of a larger conversation that took place in 1996 with Dr. William R. Jones (1933–2012). The conversation was synoptic in scope, covering fragments from his childhood, his interest in philosophy, Blacks in the field of philosophy, the Committee on Blacks in Philosophy, racism, theodicy and Christian theism, Black theology, and oppression, the last of which shaped the driving theme to which Jones dedicated his life to understand and eradicate.

Like his Black heroine Harriet Tubman (1820–1913), Jones was compelled to continue in his *liberation* efforts. For Jones, there was no justification to discontinue. Liberation struggle, for him, took place within the context of history, on the plane, as it were, of existential suffering and social praxis. No matter the truth or falsity of the vertical theistic/metaphysical claims made by theologians regarding the existence of God, Jones was clear that it was *our responsibility* to wage struggle against the multiple forms of oppression experienced by human beings. In short, then, his “theism” did not mitigate his humanist drive to change the world for the better. His “humanocentric theism” is conceptually consistent with the need and responsibility

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for human beings to transform destructive forms of historical repetition, to dismantle structures of oppression, and to attack manifestations of social evil wherever they are found.

When talking with Jones, one got the impression that there is so much more to be done, so much more social evil that needed to be eradicated. One also got the sense that the effort to fight for a better world is *one's* personal responsibility, a responsibility that one bears despite the fact that one is always already born *in medias res*, in the very middle of the drama of human existence. Indeed, we participate (both directly and indirectly) in the interdependent matrix of social, political, economic, and psychological forces that oppress so many. And while it would be false to say that we all engage in acts of oppression in the same ways or that we all experience oppression in the same ways, it is true, nevertheless, that our duty is to locate where and how we oppress others and to seek out ways of challenging and undoing those forms of oppression.

This was partly what was so profound and didactic when talking with Jones. He forced me to confront my own bad faith, something he did with passion and sometimes tears. Out of all the interviews that I have done, it was with Jones that I was, for the very first time, personally moved by a profound sense of passion, a form of passion that was deeply infectious and abiding. As he talked about Harriet Tubman and her headaches, caused by the trauma of being hit on the head with a blunt object by her white “owner,” his voice began to crack. His cracking voice gave way to a process of gentle sobbing. In silence, I listened to Jones complete the powerful moral story of Tubman’s liberationist indefatigability. Tears welled up in my eyes. From what I recall, I turned off the recorder. And with a somewhat strained composure, though one not easy to maintain, I simply said, “we should end there.” He agreed. That moment of shared tears, of shared tarrying over Tubman’s ethical and spiritual journey, left me in silence long after the conversation was over. The sheer joy of journeying through that emotional moment with Jones was itself a burden and yet liberating. I was reminded of the pain and angst suffered by Tubman. Yet, I was reminded of her sacrifice, her duty, and her love for others. I was also deeply stirred by Jones’s humanity, his vulnerability, and his intense passion. Most of all, I was reminded—as he spoke of finding absolutely no justification for why he should discontinue fighting against oppression—of the fact that Jones was a philosopher who wept.

GEORGE YANCY: When did you first discover that there was a field called philosophy?

WILLIAM R. JONES: As a teenager, I did a great deal of reading. I was a little bitty, tiny kid. And I had very, very bad eyes. In fact, I should have used glasses well before I actually got them. But you know back then if you wore glasses they called you “four-eyes.” And so literally it got to the point, and this was in high school, where I could not see the board from the first row, and the teacher, Mr. Forbes, called my parents and told them he thought that I needed glasses. I’ll never forget the time when they put those glasses on me. The world looked different. I just hadn’t seen anything. But I couldn’t participate in sports. So I did not get into that athletic route that, to me, is really an oppressive structure designed to keep Black people oppressed. So, because of my physical body size and my eye problem, I began to do a lot of reading. I remember reading Plato back then.

YANCY: At what point did you apply to Howard University?

JONES: Actually, I had not decided to go to college because I didn’t have any money. My father was a postman and he did not have much money, but his argument was that he had to help my sisters. He said that he had to set aside and make sure that

my two sisters got an education rather than operating within the framework of “who had the best potential.” So, I had decided to try to get into the armed services and then get some money and go on the GI Bill. But one morning I went to school and I hadn’t studied for a chemistry exam and our homeroom teacher told us that there was a representative from Howard who was there to give this national competitive scholarship exam. The exam was scheduled at the same time the chemistry test was going to be given. If you took the scholarship exam you would miss the chemistry exam that day. So that’s what I did. I took the scholarship exam because I wasn’t quite ready for my chemistry examination. And I won a national competitive scholarship. It was a four-year scholarship, a thousand dollars per year, and that thousand dollars covered your tuition, room and board, and there was a little left for books. My education was essentially paid for all the way through.

YANCY: When did you decide that you wanted to study philosophy?

JONES: Well, I went to Howard to study engineering. You know they give you these aptitude tests and I did well in math, and so engineering came up as one of the things that they said I was suited for. Back then, I was operating on a bread-and-butter approach. The whole theory was that you would get in and get out as soon as possible so that you can make the most money. And so engineering made a lot of sense. But I did not like mechanical drawing. I remember having to do isometric drawings and I just did not like it. I eventually went to the dean of engineering and told him that I wanted to transfer to liberal arts and do philosophy. And the dean said that he hadn’t had anybody with those good grades moving out of engineering into philosophy, and that I really didn’t have to worry about the mechanical drawing because they had draftsmen—computers weren’t in then—who did all of that. He said that I didn’t have to worry about that and he didn’t think that I was making the right decision. But I just didn’t like it. My friends said, “You’re crazy. It’s fine if you want to give up engineering, but don’t go into philosophy. What can you do with it?” They said that I would only get my AB degree and that I could hardly teach with that. In fact, I was told that if I wanted to teach philosophy, I would have to get my MA and PhD. But my friends told me that if I was talking about putting in that amount of time and money and effort, I may as well go to law school or medical school and make myself some money. But the philosophy program was interesting to me. There was a fellow named Winston McAllister who was my mentor. Eugene Holmes was the head of the department and Alain Locke had been there, but had retired. I did not study with Locke, but I knew about him. There were only about four or five students who were majoring in philosophy there at Howard.

YANCY: All male?

JONES: All male. There were no female faculty members in philosophy at that time and no female majors in philosophy.

YANCY: Why do you think you had such a passion to pursue the field?

JONES: It was more of a survival tactic. I know that sounds odd. I couldn’t fight or anything. I never got into fights. I was always able to sort of argue my way out of things. So, argumentation and rhetoric were sort of survival tactics for me as a kid. Philosophy enabled me to enhance my survival and well-being through developing effective coping skills for a context of oppression. The reality of societal oppression pushed me into this kind of analytic, critical, virus detection operation. Hence, I could develop effective strategies, develop a sort of keen, analytical, critical approach, not for the sake of philosophy per se, but because this was a survival, well-being tactic or strategy for me.

YANCY: Talk about the impact that philosophers McAllister and

Holmes had on your philosophical direction. What were they like as teachers?

JONES: I didn't understand Holmes that much. He was way, way above me in terms of my understanding of philosophy at that time. He was at that time one of the few Blacks who had a PhD in philosophy. You could almost count them on your hand. I remember we did a survey back when I was at Yale, which was in the early '70s or late '60s I guess, to try to identify an exhaustive list of African American philosophers, and we came up with under thirty. And that was a deceptive figure.

YANCY: Why was it a deceptive figure?

JONES: It was deceptive because that number included not simply African Americans, but Caribbeans and also Africans who were teaching in the United States. So, I'm trying to say that we found out back then that the figures were deceptive. You know, I was instrumental in helping to set up this Committee on Blacks in Philosophy.

YANCY: Yes.

JONES: We went through and used some of the survey material from that data collection to establish, to institutionalize that committee. It turned out that there was approximately one Black philosopher for every million Black persons. As I say, we came up with thirty, and if you subtract Africans and people from the Caribbean, who were in the United States, subtract seven, and there were about twenty-three million Black people back then, so you're talking about one Black philosopher for every million Black persons. Now, you were asking about Eugene Holmes, also. I knew that he was one of the few Blacks in philosophy. The issues that the faculty in philosophy at Howard were dealing with at that time were not focusing on oppression per se, but it was more classical philosophy and the like. Alain Locke had done some work on cultural pluralism and so forth, and McAllister did some courses on ethics, but McAllister taught logic, and so forth, so my introduction was basically to logic, logical positivism, and so forth. Keep in mind that Holmes also identified himself at that time as a Marxist so I got a little splattering of that. But the main impact from McAllister and Holmes was to solidify philosophy as an appropriate and useful pursuit for African Americans interested in the struggle. They didn't themselves focus on that particular issue, but I did begin to see how I could take these kinds of tools and skills and develop an arsenal against oppression.

YANCY: Which courses did you take with McAllister and which with Holmes?

JONES: I took elementary logic and symbolic logic from McAllister. I took his course in ethics. The history of philosophy I think I took from Holmes. Holmes did a course on the pre-Socratics, which was my introduction to the Sophists and so forth. He didn't stress the Sophists, but he gave great emphasis to the naturalists. But that was my introduction to Protagoras and that became a critical piece of my eventual philosophical outlook.

YANCY: Was it a shock to you that there were actually these Black philosophers?

JONES: I don't remember that kind of response. To me, I was pursuing philosophy for the personal reasons that I indicated before, and at that point, I wasn't on target yet in terms of my phenomenology of oppression, how it operates and the like. I taught at Yale Divinity School and I began to notice what we call the "starving statistics phenomena," the SSP factor, that there's a striking disproportion that is representative of lack people when you look at certain kinds of indexes. And it doesn't matter whether it is a negative index like illegitimacy or representatives in the NBA [National Basketball Association], or whatever. But there are striking disproportionalities between the percentage

of Blacks in the population and their percentage in whatever context or index you're talking about. And this is one of the things that struck me about philosophy and religion. We have produced an enormous number of ministers but almost no philosophers. We have theologians but almost no philosophers. And I didn't understand that at the time but later on I began to associate that with the operation of oppression and how the maintenance of oppressive structures would dictate that kind of starving statistic.

YANCY: How do certain oppressive structures dictate that kind of starving statistic in philosophy?

JONES: I started off by analyzing the issue of the linkage between religion and oppression, that is, the role that religion plays in oppression. At that point, I saw this uniquely central and exclusive role that religion played in maintaining oppression. But I reached the erroneous conclusion that to get rid of oppression you had to get rid of religion, as if religion was the only institution in the society that was the maintainer of oppression. I began to see that it's more of a cage metaphor. In a cage, you've got solid bars with a lot of open spaces as opposed to a solid wall. Oppression is a very predictable phenomenon. We can literally go into a situation and predict what people are going to do. We never lose on this. But one of the things we found out was that oppressed people, when they talk about their situation, often drag in this metaphor of the cage. When oppressors talk about the situation they don't use the cage metaphor, they talk about walls, solid walls, and giving people ladders to go over the wall, or opening or creating a door to go through the wall. Now when you look at those, to me, I notice another kind of metaphor. When white Americans focused on an animal symbol for their situation, they picked an eagle. Black people, and I pay attention to the Brer Rabbit stories, they picked a little rabbit. Now that's an interesting kind of contrast, particularly when I went back and I remember reading that an eagle is a predator. Now there are a lot of predator birds that human beings have tamed, have used in hunting, like the falcon and so forth. Have you heard of anybody taming an eagle? My point was that they chose an untamed predator as the animal to represent their freedom. Black people chose the little bitty rabbit. They had the historic memories of lions and tigers and panthers and snakes and all that stuff, but they chose the rabbit. You know part of the West African folklore identifies two underdogs: one is the hare and the other is a tortoise. In the tortoise and the hare story, it is the tortoise that is the underdog and it is the hare that is the overdog. In the United States, at least for me, the image of the hare, the rabbit, in relationship to the eagle, the predator, was the most accurate description for Black people to understand and to describe both who they were and to make sense of their situation. And if you look up the Brer Rabbit stories and deconstruct them, contextualize them, you have a situation in which these were stories that Black parents were teaching to their children while they were also caring for the master's children. So, to talk about the evils of racism and oppression and to protect their children against it while they were caring for the white kids, they had to use symbols and stories and so forth. Otherwise the kids, the white kids, could say (presumably to their parents), "Aunt Jane called you a mean S.O.B." But if you look at the stories, in the natural arrangement of things, what happens when the rabbit and the eagle, or the rabbit and the fox, or the rabbit and the bear meet each other? In the natural order of things, it is the fox or the eagle that is the eater, and it is the rabbit or the hare that is the eaten. But if you look at the Brer Rabbit stories, what you see is that the Brer Rabbit story sort of turned nature upside down. It is the Brer Rabbit that uses wile and guile to overcome the superior power of the fox or the bear. On my reading, that was the lesson and the model that Black parents were trying to teach their children living within

the context of oppression under slavery. What I'm trying to say is that this is all a part of a certain theory of culture that I find in Reinhold Niebuhr, H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and some cultural anthropologists, that what we do and what we make, all of our actions and all of our products, express a very specific value orientation, a very specific picture of reality, and that you can literally take our actions and our products and decode the underlying belief in value, the world-view position that undergirds those actions and products. Let's return to the cage example. With the cage, you've got the solid bars and the open spaces with an illusion of freedom. No single bar by itself can keep anything inside. But if you take the multiple bars, even with the open spaces, and link them together, that cage with the open spaces will produce the same kind of rigidity and impenetrability as a solid wall. My point is that to understand oppression you have to understand that each one of those bars is a particular institution in the society. One bar is education, one is politics, and so forth and so on. Not any single one of those factors by itself is sufficient to encage you, but what they do is that they all operate together. Education will operate with politics, and politics with religion and entertainment, and so forth, to produce the same kind of rigidity. Another question to ask is: "Why is it that the oppressor doesn't talk about the cage, but talks about the solid wall?" Now the cage metaphor automatically sets up one of the features of oppression: a two-category system arranged in a hierarchy of superior and inferior. The cage says we've got a "cagee," something inside the cage, and we've got something outside the cage. I'm in the cage and then there's something that is outside the cage, the keeper. The thing that is outside the cage has the key that keeps me inside. There's a surplus of power and privilege that's related to the keeper that establishes that kind of hierarchy. Now if we talk about the solid wall, we don't have that kind of hierarchy automatically presented. So if the oppressor talks about a cage image, it means that he or she is pointing to a situation where we've got these two groups with disproportionate amounts of power and privilege. But what's the cause of that? How did that happen? If you talk about the wall, the solid wall with the ladder going over it, there is no hint of any kind of hierarchical arrangement or surplus of power or deficit of power configuration that automatically comes to mind as when you focus on the cage. The point here is that the oppressor is not going to pick the kind of metaphor that will reveal or suggest their status as oppressors. So they're not going to use the cage metaphor, they're going to use the wall metaphor.

YANCY: Relate this cage metaphor to your discussion regarding the paucity of Black philosophers.

JONES: I have found that our world-view, our beliefs and values, our strategies, and so forth, reflect our context. We operate on what we call the "CC Connection." There is a connection between the *content* of your beliefs and values and the *context* (economic, social, and political situation) that determines the world you live in. Everything that we do and everything that we make is a combination or a relation between some context and some content. Tell me if you find an exception to this. As human beings gain control and predictability over certain areas of human life, the concept of God's control and sovereignty diminishes. There's an inverse relationship that's reflected by the following: If you got sick in the medieval period, who would you call on first? You would go to the priest first, right? Now, as medicine has developed, you no longer call the priest in, you call a physician. Today, when do you call the priest? Well, when the physician says, "I can't do any more for you." What I am saying is that that change represents a shift in human control over an area. Again, it's an inverse relationship: as human control and predictability over an area are increased, we do not relate God's causality to that area. People don't go out and

do rain dances now. So, if you are an oppressed person or an oppressed group, it means that your control over areas is by definition drastically diminished. Tell me if I'm wrong. To me it's [not] accidental that Black people developed this concept that God's got the whole world in his or her hand because of their lack of power and control over their own social reality. If Black people cannot effectively overcome the structures of oppression at the economic, social, political level, if they don't see the possibilities of some external power or force that is more powerful than the power of whites, if they don't see that possibility, what hope do they have? They have no hope. What I'm saying is the impossibility of hope to cope with their situation under oppression compels a lot of Black people to look for supernatural help or support as their only recourse. If you look at the actual development of humanism, to me, humanism begins to develop in those areas and situations where human beings begin to gain control. They can exercise human power and get certain predictable results. So I think that if you look at the history of our world-views in that way, then you don't have humanism developing in those areas where people have little or no control over things.

YANCY: Since philosophy involves a kind of independent criticality, are you suggesting that the reason that there might be a paucity of Black philosophers is because Black people don't feel like they're in control of their lives?

JONES: Yes.

YANCY: So, you actually formally established a Committee on Blacks in Philosophy, right?

JONES: That's correct.

YANCY: Well, within the context of oppression, what led to this? Was there any opposition that you received, say, from the APA at the time?

JONES: Oh, yes! The response of the APA was predictable. We have found that oppressors go through three denials. They describe the present situation in such a way that the labeling of oppression is inaccurate or inappropriate. You can use internal criticism to have them relinquish the first denial. But then they move to the second denial, "Well, I'm not the cause." But then, again, through internal criticism, we get them to relinquish that claim. So, they admit that there is oppression, that they are culpable, and that something that must be done to correct this oppression. But this is where the third denial emerges. The oppressor selects a method of correction that will not correct. The APA did not see the oppression in their structures or in their policies because they were not looking at it from the angle of analysis that would reveal such things as oppression. The whole concept of Black philosophy was deemed a square circle category. The initial effort was to establish the legitimacy, the necessity, of doing what we called ethnic philosophy or looking at the philosophical enterprise in terms of contextualism. We tried to pull together a volume on Black philosophy, and the response of most white philosophers, and some Black philosophers, was negative. I don't want to name anybody, but we tried to get one Black philosopher to write an article on criticizing Black philosophy or anything that he wanted to do on it, and his response was that he would not be involved in the enterprise because even to undertake the project of critiquing Black philosophy would presuppose that the concept itself is meaningful rather than a square circle concept.

YANCY: Right, because to debunk it you would have to give it legitimacy, right?

JONES: That is the point. To enter into the discussion, to debunk it, gives it a status that he was denying that it had. Notice, though, what we were trying to do. We were trying to find an entry point for doing Black philosophy in a deconstructivist or

postmodern mode. That's what I mean by contextualism. We were trying to do philosophy in a contextual mode. That, to me, is all that ethnic philosophy is. And one of the things that we kept running up against was, in my opinion, the inaccurate and illegitimate view that was informing the majority of philosophers at that time. It was the view that the norm of philosophy is something synonymous with reason per se or something like that, which, to me, is totally inaccurate. Reason does not have the discriminating capacity or ability that they were assigning to it. They were operating on an absolutist analysis. Reason was considered to be operating as some kind of absolute that the philosopher ought to accept as norm, and that just does not wash as I see it. Let me give you an example of what I mean. For example, we label a cow as subhuman, outside the circle of humanity, and therefore through the process of labeling, and remember, a label is something that we attach to the object, the cow is allowed to be murdered and cannibalized. We kill it and we barbecue it. Now, take Hindu culture. They do not label or classify the cow in the same way and therefore it is considered murder to kill it, cannibalism if you eat it. Now, I want you to show me, using reason, who is right and who is wrong. You cannot do it. Reason does not have that kind of discriminating capacity. Go back and look at the history of philosophy, go back to Greek philosophy. You had two opposing points of view. You had the absolutism of the Platonic-Aristotelian rationalistic point of view on one side. On the opposite side, you had the Sophists. And the Sophists were arguing for this kind of humanism, this contextualism, this relationalism that I am talking about. Western philosophy and theology at that point chose the absolutism of Plato and Aristotle, and rejected the contextualism of the Sophists. I would argue that as we have progressed, and I don't mean improved, there has been a more explicit acknowledgment from the noncontextualist side, the absolutist side, of contextualism as norm. This is what is involved in the postmodernist situation, where it is the contextualist position, what I call the Sophist Principle or what I call the functional ultimacy of the human being, not ontological ultimacy, that is being accepted as the critical norm.

YANCY: So, the whole emphasis that postmodernists place on notions like disciplinary matrices, or paradigms, or communities of intelligibility, you see as an instantiation of Protagoras' dictum?

JONES: Well, two points. I make a distinction between universals and absolutes. There are universals. A universal is something that is omnipresent, something for which you cannot identify an exception in a particular context. You always have to start with a context. I'll give you an example. This is one that informs my whole understanding of oppression, and really everything else. At the organic level, in order for anything to survive it has to feed on something else. You cannot give an exception to that. My system simply takes that universal and extracts the implications from it. It says that you and I were put into a reality where we had two and only two choices: we could choose either to commit suicide, that is, feed on oneself—for if you feed on yourself eventually you exhaust the food supply—or the only other option is to murder and cannibalize something else. All I'm saying is that we have two choices, two different moral options: the morality of treating things other than ourselves as coequal, and therefore not eating them, or establishing a hierarchy relative to those things that are not ourselves and establishing ourselves at the top as the predators and we prey upon the others. The fact that you are alive is all the evidence you need to show that you rejected suicide, which means that you have set up a structure that says there is a predator and there is the preyed upon, that is, you live according to a hierarchical structure that says you are superior and whatever you eat is inferior. Now that's the fundamental structure of oppression, that's the ontological structure of oppression that I see. Now, there's no way to

escape that kind of oppression, as I said, except through suicide. But the kind of oppression that I'm working against has to do with what we call human societal oppression, not ontological oppression. Now, you can avoid human societal oppression. Ontological oppression can't be avoided *in toto*—you're going to have to take some species and treat it as inferior. That's what oppression does. You see what oppression does is to establish within the human species the same kind of predator and preyed upon hierarchy that we acknowledge as definitive for the ontological structure. And my whole argument is that that kind of intra-species oppression worked before, but given that people at the bottom no longer accept those kinds of definitions and structures about their inequality and protest that, efforts to maintain that kind of predator/preyed upon hierarchy produces a great deal of conflict.

YANCY: So would you accept my analogy earlier that the postmodernist's use of these terms—and I think those terms are equivalent to your use of contextualism, terms like disciplinarian matrix or paradigm or communities of intelligibility—are instantiations of Protagoras' dictum that man is the measure of all things?

JONES: Take the development of modernism. Modernism attempted to critique supernaturalism, that is, revelation based on the Bible. Take Descartes, take all of them. It was an attack on the supernaturalism that informed the medieval church. Now they did an internal criticism which attempted to show that "supernatural epistemology" was not an absolute. It was contextual; it was not an absolute. So, what they did was to de-absolutize that absolute by a method of internal criticism using another norm. For instance, say you start out with the Bible as your single norm. The moment Catholics use that one norm, that one absolute to reach one conclusion, and Protestants use the same norm to reach a different conclusion, you have set up a situation where you have to go and pick and choose between those alternative definitions of a single thing. The text doesn't enable you to do that, so you have to go outside the text. Take any verse in the Bible. It can be interpreted either literally or symbolically. There isn't anyone who can disagree with that, even the most rabid infallibilist. If you go into the text itself and try to establish the basis for that choice, the text, that is, the absolute that you started out with, never tells you. The text doesn't say, "Interpret John I literally or interpret John I symbolically." There is nothing in the text that tells you that. So in trying to make that decision you have already gone outside of the text, you have brought in a norm other than the absolute according to which you said you were operating. So people will use a norm to de-absolutize something else, but then they begin to treat that norm that they used to de-absolutize as an absolute.

YANCY: Moving back to African American philosophy, would you describe yourself as an African American philosopher?

JONES: Oh, yes.

YANCY: In your essay, "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations," you conclude the following: "Of course, of crucial importance is the description of possible models for executing the enterprise of Black philosophy." Do you feel that Black philosophers have begun to describe the possible models for executing the enterprise of Black philosophy?

JONES: I think so. I tried to do that in terms of my first book, *Is God a White Racist?* This book was an effort to take all this theory that I am describing and apply it to Black religion and the Black church. And it was attacked at first. That work was identified as a sort of theological pariah; it was identified as not being Black. And I'm arguing that it draws on the African American/Black intellectual tradition. So, if you look at the actual evolution of Black theology since then, they have had to

incorporate the norms and the methodologies that we argued for twenty-five years ago. So I'm trying to say that even though it was initially rejected as an accurate picture of the evolution of liberation theology and liberation philosophy, it was accurate in the sense that people have had to incorporate certain norms and methodologies that we argued for twenty-five years ago as they dealt with oppression. Now, I have difficulties with Afrocentricity.

YANCY: What are some of those difficulties?

JONES: Because it's operating on a faulty diagnosis of the problem and therefore a faulty therapy. I'm influenced in large part on this by Frantz Fanon. On my view, diagnosis dictates the therapy, and I'm arguing that that's a universal principle. I can show that the Afrocentric is operating on that just as everybody else is. What is the diagnosis in Afrocentricity of the Black plight? It reaches the conclusion that Black people are in a bad situation because they have strayed away from, abandoned the world-view, the beliefs and values and so forth of Africa, of the motherland. So the diagnosis is that we have abandoned Africa or replaced the African world-view with Eurocentrism. Given that diagnosis, what is the only therapy? The only therapy possible, according to them, is to go back, recover, resurrect, re-introduce that world-view that we have abandoned. Now, what is wrong with that? I'm operating on an oppression model. Frantz Fanon pointed out that if you look at the actual operation of colonialism and oppression, dying colonialism and oppression, he says that you have to differentiate between two kinds of colonists, two kinds of colonialism. And he also argues that you'll never have a successful decolonization, eradication of colonialism, unless you have two revolutions. He operates on the two-revolutionary theory. It's based on his understanding of how colonial oppression operates. You have the alien colonists, those are the English, the Germans, Dutch, and so forth, who come from their country to another place, i.e., Africa, South America, whatever, and introduce oppressive structures. But the mechanism that they use to set up the oppression is the following: they look within the indigenous culture for persons, principles, and policies as the structure, as the infrastructure of the oppression. So his point is that colonization is an exercise in indigenization. So the indigenization then sets up two colonists: the alien colonist and the indigenous colonists. So if you have one revolution, you kick out the alien colonists, but you're leaving in that place the indigenous colonists. But that says two things: it says that the original set of beliefs and values that were there in the pre-colonialist period had the potential, had the capacity, had the possible outcome, of oppression, of maintaining oppression. Therefore, if given that fact, if you want to recover, reintroduce, resurrect, the original African world-view, you cannot do it without subjecting that original pre-colonial world view to a filter which at least does the following. It differentiates between the beliefs and values that helped to support oppression that supported the maintenance of the colonial system, and those that do not. Now, to do that, you're going to have to introduce a phenomenology of oppression. That kind of self-critical, self-filtering is not going to take place by simply going back and recovering what's there. Now the moment that you understand that, it means again that you are introducing into the whole discussion a filter that has not been designated or decided as Afrocentric. In order to make the distinction between what you bring forward from the African tradition and what you keep back there, don't bring forward, you're introducing a non-Afrocentric item. I want to start with a sort of phenomenology of oppression, a grid of oppression, and use that, because eventually that's what the Afrocentric is going to have to come to anyway. And I've done a lot of research in South Africa, and what I am finding is that the oppressor utilizes that principle of indigenization to go back

and pick those parts of the traditional African culture that help to maintain this neoracism, neo-apartheid. And people, South Africans, let them get away with that because it is advanced as a process of indigenization.

YANCY: In the "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy" article, you argue that Blacks dehumanize themselves if they fail to philosophize from their own cultural perspective.

JONES: Sure. If you understand oppression, what oppression does is to set up a two-category system arranged in a hierarchy of superior and inferior. Oppression is a response to difference, but difference is contextual. You cannot tell me whether things are different until you give me a context. Take two identical things. Pick them out. There will always be a context from which you can show that those two things are different. For instance, I am holding one in my left hand and I am holding one in my right hand. You can take two "opposite" things, and there will always be a context from which you can show that they are similar or the same. Take any two things. They may be different, but different things *on this table*. So what I am saying is that difference is always contextual. What oppression does, oppression wants to treat things differently. So, in order to treat things differently it has to establish a difference. The difference can be real, it can be imaginary, it can be important, unimportant, whatever, but it is going to focus on a difference and then it is going to respond to that difference in a precise, predictable way. That is, those differences will be arranged in a hierarchy. But there are many different kinds of hierarchies. We can have a hierarchy between big and little, young and old. All we're talking about is rank order. But the oppressor is going to arrange the differences in a specific hierarchy; it's going to be a hierarchy of superior and inferior. If it focuses on intelligence, if it focuses on skin color, it's going to use that difference to establish a hierarchy of superior and inferior. Now, if you want to overcome oppression, what you have to do is to reduce that hierarchy, get rid of that hierarchy of superior and inferior. In order to defend slavery, one will attempt to justify it as good and right, proper, moral, reasonable, and so forth. Hitler did this. It is what I refer to as legitimation, which is a universal characteristic. The oppressor is always going to legitimate the structure of oppression as moral, as good, as right. Now take the United States. They had a situation where they wanted to defend the policy of institutionalized slavery as good and moral, and not only good and moral but as best for the people they were oppressing, enslaved Africans. They took people involuntarily from their country, involuntarily now, and subjected them to the most dehumanizing situations. Through the Middle Passage, Africans were brought over here involuntarily, put in at the bottom of the social ladder, actually outside of the social ladder because they were defined not as human beings, but as chattel property. If a dog has puppies, to whom do the puppies belong? Now, you continue that from generation to generation, with all the horrors that we relate to that, and now the oppressor wants to, or has to, legitimate that as good and right and proper and best for the slaves. Now I'm saying it is always possible to justify anything. This is a feature of contextualism. If you understand contextualism, there will always be at least one angle from which you can establish something, I don't care what it is, as good, and at least one angle from which it is bad. I can't tell whether something is good or bad until you give me a context. So, what whites did in order to defend that policy of slavery was the following. It was a very simple recipe. If I take you from one place and plop you down in another, to justify that shift as good all I have to do is go back and describe whatever I took you from as the worst place in the world, as the pits. So, no matter what I do to you, by taking you out of that "bad situation" what I have done is [deemed] moral and good and best for

you. Now that's exactly what happened. The consequence of that was to give a totally inaccurate, negative view of Africa. What I'm trying to say is that any policy that understands racial oppression in the United States has to recognize that you have to go back and rehabilitate the picture and image of Africa, that is, get beyond that oppressive picture of Africa that was used to legitimate oppression. I'm not against Afrocentricity. You have to knock down Eurocentric supremacy, but you cannot simply be uncritical about the content of pre-colonial African culture precisely because of the use that was made of that pre-colonial belief and world-view to support colonialism. It requires you to do a rotten-apple-in-the-basket approach, that is, not to bring forward anything until it has gone through the filter of not supporting oppression. As I've said, if you understand oppression, oppression sets up this hierarchy of superior and inferior. Contextualism is always looking at things from a very particular, single angle. What the oppressor is saying is that if I take this object, a toilet tissue holder, let's say, and I say "this is a toilet tissue holder," what I am doing is taking one attribute, one description of that item, giving it hierarchical superiority, in terms of the definition of that thing. To show the error of that, what I need to do is to pick another angle and establish the coequal interpretive status, the coequal definition status of that angle. And that's my point. If Black people don't take their life experiences, their choice of the angle of interpretation, and treat them as coequal, and force the opposing point of view to justify the "superiority" of their position in light of the coequality that I assign to mine, and that to me is going to dictate a process of internal criticism, if I don't do that, what I am doing by not forcing them to do that kind of analysis is to affirm the superiority that the oppressor has put on that situation at the outset.

YANCY: I recall that there was the Wingspread Conference in Wisconsin in 1976 where you, Dr. Joyce Mitchell Cook, and the late Dr. Robert Williams were discussing the nature of Black philosophy. Is there a Black philosophy?

JONES: I go back to my earlier analysis of what is meant by "Black." You see, "Black" is a label. Now, to answer the question that you just put to me, I would have to go back and ask, "What is your definition, what is your angle of analysis of the word "Black"? If you mean that it represents or is a description of the experiences or the angle of perception of a given group of people, then how can anybody disagree with that? How can you disagree with that conclusion if you mean by "Black," the ethnic membership of a particular group, or if you mean by "Black" the audience for whom this [Black philosophy] was intended? Given this, at least for me, there is no dispute about it. What was in dispute back then was the following point. People were not looking at the word "Black" in the sort of broad way that I was looking at it. They were looking at "Black" in terms of a racial category. And from this they concluded that if we were talking about Black philosophy in racial terms that we must be talking about a causal linkage, some kind of genetic determinism between skin color or race, and belief and value or philosophical content. Leonard Jeffries tries to argue that if you talk about whiteness as producing or predetermining a kind of specific value orientation, then there is a specific value orientation connected with the genetic, factual feature of being white. But there is a difference between focusing on Black or white as cultural categories, contextual categories, and focusing on them in terms of causal categories in the genetic sense.

YANCY: So, if one means by Black philosophy a chromosomal project, then you find that highly problematic?

JONES: I argue that what people call the Black experience or what Jeffries is identifying as the white experience is not related to chromosomes. It is related to the contextual, economic, social, political situation which dictates a certain kind of choice.

This is what I am saying. If I am an oppressor, that means I have committed myself to maintaining a certain kind of structure. Now, within a given context there will be certain things that will support that oppressor status and other things that will work against it. The point here is that the oppressor will choose those things that help to maintain his/her oppressor status. This choice will not be based upon chromosomes. In trying to set up color oppression in the United States, the United States had a very peculiar kind of oppression. Not all oppression is based on color or race. That's just one variable. For me, I argue that race is a social construct. But white people could not maintain the kind of structures that they wanted if they had focused only on chromosomal eye color or chromosomal hair color as opposed to chromosomal skin color. If they had focused on chromosomal hair color, then white people who are brunettes would be in the same class as Black people who are brunettes. That would not have been the kind of variable that they needed or wanted. So they had to focus on the skin color factor as the basis for separation and oppression. Again, however, that has nothing to do with chromosomal causality. It has to do with what is the most effective way to maintain oppressive structures within a context where people have different skin color. And I think if we don't understand that, then we enable the oppressor to put into place neo-oppressive structures. And that's what neo-oppression, neo-racism does. You don't use chromosomes as a basis for discriminating against people. What you use is the un-level playing field effect of the prior use of chromosomal differentiation. If I discriminate against you on the basis of skin color, if I do that for a couple of generations, if I don't teach you to read and write, then after a certain number of generations I have established a two-category system arranged in a hierarchy of superior and inferior. The group that wasn't taught to read and write will have deficits in education, in economic status, health care, etc., relative to the group that was not discriminated against. The former group will be at a disadvantage. So the use of race, which was originally used to discriminate against a certain group, establishes what we call the deficits, disadvantages, and defects. And one can add demerits and so forth. So, after that is done for a couple of generations, one can literally stop using race altogether to discriminate against others and still produce the same kind of discrimination that was accomplished when explicitly using chromosomal discrimination. What the oppressor does now is highlight the demerit, the deficit, or the disadvantage, and use that as a basis for discriminating against the oppressed. They can then argue, "How in the world can you accuse me of being a racist when I'm not using race anymore?" And that is precisely the mechanism of neoracism that one finds. And if we don't understand these processes of neoracism, then we have a situation where you have black people in the US, and as was the case in South Africa, concluding that because whites no longer exclude Black people on the basis of race, they are no longer discriminating against Black people. They are discriminating against Black people because they have not corrected for the prior discrimination. If you don't correct for the prior disadvantages, then all you are doing is continuing the discrimination.

YANCY: I understand. What is humanocentric theism and how does this position help to address issues of theodicy, particularly the problem involving God's purported omni-benevolence and the reality of the oppression of Black people? In other words, what is humanocentric theism?

JONES: This is the point of my book *Is God a White Racist?* I'm trying to develop effective strategies for dealing with what I call "neoracism." So, I'm doing a phenomenology of oppression that tries to identify the features, the beliefs, and values that bring about oppression. Now, if you look at the debate between theists and humanists, you will find a very interesting point.

The so-called problem of evil, as you know, is produced when you assign a certain complex of attributes to God and then you try to account for certain things within human history. This includes such things as the oppression of Black people, or inequalities, or earthquakes, and so on. If that list of God's attributes is correct, then those other things of great travesty that happen to human beings shouldn't be there. So, the problem of evil is trying to account for the existence of those things. I can logically solve the problem of evil by changing one of those attributes of God, by taking off the "omni" of any one of those attributes. One move within theism has been the willingness to relinquish the "omni" feature of power and the "omni" feature of knowledge, but it has never been willing to relinquish the "omni" feature of benevolence. So that identifies to me the central premise of theism, namely, that it is affirming in some way the omni-benevolence of God. That's the indispensable item that it will not relinquish. So, what I did was to go back and show—in *Is God a White Racist?*—that the principle of God's omni-benevolence is a concept that helps to support oppression or the context within which affirming the omni-benevolence of God is part of the mechanism of oppression. I was trying to show the economic, social, and political practice of the use of that concept of omni-benevolence. I argued that that's exactly what it is. If you look at the history of the Black church, Black theology, and so forth, the concept that God's got the whole world in his hands and that no matter what happens in this world, as my grandfather used to say, it operates for our good, what that is saying is that everything that God does is benevolent relative to us. I raised the issue of omni-benevolence as an accurate attribute of God or the creator. I asked people to explain to me how it is that the choice either to commit suicide or to commit murder, for these are the only choices that God gives us, factors out as an affirmation of divine benevolence, particularly divine omni-benevolence? If I argue that something is in conformity with God's will and purpose, then I cannot label it bad. If God does it, then, by definition, it is good. Hence, I can never label it as bad, and therefore I can never label it as oppression. So, in order for me to approach something as oppression, that is, to exterminate it or to eradicate it, I must first establish within the Judeo-Christian tradition that this is not the effect of God. If it is divine punishment, now, that is an effect of God, and if it is divine punishment, I am not permitted to try to escape it. So, what I'm arguing is that the moment you identify something as caused by God and you are operating within a system where whatever God does is by definition good, then there is no possible starting point for a theology of liberation, a philosophy of liberation. The philosophy of liberation must first establish that something out there is wrong or bad, that something out there is not operating for my survival and well-being. I am protesting that and I'm trying to eradicate that. I'm not trying to conform to it. So, I'm saying that by arguing for God's omni-benevolence it makes it difficult—impossible—to establish the initial starting point for a theology of liberation. So, I'm just trying to make sure we understood that point.

YANCY: Absolutely.

JONES: Now, given that situation, if you want to operate within a theistic system, and I am not interested in doing that myself, then you have to operate with a concept of God that enables you to label something in that environment as bad, as wrong, or as oppressive, and therefore something that you can approach in terms of eradication. That is where humanocentric theism comes in. The opposite point of view is theocentric theism. Theocentric theism argues that God has got the whole world in his hands. Indeed, not a sparrow falls without God knowing it and willing it. Theocentric theism argues that whatever is, is what it ought to be, because whatever is, is the result of God's causality, God's willing purpose. So if whatever is, is what ought

to be, then there is no way that you can protest anything that is. So, in order to protest, you have to introduce a theological or philosophical perspective that allows the human being to look at that reality out there not in terms of what it is from God's angle, but what it is from the angle of human beings' reality, how it impacts them. Think of humanocentric theism in terms of the metaphor of a parent who has a business and voluntarily hands over the business to the children. The parent does it out of his/her own power. The parent is not forced to do it. The parent does it because he/she wanted to do it. So, the parent leaves the business in the hands of the children. The parent tells them to sink or swim with it. Now that's an affirmation of God's will and purpose and God's power, but the consequence of that is to take the responsibility for what happens in human history out of God's hands and put it in human hands. My point is that if Black theologians want to do a theology of liberation, if they want to avoid the conclusion that God is a white racist, based on the fact that this situation of Black people hasn't been improved, then the only way they can do that is to move towards this position of humanocentric theism. There is no other way to do it.

YANCY: How is humanocentric theism different from deism?

JONES: Deism is a form of ontological determinism. The deist argues that God at some point has set up a whole set of deterministic mechanisms. What deism says is that God does not intervene after God has set that up. It is no longer necessary for God to intervene and make any corrections. But there is a form of determinism, there is a *telos* already built into the order of things that is not changeable or correctable by human choice or human power.

YANCY: So, is it still legitimate to ask if God is a white racist, particularly given that Black people still live under conditions of discrimination, oppression?

JONES: Oh, yes. You see, I was asking the question. I did not think that you can answer the question. If you are a contextualist, that's a question that you cannot respond to with a definitive, demonstrative answer. What I was trying to do was simply to force Black theologians and people in the Black church to look at the strategies of liberation they were operating on in terms of their effectiveness. Humanocentric theism gives Black people the right, the authority, and the power to take the angle of reality that emphasizes their inequalities and so forth and to make that the point of the discussion, the master concept that has to be answered at some point. What humanocentric theism does is to establish the coequality of human power relative to God at the level of human history. It is based upon giving or granting coequal power and authority to human beings by God. So, this position enables theists to hold on to their concept of God if they want. It allows them to hold on to their concept that God does this out of his benevolence and so forth, but it forces them to avoid the situation where whatever is, is what ought to be.

YANCY: How did Black theologians receive your book on this question concerning God and racism?

JONES: They rejected it. They said that it was not theology; they said that it was not Black theology, that is, they questioned the Blackness of it. And all of this points to some fundamental misunderstandings about the mechanism of liberation theology. All I did was to take the purpose and method of liberation theology at that time and apply it to Black theology. It involved internal criticism. They argued that I was introducing some alien norm and evaluating them on the basis of that alien norm. No. I was doing an internal criticism. After all, they claimed to offer philosophies and theologies of liberation. And I maintained that the moment they do that, a very precise methodology is determined, which they did not follow. As they began to work with some of these issues later on, the evolution of Black theology shows that that analysis that I put forward twenty years

ago was absolutely accurate because they had to do what I said they had to do. If you do internal criticism correctly, you never lose, because if a person disagrees with you they are disagreeing with their own position, contradicting themselves. If I take my norm to criticize you from you, and execute that criticism, and then you say, “No, no, that’s wrong, I disagree with that,” then you are contradicting your original norm. But their response also indicates their lack of awareness and understanding of these alternative forms of religious belief in Black thought. For example, if you go back, many Black theologians said, and almost by definition, that Black people are theists. This is part of Afrocentricism. They were arguing that African spirituality is based on theism. Therefore, when I was trying to introduce humanism, I was said not to be Afrocentric. I wasn’t being Black. The implication was that some white person had messed over my mind, so to speak. What I did was to go back and show that in the Black religious tradition in the United States, there is this position that I called “Black religious humanism.” I helped to resurrect that point of view which so many other Black theologians said was not there. And when that tradition was shown to exist, it was a liberation theology.

YANCY: Who are those who would identify as Black religious humanists?

JONES: Well, to me, Brer Rabbit is one. I’m going back to folklore. John Henry is one. I would say that Sterling Brown is one. He wrote an article on what he called “the slave seculars.” Alongside of the slave spirituals and so forth, you know, the theistic stuff, there were the slave seculars who were criticizing, who were making fun of that belief in God. So that’s what I’m drawing from. We found if one does the historical research that there are the accounts of people like Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne. They indicate that there were a lot of Black people who said they would not set foot in the church because they could not make sense of church beliefs and the continued oppression of Black people. So that tradition was there. But it was not very visible; it was not identified as a prominent part of the Black tradition. But if you understand the mechanism of oppression, it is very predictable. Oppression involves what I call the “VIP principle,” that is, the visibility, invisibility pattern. The oppressor is always going to make certain things very visible, very prominent. Ask kids how many have seen a school or street named after Booker T. Washington. Everybody raises his hand. But how many have seen a school or street named after W. E. B. Du Bois? In 1991, Martin Luther King’s birthday, January 15th, was also the day that George Bush said we’re going into Kuwait. They could not legitimate that by utilizing Martin Luther King. And so you go back and you listen to the tape and George Bush says that we’ve got to use any means necessary. As you will recall, Malcolm was widely criticized for urging Black liberation by any means necessary. So, notice what he did in order to legitimate that excursion into Kuwait. He went back and made Martin invisible on his birthday and made Malcolm visible in order to support the structures of oppression that they were trying to support. But that’s the tactic. An oppressor will make visible whatever helps to maintain the structures of oppression. They will keep invisible or undercover whatever undermines that structure.

YANCY: How does religious Black humanism differ from Jean Paul Sartre’s or Albert Camus’ humanism?

JONES: I think that they are very similar, but it is important to differentiate not so much because Camus and Sartre are operating on humanism as a response to oppression, which is not the same thing as the Enlightenment humanism as I will show you in a moment. They were also operating on the existentialist principles of contextualism, which, to me, is a going back to Protagoras’ principle. I make a distinction

between that kind of humanism and Enlightenment humanism, the humanism that is associated with thinkers like Paul Kurtz and so forth. There is a Black scholar, Norm R. Allen Jr., who works with Paul Kurtz. Allen edited a book on Black humanism, *African American Humanism: An Anthology*, which was published in 1991. I was not asked to participate in that. I guess it was because I’m endorsing a whole different kind of Black humanism. But anyway, go back and look at Enlightenment humanism. Enlightenment humanism developed out of a conflict between supernaturalism, on the one hand, and the new naturalism, the new scientific epistemology, on the other hand. What that humanism could not accomplish was how to fit in the new science, the new naturalism, with the old supernaturalism. African American humanism has nothing to do with the Enlightenment. The issue for African American humanism was/is the inability to connect logically and morally the oppression of Black people with this concept of God’s benevolence. It was the theodicy question that was the central issue that motivated or generated Black humanism. It was more of the epistemological issue that generated Enlightenment humanism. So, I begin from the Black religious humanism angle, not the Enlightenment humanism according to which Allen and Kurtz operated. I really find parts of Enlightenment humanism as part of the structure of oppression, of neo-racism.

YANCY: In terms of your educational background, you wrote your dissertation [*Sartre’s Ethics in Relation to his Philosophical Anthropology: A Criticism of Criticism*] on Sartre while at Brown University, right?

JONES: Right. I was in the religion department, but the dissertation is actually included in philosophy. At Brown, I had a NDEA fellowship, a National Defense Education Act fellowship for religion. That’s why I went into the religion department instead of philosophy. I worked with Stephen Karey and Wendell Deitrich on my dissertation.

YANCY: What made you decide to get your MDiv from Harvard?

JONES: When I graduated from undergraduate school, I received a Rockefeller trial year fellowship. The Rockefeller Foundation at that time was concerned because there was a paucity of what they thought were bright people going into the ministry. People were not considering ministry as a career option and they felt that sort of “dumbing down” of the ministry would have bad consequences. So they selected various people and we got to pick any seminary of our choice, and they paid all our expenses for that year. And all they asked us to do was to consider the possibility of going into the ministry. If we decided to go into the ministry, we would stay in the seminary and then complete the degree. I didn’t feel that I could make a decision about the ministry simply based on my first year. I thought that one really needed to be in a ministerial context, get some experience, and then decide. So I stayed on and did the MDiv, and then I worked for two years at an all-white church in Providence, Rhode Island, a wealthy, upper-class white church. However, after the first five or six months I recognized that I really wanted to teach rather than preach so I stayed there in Providence and got this NDEA fellowship to go to Brown University.

YANCY: Given that your dissertation was geared toward Sartre, in what way does his thought continue to shape your later philosophical concerns?

JONES: To me, Sartre has been much misunderstood. My dissertation did the following. And it’s not something that I would recommend. I tell students not to do this, but I started off with one thesis adviser who left the university. They then assigned someone else to me. That is important background. What I did was to take all of the criticisms against Sartre, and then developed a topology that rebutted all of those. So I was trying to show that all of these criticisms were wrong. Now

one of the criticisms that I was showing was wrong was an interpretation that my new thesis adviser thought was a correct interpretation. So, I literally had to show him that he was wrong in order to get my dissertation through. But there are many common criticisms of Sartre, which, to me, are simply wrong. And if you go back and do what I call “a descriptive apologetic,” an internal description of Sartre, it was easy to show that all of those criticisms were wrong. Now, what I learned from Sartre was in part this issue of the legitimacy and necessity of doing internal criticism, and doing accurate phenomenological description. Sartre is to me essentially a phenomenologist. And if you understand that, the criticisms that people have of him go by the board. For instance, if I am going to describe a phenomenon, then every item presents several different phenomenological angles. Anything is going to have more than one angle, right? So, if I am going to describe that item, I have to describe it from a multi-angular approach, I have to pick different angles of it, and describe them. Also some of these angles may be in contradiction with each other even though they are angles of the same object. For instance, I position a toilet tissue holder so that the people immediately in front of me can only see the circle, the two-dimensional geometrical figure. You can position it so that the circle is the only thing they can see. People on the side do not see a circle, they see a rectangle. So that one object, depending upon the context or angle, presents opposing descriptions. Now if you understand that you are doing phenomenology, that your description of something is going to have that kind of “contradiction,” then it shouldn’t be used as a way of saying that you are in contradiction with yourself. If I describe a circle over here and then I describe the rectangle, I am not in contradiction with myself. I’m only in contradiction if you interpret the circular description as definitive rather than simply one different angle. So, I’m trying to say that I approach Sartre as a phenomenologist, and that’s what I am doing. What I am doing is a multi-angular description of oppression. I can literally give you a very accurate description of oppression, because what we did was to look at every single instance of oppression that anybody brought forward, and then went through it to try to find the common dimensions of each one of those descriptions. My students call it the “JOG and JAM” model. JAM stands for the Jones Analytic Model, the core of which is JOG, the Jones Oppression Grid, and the Jones Oppression Grid is the phenomenology of oppression. From Camus, I became interested in the issue of theodicy and the metaphor of the plague as oppression. The notion of a plague is sort of a master symbol for me in terms of looking at oppression. In fact, the concept of a plague is another way of talking about a virus. I have a student, Billy Close, who is in criminology and he has helped me understand the concept of conceptual incarceration, which maintains that the angle or label from which we approach something has the consequence of imprisoning us to our oppression, that is, that there are certain concepts which support oppression. So an adequate phenomenology of oppression requires two things. You’ve got to go through and decode the institutional, economic, social, political, the so-called objective component of oppression. But that objective component, the institutional factor, is always linked together with what I call the subjective component, that is, the belief in value systems. So you also have to reduce oppression to its set of concepts, its *sine qua non* concepts. And that’s what I am saying we have done.

YANCY: How do we get younger Blacks in the field of philosophy?

JONES: First, I’m persuaded that if the economic, social, and political reduction of the oppression of Black people takes place that one of the byproducts of that will be an ascendancy of the principle of philosophy in Black culture.

YANCY: Sure. It works inversely, right?

JONES: Right. Second, I think part of it has to do with moving beyond this concept that reduces or equates Blackness or negritude with theism and/or the Black church. I think that is another important factor to counter. Because if you go back and look at philosophy in terms of Black thought in the United States, it has been associated primarily with a criticism of the Black church or Black religion. There’s no way to read Carter G. Woodson without seeing his *Miseducation of the Negro* as also talking about the mis-religion of the Negro. Go back and look at every one of those statements where he talks about the mis-education of the Negro. A contextual analysis will show you that in every one of those places he also mentions religion. If you go back and do a contextual analysis of the chapters themselves, at least three, perhaps four of them, they actually talk about religion. But what I found, and this is my reading of it, was back then because of the hegemony of the Black church, if he had attempted to do what I did in *Is God a White Racist?* he would have received a very negative response. So you sort of have to cloak this critique of mis-religion under the rubric of mis-education. But it’s right there.

YANCY: How does your identity relate to your overall philosophical world-view?

JONES: Now I’m not sure what you’re packing into “identity.”

YANCY: Exactly. How does Bill Jones’s own self-perception of who he is as an African American thinker in the world relate to his overall philosophical world-view?

JONES: That has to do with understanding my mission and purpose and so forth. As a young child, I started protesting oppression vis-à-vis my sisters, who tended to be rather domineering. Fighting against oppression as been the single, singular motivation, method, message of my research and my life. I’ve tried to show that that develops out of this predominance of oppression in Black culture. This is emotional for me, because Harriet Tubman has been a very crucial influence for me. If I were to pick a single Black heroine or hero, I always talk about Harriet Tubman, never Martin. I talk about Brer Rabbit and I talk about John Henry, those three figures, one real, the others fictional, one an animal symbol. Well, these encompass everything that I have been trying to do. You remember Harriet Tubman. She was a slave and she got her freedom. And one of the most glowing accounts of freedom that I came across was when she described how very different the very world looked, how different things are when she is looking at the sky, for example, from a context of freedom in contrast with looking at the same objects when she was a slave. And please note that I am operating on the premise that no matter what you and I do, we always try to legitimate our positions, and that you and I are normally in denial of our oppressions. We do not normally identify ourselves as oppressors, even though I’m aware of the fact that the only way we could be living here is for us to have adopted an oppressor relation in respect to some other life form. So, when she said that she tried to justify and legitimate her being free and other people still being enslaved, she said that every legitimation she came up with echoed in her mind and in her heart as the same legitimation that the oppressor had used to legitimate her being a slave and his being free. The point here is that when she began to look at her situation of freedom, of affluence, she recognized that she was in that hierarchical position and that the only legitimation that she could come up with was the kind of oppressive legitimation that she had heard earlier. So based on that she said she had to go back and give back. These aren’t her exact words, but I think you understand the philosophy. Reaching that level of freedom required her, obliged her, to go back and reduce the oppression of other people or otherwise she would simply be continuing the

oppression that she had gotten from under. So she did. She went back and she gave back and she never stopped. You know she had this ailment, these headaches, very painful headaches that were the result of her white master hitting her over the head with a stick or a blunt object. These headaches never left her. She talks about reaching this situation where she became weary. You know, old folks make a distinction between being tired and being weary. Tiredness is when you've worked, when you're exhausted, you have used your muscles and your body to the point of exhaustion and you need to rest, relax, restore yourself so that you can go back and pick up the task again. Weariness, however, means something else. And I learned this from my father when he was suffering from cancer. They arrested the cancer and seventeen years later they wanted to subject him to what I call "survival medication," and he didn't want that. He said, "Billy, I'm weary." He did not say that he was "tired," but weary, which meant that he wanted to rest, not to take up the battle again. He just wanted to rest, to sleep, just to stop the whole rat race. So, imagine Harriet Tubman. She's having all these headaches. Yet, she's devoted her whole life to getting people free, and so she asks herself, "When can this be the last trip, when can I stop the underground railroad and rest?" And she said every time that she tried to justify this as the last trip, the only way she could do it was to picture herself, her pain, her willingness as having more value, more importance than the people who were still not free. I don't know any way to get out of that. I'm an asthmatic, I'm permanently disabled with it, and how do you justify not continuing the struggle at a certain level of energy, even with that disability, without concluding that my disability has more importance than the oppression of other people? What I am trying to say is that this concern about oppression, this effort to protest it and set up programs that eradicate it, which has sort of been my life struggle, leaves me in the situation where I still haven't been able to establish the anti-oppression value of my setting aside certain kinds of facilities and so forth for myself to accommodate my disability. I've done it but if you ask me to justify that, and to show that the special care I give myself, the special equipment that I have in my house for my asthma, to show that that is not a continuation of the oppression of other people because I have not taken those resources and so forth and devoted it to their liberation rather than the handling of my disability, I have no moral justification for that.

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### Books

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Jones, William R. "Toward an Interim Assessment of Black Theology." *The Christian Century* 89 (May 3, 1972). (A prediction of

the evolutionary tilt of Black theology as a neoteric discipline). (R) Jones, William R. "Reconciliation and Liberation in Black Theology: Some Implications for Religious Education," *Religious Education* 67 (September-October 1972): 384–88. (Defends the hypothesis that how a theologian ranks orders these categories is predictive of her/his tilt towards social quietism). (R)

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Jones, William R. "Crisis in Philosophy: The Black Presence," *Radical Philosophers' News Journal* (August 1974): 40–45. (The causality and implication of the under-representation of Blacks in the discipline of philosophy and the foundation for the establishment of the first Committee on Blacks in the American Philosophical Association). (R) (Reprinted in: *Proceedings and Addresses of American-Philosophical Association* XLVII, 1973–74.)

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Jones, William R. "The Case for Black Theology." In *Black Theology II*, edited by William R. Jones and Calvin E. Bruce. Bucknell Press, 1978. (Defense of religious humanism as a legitimate and necessary expression of African American religion).

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Jones, William R. "The Religious Legitimation of Counterviolence: Insights from Latin American Liberation Theology." In *The Terrible Meek: Revolution and Religion in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Lonnie D. Kliever. 189–215. New York: Paragon Press, 1987. (Protest, marked by counter-violence, will be the future response of the oppressed to the violence inherent in a situation of oppression).

Jones, William R. "Moral Decision-making in a Post-Modern World: Implications for Value Education in Unitarian-Universalism." In *Unitarian-Universalism 1985: Selected Essays*, edited by Wayne Arnason. 31–52. Boston: Papercraft Printing Co., 1985. (Critique of the neo-fundamentalism and the religious right as preaching moral absolutism but practicing situation ethics, their definition of moral nihilism). (R, I)

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Jones, William R. "Intercultural Diversity, Diversity, Divisiveness, and Dialogue: The Religious Connection." In *Global Outreach: Global Congress of the World's Religions: 1982–83*, edited by Henry O. Thompson. (1987): 81–98. (Authentic pluralism is the only antidote for the intercultural conflict of the post-modern world). (I)

Jones, William R. "Hypocrisy, Bureaucracy, and Democracy: Implications for Gays and Lesbians in the Military." In *The Christian Argument for Gays and Lesbians in the Military: Essays by Mainline Church Leaders*, edited by John J. Carey. 37–44. Queenston, Ontario: Mellen University Press, 1993. (An argument of internal criticism demonstrates that the religious and moral rejection of gay and lesbians rights is hypocritical and contradictory). (I)

Jones, William R. "The New Three R's." In *The Transient and the Permanent in Unitarian Universalism, Vol. II*, edited by Jan Seymour-Ford. (1995): 161–76. (Advances a new model of conflict reduction for the post-modern world). (I)

\* (R) = Refereed, (I) = Invited

## Remembering William R. Jones (1933–2012): Philosopher and Freedom Fighter

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To write about Professor William R. Jones is for me to write about a man who was more than a scholar, more than a historic figure, more than a friend, and definitely more like a relative. His passing is a loss for so many. It is a blow to a profession and a discipline in addition to many erstwhile political causes. And given his love for his wider community and family, it is also, for many of us who loved him, a profoundly personal loss.

I will move from the professional to the personal, which, for Professor Jones, as we all knew him, was never neatly separate. I encountered Jones in perhaps the best way one should with a philosopher: through his work. His ideas were instrumental in the later parts of my dissertation, which was later revised into my first book, *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism*. The part entitled "God in an Antiracist World" was inspired by his important book *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (1973; reprinted in 1997), which I first read in the course "Black Theology," a course I took at Yale Divinity School under the instruction of one of my mentors, M. Shawn Copeland, who now teaches at Boston College. That classic work was Jones's devastating critique of James Cone's and others' articulation of Jesus's symbolic location as a champion of the oppressed. The history of Black suffering doesn't bear that out, he insisted. Black liberation theology required, he argued, a rigorous engagement with theodicy. Such an exploration would reveal the classic problem of responsibility and free will, where human agency must be considered for the path of any commitment to social transformation and liberation—the project, that is, of bringing some semblance of heaven on earth.

Jones's thought had a profound impact on me. He raised a problem that led to my asking a different kind of question. As he asked the reader to consider what to do if G-d were a white racist, I began to question the mediation of deities in terms of self-reflection, especially from the actual behavior of people of faith: Must G-d, in other words, be in their image? If G-d could never be in their image, and if they could never hope but to echo G-d's as an ethical hope (the Jewish view), then another conundrum emerges, especially when one reflects on the troubling history of gender and race: How is Black female love of a non-female deity possible?

That consideration was a clue to a problem in many models of ethics: the presupposition of similarity as a condition for responsibility and love. What if such commitment and devotion could be premised on *difference*? If so, wouldn't that pose a radical consideration of responsibility for those who use difference as an excuse instead of an opportunity for an ethical extension of the hand and the heart?

I continued reading Jones's work, and I was struck by his activist-oriented scholarship. He articulated a demand for "Black philosophy," as it was at that time called, well in his challenging essays "Crisis in Philosophy: The Black Presence," in the *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association XLVII* (1973), and "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations," published in *The Philosophical Forum IX* (1978). These writings brought to the fore his astute understanding that every liberation struggle, every fight for social justice, also involves exploration of their epistemic and theoretical conditions. In his own way, he identified a problem of philosophy often overlooked by its practitioners from racially and ethnically dominant groups:

philosophy was not immune to colonial dynamics, and some of those also involved lying to itself about its relationship to things human.

Looking further, I learned that this was a theme throughout Bill's thought. A graduate of Howard University, he was once a devote Protestant who achieved his M.Div at Harvard University and was transformed by the contradictions of a religion of love issuing so much hate in practice. This concern brought him to the Unitarian Church, but his unease continued. A self-critique was necessary, and he offered such in his Brown University dissertation, "On Sartre's Critical Methodology" (1967). What he appreciated about the thought of Sartre and other existentialists was their quest for radical self-critique, a practice they extended to the study of thought and society. It was this methodological concern that led to his writing *Is God an Antiblack Racist?* when he taught at Yale Divinity School in the early 1970s.

There are stories, some of which are apocrypha, on whether that challenging—and to some, shocking—treatise led to his leaving Yale, an institution at which he was an award-winning faculty member. What is clear is that it led him, with his wife and two sons, to Florida State University at Tallahassee, where he was professor of religion (focusing on philosophy of religion) and the founder of the Afro-American studies program. I will return shortly to some of the consequences of this move.

I began my career as an assistant professor of philosophy and African American studies at Purdue University. While there, my colleagues Renée T. White and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and I had decided to organize a conference on Frantz Fanon in 1995 in celebration of what would have been Fanon's seventieth year. We sent out a call for papers, and as the conference neared, I received an unusual phone call.

"Dr. Gordon," the caller queried, "I would like to know if it's too late for me to submit an abstract to present a paper at the conference. I'm a great admirer of Fanon's thought, and I would appreciate the opportunity to participate."

I responded that "We have quite a number of presentations, but I will see what I could do, depending on what you would like to present. What is your name?"

"Bill Jones," he said. "Some people know me as William R. Jones."

There was a long silence. "One moment," I replied. I then walked out of my office and spoke to my colleagues in African American studies, who included Leonard Harris, and explained who was on the phone asking to participate in the meeting.

On my return, I explained to Professor Jones that I was a great admirer of his work and it would be an honor not only for him to participate but also for him to do so as our keynote. With typical modesty, he laughed and said that would be fine but that he insisted on paying his own way and participating as any other presenter at the meeting. So, we had William R. Jones, without fanfare, at what was the conference that led to the publication of *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (1996). Remarkably, he was ill at the time and had showed up with his oxygen tank ready to go.

Jones's keynote was memorable, but for me it was the beginning of what was also a filial relationship, the transformation into "Professor Jones" simply becoming, for me, "Bill." My favorite memory is of picking him up from the airport in Indianapolis. I had also picked up Paget Henry of Brown University on the same trip. As I drove to West Lafayette, talking about how delighted I was to have the editor of *The C.L.R. James Journal* and the author of *Is God a White Racist?* attending our conference, I turned to address Paget and saw him crouched over in a near fetal position in his seat.

"Are you OK?" I asked.

"You're driving too fast!" Paget said.

"This is Indiana," I answered. "Look—the other cars are passing us on the highway." I looked back at Bill and asked if he were OK.

He smiled gently and said, "I'm from Kentucky. This is slow driving there."

Such was the beginning of the transformation of our relationship into a close friendship of nearly two decades.

If asked what he was first and foremost, Bill often said he was a secular humanist. He devoted his life to struggles against dehumanization across the globe as a participant in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, and the fight for egalitarian education worldwide. He mentored scores of graduate students, many of whom were from underrepresented communities, to the completion of their doctoral degrees, and he was proverbially "there" for so many people in need that he once lamented to me that he wished it were not at the expense of his relationship with some of those closest to him.

Bill was not only a gentleman. He was also a *gentle man*. That is to say that he paid attention to everyone with unusual patience and tenderness. Nothing made him happier than to see another human being flourish.

I have a picture of Bill in my living room. It's of him with a joyous smile at my wedding. One of the things he mentioned at the ceremony was the importance of unions once thought impossible serving as revolutionary beacons of hope. My wife is a descendant of European Jews who moved to South Africa. I am of Irish and Palestinian Jews who, when they moved to Jamaica, married Afro-Jamaicans, Chinese Jamaican migrants, and Tamil Indians who were former indentured servants. My wife's Jewish family had become white. Mine became Black. A decade earlier, it would have been illegal for us to marry in her parents' country, even though we are both Jews. And in the US for most of Bill's life, it was the same.

I was honored to be the featured speaker at Bill's retirement celebration in 1999. Organized by his former student, the award-winning novelist Monifa Love and her husband, the late Ed Love, the event included many proclamations that revealed Bill's impact on the state of Florida, the country, and the globe. There is a William R. Jones Day in the city of Tallahassee and another for the state, and numerous scholarships and honors in his name. There was a theater full of students, colleagues, politicians, friends, and relatives. But the powerful close to the meeting was the man himself. He voiced his appreciation for our gathering in his honor, and then he reflected on two aspirations that animated his life. The first was love. The second, which he articulated with trembling lips, as his large, penetrating eyes seemed to wonder reflectively and panoramically over the struggles, the humiliations endured and the battles lost and won, was, simply but profoundly put, in his powerful words,

"... freedom,

"freedom,

"freedom. . . ."

Bill kept his eyes on the prize. We are fortunate to have had such a guiding spirit in the world of philosophy. As with the challenge he posed to Black theology, we may wish to take his counsel to heart and reflect on the responsibility we have for the knowledge we seek and produce as we face a world we not only try to understand but also change.

Thank you, Bill, for proverbially more than you could ever know.

## ***On the Occasion of William R. Jones's Death: Remembering the Feuerbachian Tradition in African-American Social Thought***

**Stephen C. Ferguson II**

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On Friday, July 13, 2012, just four days short of his seventy-ninth birthday, William Ronald Jones, one of the tallest trees in our philosophical forest, died. Born July 17, 1933, in Louisville, Kentucky, he was one of six children born to Lannie (Brogsdale) and Henry Jones, a letter carrier for the post office.<sup>1</sup> Jones's magnum opus *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology* (IGWR) is a must read for all who are committed to advancing the struggle for a new society; a life without religious illusions; a new future without racial dominance and oppression, sexism, and class exploitation.

I recall first meeting Dr. Jones during the early 1990s at Mizzou (University of Missouri–Columbia). John McClendon, the director of the Black Culture Center on campus, invited Jones to give a talk. Since that time, I had many occasions to talk with Dr. Jones about Christianity, oppression, philosophical anthropology, humanism, interpretations of biblical scripture, philosophical materialism, Black theology, philosophy of religion, and how these matters relate to African American history and culture. I always felt fortunate to share moments with this philosophical giant in my search for philosophical truth.

On many occasions since his death, I have thought about the man who was always generous with his time and open to “cuss and discuss.” When I first met Jones, I had no idea how he had fought against racist practices as a day-to-day norm in philosophy departments throughout the country. His efforts in the American Philosophical Association (APA) turned stumbling blocks into stepping-stones for the current generation of African American philosophers. During the span of the turbulent 1960s, he was one of only four African Americans to receive the PhD in philosophy; in addition to Jones, we have Francis A. Thomas (Indiana University, 1960), Berkeley Eddins (University of Michigan, 1961), and Joyce Mitchell Cook (Yale University, 1965). Jones played a seminal role in the creation of the APA Subcommittee on Blacks in Philosophy. Mainly through the subcommittee, he incessantly took—in the words of John Coltrane—“Giant Steps” to increase the presence of Black people in professional philosophy. He also wielded his pen against the “cancer of racism” festering in the profession. In this regard, two significant articles, “Crisis in Philosophy: The Black Presence” and “The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations” embarked on a lacerating assault on critics who called into question the existence and validity of a Black philosophy.

Jones received a BA in philosophy (*magna cum laude*) from Howard University in 1955. For Black philosophers of Jones's generation, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) formed the intellectual foundation for their development into academic African American philosophers.<sup>2</sup> At Morehouse, for example, Samuel W. Williams, George Kelsey, and Williams Stuart Nelson served as philosophical mentors to a young Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>3</sup> Samuel W. Williams served as chair of philosophy and religion from 1947 to 1970. Williams, Nelson, and Kelsey helped King to cultivate his understanding of the civil rights movement and the philosophy of nonviolence. In addition to meeting Gandhi and starting the Gandhi Memorial Series, Nelson was the first person to formally teach a course in the philosophy of nonviolence on a college campus. It was also Nelson who started the academic journal *The Journal of*

*Religious Thought*.<sup>4</sup> What is most evident is that many African American academic philosophers adjoined to HBCUs were not ivory tower intellectuals; they were engaged in the politics of social change as well as efforts to bring philosophy to the broader African American community.

Howard University's department of philosophy historically has been seen as the “capstone” of African American philosophy.<sup>5</sup> There is a long list of individuals who were either students or on the philosophy faculty at Howard: Lewis Baxter Moore, Carlton Lee, Forest Oran Wiggins, Samuel Williams, William Banner, Alain Locke, Eugene Clay Holmes, Joyce Mitchell Cook, William R. Jones, Winston K. McAllister, Albert Dunham, Percy Johnston, and Cornelius Golightly.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to teaching Latin, pedagogy, psychology, and education, Lewis Baxter Moore taught philosophy and established the philosophy department at Howard University. Locke joined the faculty at Howard in 1912, leaving only once to earn his PhD in philosophy from Harvard in 1918. (He was fired by Howard's white president J. Stanley Durkee in 1925, and returned in 1928 under its first Black president, Mordecai Wyatt Johnson.) After Moore, Locke became chair of the department of philosophy and held this position until his retirement in 1953.<sup>7</sup>

During Jones's undergraduate years at Howard, he came in contact with many pioneering African-American philosophers such as Winston K. McAllister, William Augustus Banner, and Eugene Clay Holmes.<sup>8</sup> In fact, McAllister served as a mentor to Jones after Jones switched his undergraduate major from engineering to philosophy. After Alain Locke's retirement from Howard in 1953, the Black Marxist philosopher Holmes became the chair of the philosophy department.<sup>9</sup> Jones recounts,

I didn't understand [Eugene] Holmes that much. He was way, way above me in terms of my understanding of philosophy at that time . . . I took elementary logic and symbolic logic from [Winston K.] McAllister. I took his course in ethics. The history of philosophy I think I took from Holmes. Holmes did a course on the pre-Socratics, which was my introduction to the Sophists and so forth. He didn't stress the Sophists, but he gave great emphasis to the naturalists. But that was my introduction to Protagoras and that became a critical piece of my eventual philosophical outlook.<sup>10</sup>

He continues,

The issues that the faculty in philosophy at Howard were dealing with at that time were not focusing on oppression per se, but it was more classical philosophy and the like. Alain Locke had done some work on cultural pluralism and so forth, and McAllister did some courses on ethics, but McAllister taught logic, and so forth, so my introduction was basically to logic, logical positivism, and so forth. Keep in mind that Holmes also identified himself at that time as a Marxist so I got a little splattering of that. But the main impact from McAllister and Holmes was to solidify philosophy as an appropriate and useful pursuit for African Americans interested in the struggle. They didn't themselves focus on that particular issue, but I did begin to see how I could take these kinds of tools and skills and develop an arsenal against oppression.<sup>11</sup>

Upon receiving a Rockefeller trial year fellowship, Jones would go on to receive a masters of divinity from Harvard University in 1958. Afterwards, he served for two years as a minister at an all-white church in Providence, Rhode Island. In 1969, Jones completed a PhD in religious studies from Brown University. Because he was only able to procure graduate funding through

a National Defense Education Act fellowship, Jones had to do graduate studies in religion rather than philosophy. Working with Stephen Karey and Wendell Deitrich, he completed his dissertation titled *Sartre's Philosophical Anthropology in Relation to his Ethics: A Criticism of Selected Critics*. Four years after completing his doctorate, while teaching at Yale Divinity School, the “scandalous” book *Is God a White Racist?* was unveiled to public scrutiny.<sup>12</sup> The first edition, published in 1973, was a part of the C. Eric Lincoln Series on Black Religion. (It was later reprinted by Beacon Press in 1998.) He certainly had some apprehensions about writing the book, as he writes in the prologue,

Think not, as you read these pages, that they were conceived in certainty and ease. Fear and trembling, confusion and doubt gave them birth. And if my words bespeak an irreverent iconoclasm and profane dissent for the sake of notoriety, they contradict my conscious motives.<sup>13</sup>

With this book, Jones took on the role of a gadfly awakening Black theology—the big sleeping horse—from its dogmatic slumber.

I can remember the first time I sat down to read my used, worn copy of IGWR in 1995. I applied my mind to tackling his argument with such delight! Jones skillfully exposes the “logical potholes” and “unsound detours” of Black liberation theology. Jones argues, “the purpose and first step of a theology of liberation is to effect a radical conversion of the mind of the oppressed, to free his mind from those destructive and enslaving beliefs that stifle the movement toward liberation.”<sup>14</sup> As he surveyed the Black theological terrain, he focused on the implications of the biblical concept of suffering. He provides penetrating insights into what he terms the “harder the Cross, [the] brighter the crown” theodicy. From this ideological perspective, Black people are god’s chosen vessel and, by implication, Black suffering is god’s means of disciplining him for their divine task. James masterfully argues,

theodicy leads ultimately to quietism, to the acceptance of one’s own suffering and that of others. To explain this point necessitates that we discuss the meaning of quietism. . . . Namely, it is to choose to act in a way that preserves and conserves what is already present; quietism, in the final analysis, collapses into a posture of conformity. From another side, quietism is the refusal to undertake corrective action, especially where basic cultural practices and institutional structures are at issue.<sup>15</sup>

So, the “harder the Cross, [the] brighter the crown” theodicy logically leads to political quietism. Consequently, oppression as a form of suffering becomes a form of positive suffering. Jones’s observations on quietism are similar to the Communist statesman and philosopher Lenin: “Those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient while here on earth, and to take comfort in the hope of a heavenly reward. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man.”<sup>16</sup>

Since my first reading, I have returned to this masterpiece at least ten times. Every time I have read this book I reach the same conclusion: without any sense of hyperbole, IGWR is by far one of the most important philosophical books written in the last fifty years! Whether we measure it against John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* (1971) or Cornel West’s *Race Matters* (1994) or Martha Nussbaum’s *Sex and Social Justice* or Carole Pateman’s *Sexual Contract* (1988) or Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) or Michel Foucault’s *Archaeology of*

*Knowledge* (1969), it is simply a profound and profane book. The real tragedy is that no philosophy or theology journal has hosted a special issue dedicated to Jones’s book. He wasn’t given an endowed chair—the Holy Grail of philosophy—much less anything like a Guggenheim Fellowship to support his philosophical research and scholarship. Jones was left to live a relatively modest life, teaching and traveling to various conferences, cities, and countries.

By raising the question “Is God a White Racist?” Jones brings to the forefront the problem of theodicy for Black liberation theology. In relationship to Black theology, theodicy is focused on the Black suffering affixed to racism in contradistinction to the notion that god is omnibenevolent as well as omnipotent. How can we explain Black oppression and exploitation if god is all-good and all-powerful? Is god on the side of Black people? Jones astutely critiques the pivotal assumptions and presumptions of Black Christian liberation theologians and the corresponding implications for formulating a Black theology.

While the etymology of the word theodicy (that is, god’s justice) serves as a point of departure, Jones emphasizes that theodicy is more than the attempt to exonerate and justify god’s purpose and work in light of the existence of human suffering brought about by either natural and moral evil. Most importantly, it is a concern to determine the cause of human suffering. To bring the point closer to home, we could raise the following questions: how could an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly benevolent god allow the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina to happen to so many innocent Black people? Was Hurricane Katrina an act of god? The mere sight of swollen bodies floating in flooded streets, citizens trapped on rooftops awaiting rescue that for many never arrived, and thousands of starving people crowded in the Superdome and the New Orleans Convention Center or stranded on highway overpasses raises in a profound manner the question of theodicy. Does the existence of unnecessary suffering witnessed during Hurricane Katrina pose an evidential challenge to the existence of god? So many people prayed with all their heart for water, food, and shelter, and most importantly for their very lives, but where was god? Is god dead? The many stories of horrible afflictions associated with undeserved suffering chronicled in Spike Lee’s phenomenal 2006 documentary film *When the Levees Broke* seems to be a representative case for posing the question, is god a white racist?

So, while we are discussing the issue of “divine racism,” it is important to recognize that we have abstracted from the class dimensions to Hurricane Katrina. Most discussions of the suffering caused by Hurricane Katrina, in my estimation, have been hampered by a rather restrictive ideological scope, viz., focusing exclusively on the role of race and racism. This approach requires, by way of analysis, defining racism and national oppression *without* due consideration given to the *material* context of social relations of production and the state as an instrument of the ruling class. It is important to emphasize the *material* context for the critical investigation of racism and national oppression, constituted in the dialectic relationship of bourgeois civil society with the capitalist state. I contend that an analysis of the devastation brought about by Hurricane Katrina must have as its starting point that racism and national oppression are grounded on class exploitation. Talk about how and whether “race matters” obscures the role of class in racial disparities.<sup>17</sup> As Adolph Reed has poignantly noted, “It’s certainly true that George W. Bush and his minions are indifferent to, or contemptuous of, black Americans in general. They’re contemptuous of *anyone* who is not part of the ruling class.” Reed continues,

To paraphrase historian Barbara Fields, race is a language through which American capitalism's class contradictions are commonly expressed. Class will almost certainly turn out to be a better predictor than race of who was able to evacuate, who drowned, who was left to fester in the Superdome or on overpasses, who is stuck in shelters in Houston or Baton Rouge, or who is randomly dispersed to the four winds. I'm certain that class is also a better predictor than race of whose emotional attachments to place will be factored into plans for reconstructing the city.<sup>18</sup>

So, the material reality of Hurricane Katrina is precisely the basis for the paradox confronting Black liberation theologians. Our immediate (perceptual) observations of Black oppression offer no conclusive answers about god's position on Black oppression. God could stand on either side; god could just as well support or oppose Black oppression. When we come to terms with the reality that god's benevolence is not self-evident, then we are left with a profound sense of uncertainty—every alleged instance of "divine agape" can also be interpreted as "divine malice." Jones astutely posits,

Any given occurrence of human suffering harmonizes equally well with antithetical positions, divine favor or disfavor, God's grace or God's curse. Moreover, if it is allowed that the general category of human suffering raises the possibility of a demonic deity, then the particular category of black suffering—and this is the crucial point for the argument—at least suggest the possibility of divine racism, a particular form of hostility.<sup>19</sup>

For Jones, the concept of multievidentiality serves as a method of empirical scrutiny that highlights the ambiguity of events in life. Jones employs the concept of multievidentiality as a covering principle for the plurality of conflicting theological interpretations that are adjoined to real (empirically observable) human history. Consequently, a theological interpretation, given its multievidentiality, has an attendant ambiguity with respect to the assessment of Black oppression. Any given occurrence of human suffering harmonizes equally well with antithetical positions, divine favor or disfavor, god's grace or god's curse. So, ultimately, we are forced to answer the question, how do we understand god's motives?

Despite the heart-wrenching nature of his critique, for years Jones's book has been virtually ignored by Black liberation theologians because of its subversive character. To the extent that James H. Cone, the leading figure in Black liberation theology, felt it was sufficient to address Jones's critique, he left it to a footnote in *God of the Oppressed*. Cone displays a rather insouciant attitude towards Jones's internal criticism of Black liberation theology. So, while Jones's argument was "persuasive," Cone contends that Jones distorted his position. Moreover, Cone contends empirical evidence is never a reliable basis for biblical truth. Jones's razor-sharp argument received the same treatment by the public intellectual and religious philosopher Cornel West. Ironically, Jones is reduced to a footnote of Black religious thought.<sup>20</sup>

*Is God a White Racist?* reflected Jones's conversion from "Black Christian fundamentalism" to "Black religious humanism." When I was an undergraduate, in a fashion similar to Jones, I grappled with an agonizing dilemma: Should I hold fast to those religious beliefs that my family upbringing imprinted on my being as absolute, infallible, and divinely ordained? Or should I make an "epistemological break" from religious dogma and embrace the freedom of atheism and philosophical materialism?

While Marxist critiques of religion (from Marx to Lenin to Nkrumah) brilliantly expressed my misgivings about the limitations of religious consciousness and institutions, few philosophical works critically confronted the particularity of Black theology and religion. Jones forced me to grapple intellectually with several questions. Can Black religion function as an instrument of liberation? Or do all forms of religious theism lead to political quietism? In the tradition of George Washington Woodbey, is it possible to translate religious dogma into a socialist political platform without some form of eclecticism, logical contradiction, intellectual dishonesty, or political opportunism?<sup>21</sup> Would the attempt to bring together religious theism and socialism produce some sort of Frankenstein concoction "to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on"?<sup>22</sup>

After reading Jones's IGWR and John A. T. Robinson's *Honest to God* in conjunction with Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Nkrumah, I had no choice but to cross through the "fiery brook" and adopt atheism and philosophical materialism.<sup>23</sup> Marx famously wrote, "There is no other road to truth and freedom except that leading through the fiery brook."<sup>24</sup> Here Marx was making a clever play on the name of the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) whose name literally means a fiery stream or brook. Feuerbach played a seminal role in Marx's criticism of Hegel's objective idealism. Marx at once owed a debt to Feuerbach and transcended his anthropological humanism.

Feuerbach had a profound impact on the nineteenth-century generation of German intellectuals, including Karl Marx. Along with the other radical Hegelians, Marx was trying to find a way in which the German revolution could take place. The French Revolution had taken place, but Germany, still a feudal empire (Prussian empire) with various provinces and no national unity, lagged behind the rest of Western European thought and practice. The radical (or left) Hegelians sought to develop Hegel's philosophy so that his rational principle and the development of freedom could be concretely manifested. So they attempted to apply Hegel's principles to the contemporary German scene. The critique of Hegel, by the radical Hegelians, had as its point of departure the critique of religion. The political struggle of their generation was against the church as an instrument of the state. Consequently, the radical Hegelians were seen as a threat to the state.<sup>25</sup>

Feuerbach was one of the seminal philosophers associated with the radical Hegelian movement in Germany. In contrast to the "abstract and abstruse Hegelianising" by the radical Hegelians such as Max Stirner, D. Strauss, Bruno Bauer, and others, Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* ushered in a revolution in philosophical thought. In the oft-quoted words of Engels,

Then came Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. With one blow it pulverised the contradiction, in that without circumlocutions it placed materialism on the throne again. . . . The spell was broken; the "system" was exploded and cast aside. . . . One must himself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians.<sup>26</sup>

Although he began his career as an enthusiastic follower of Hegel, Feuerbach emerged in the 1840s as a leader of the radical Hegelians who, inspired by the revolutionary political spirit sweeping over Europe, employed the critical side of Hegel's philosophy to undermine the reactionary alliance of philosophy, state, and Christianity in Germany.

Hegel's philosophical architectonic makes theology into philosophy, and theology becomes a more rational project.

Where philosophy is *speculative* for Hegel, philosophy for Feuerbach is *contemplative*. Feuerbach informs us that Hegel's absolute is only a rational reconstruction of god. Here Feuerbach unearths the pitfalls of Hegel's speculative philosophy. Feuerbach, on the other hand, strived to take theology and give it a new content via anthropology, that is, a theology of anthropology. So, for Feuerbach, it is not god who created man, rather man creates god. Religion is a form of alienated consciousness. What becomes god is humanity. He wants to have a humanistic theology. Here we can see the parallels to Jones's IGWR. In spite of the earth-shattering implications of his critique, Jones is still trapped within the framework of theology via "humanocentric theism."

The limits of Feuerbach's anthropological materialism were subject to criticism in Marx and Engel's *The German Ideology*. They argued that Feuerbach was content to make the critique within the framework of theology. Despite the incipient materialism of Feuerbach's philosophy, he stops short of fully adopting philosophical materialism. As Feuerbach notes, "Backwards I fully agree with the materialists; but not forwards."<sup>27</sup> Marx and Engels were fervent adherents to the humanism of Feuerbach. But Feuerbach did not pursue a consistently materialist line. On the whole he did not overcome the contemplative nature of pre-Marxist materialism because in his understanding of history he remained entirely wedded to idealism. Marx and Engels brilliantly sum this up in *The German Ideology*: "As far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history he is not a materialist. With him materialism and history diverge completely."<sup>28</sup>

What Feuerbach does not do is reject theology in principle. He rejects Hegel's idealist theology for what he calls an anthropological theology, where theology has human beings at the center rather than a supernatural being named god. Marx contends this is problematic. From a materialist standpoint, Feuerbach's critique is important but insufficient. Feuerbach does produce an inversion of the Hegelian project. Yet, the materialist inversion is insufficient if it does not go beyond the confines of religion and philosophy. Marx, in turn, offers us his "Theses on Feuerbach." Philosophy is an insufficient instrument for social transformation. This does not mean scrapping philosophy in toto. Philosophy is necessary. Yet, philosophy must be sublated (*aufheben*) by social scientific investigation. The negation of philosophy is not the rejection of philosophy; rather, it is the recognition of the limits of philosophy as a field of inquiry. Marx envisions the necessity of political economy and historical science for the inquiry into concrete social relations and practices.

In my estimation, Jones should be considered the "Ludwig Feuerbach" of African American thought. Jones's constructive internal criticism of Black liberation theology brought to the forefront the issues of theodicy, quietism, and Black religion I was hungry for. Readings of IGWR played a seminal role in my conclusion that religious consciousness was a weak response to the continued suffering of working-class and oppressed people throughout the world. The only viable response to suffering was the elimination of racial domination, class exploitation, and sexual oppression by attacking the social (material) institutions and behaviors that upheld them.

One of the problems confronting Jones's overall project was his desire to formulate a "new God category that was not at cross-purposes with the demands of liberation theology."<sup>29</sup> In the final section of IGWR, "Toward a Black Theodicy for Today," Jones outlines what he terms, "humanocentric theism"—a form of humanism that is an alternative *religious* perspective. As Jones later observed, the wedding of humanism and theism was

not without critics from both champions of religious (theism) and humanist perspective. As Jones notes,

This stance [that is, religious humanism] puts me in opposition to those humanists who regard religion as an illusion, who seek to negate the divine reality as the necessary precondition for affirming the humanist gospel of human freedom, and who interpret the history of religion as only an instrument of oppression and dehumanization.<sup>30</sup>

I found myself in a state of confusion. Did I grossly misinterpret Jones's affirmation of the *functional ultimacy* of the human being, that is, the radical freedom and autonomy (from god) of humankind? How could Jones engage in the most beautiful examples of dialectical criticism of Christian theism and not be an atheist? What exactly is the soteriology that Jones is offering? Was Jones trying to have his cake and eat it too? Why would Jones offer "Black religious humanism" as a panacea to Black liberation theology?

I had to come to terms with the fact that the outcome of Jones's idealism was not to abolish religion, but rather to perfect it. Jones—similarly to Feuerbach—sought to have philosophy absorbed in religion. Jones was not able to turn the "critique of heaven" into a "critique of earth." While his critique of Black liberation theology pointed in the direction of humanism, his "theology of humanism" could not recognize the philosophical value of materialism, that is, the necessity of a concrete investigation of concrete conditions.

I reached the same conclusion that Marx had reached—in regard to Feuerbach—as he settled accounts with his idealist philosophical conscience. For Marx, it was not enough to criticize religion. Religion as a form of social consciousness was a product of social (material) conditions. In order to change religious consciousness, Marx argued we must change the material conditions that give rise to the need for religious consciousness.

In a similar manner, I concluded that if we subject Jones's philosophical critique of Black liberation theology to a process of sublation via a materialist critique, the stage is set to move beyond *individual salvation* within the framework of theology to *collective liberation* based on a concrete analysis of concrete condition. My external criticism (ideological critique) of Jones would unveil that all theological categories prove to be inadequate for the task of illuminating material (empirical) relationships and institutions that are in substance a matter of social practices, which constitute Black oppression in all of its complexity. Uncovering the basis of class exploitation and racist oppression has to extend beyond theological categories such as sin and suffering in all of its forms. In other words, the notions of redemptive suffering, suffering servant, and suffering due to punishment for sin offer nothing to our social analysis or historical interpretation of real life conditions. They tell us about god's relationship to the human condition but nothing of the human condition apart from the presumptions about god's involvement with humans.

In many respects, his *philosophical* investigations into oppression—after IGWR—were attempts to move beyond the confines of theological explanations for human suffering. While I never shared my conclusions with Jones, I'm sure he would be more than happy to "cuss and discuss" my overall position. In spite of my criticisms, I hope the reader can appreciate Jones's tremendous contribution to a larger discussion about African American atheism and humanism as it relates to Black theology. In my estimation, his legacy looms large over the Black philosophical landscape. The full life and death of Jones awaits historians of philosophy; I just hope sooner rather than later.

Notes

1. 1940 Census, Louisville, Jefferson County, Kentucky, Population Schedule, Enumeration District (ED) 121-310A, Sheet 5A.
2. Although there are to date a number of studies on individual African American philosophers, there are no general histories on African American philosophers. As late as 2001 Kuklick, in his text on philosophy in the United States (which covers over three centuries) includes only one African American philosopher namely Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and this reference is just one in passing. Consult Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), see p. 197 for the Du Bois reference. For an alternative treatment of the history of US philosophy, metaphilosophy, and racism read Lucius Outlaw, "The Deafening Silence of the Guiding Light: American Philosophy and the Problems of the Color Line," *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (1987): 46-47. For an overview of the history of African American philosophers see John H. McClendon, "The Afro-American Philosopher and the Philosophy of the Black Experience: A Bibliographic Essay on a Neglected Topic in Both Philosophy and Black Studies," *Sage Race Relations Abstracts* 7, no. 4 (November 1982): 1-51. For a comprehensive treatment of the racist nature of white academy and its professional ancillary groups read Michael R. Winston, "Through the Back Door: Academic Racism and the Negro Scholar in Historical Perspective," *Daedalus* 100, no. 3 (Summer 1971). Jonathan Scott Holloway, "The Black Scholar, the Humanities, and the Politics of Racial Knowledge Since 1945" in *The Humanities and the Dynamics of Inclusion Since World War Two*, ed. David Hollinger (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 217-46; "Talented Black Scholars Whom No White University Would Hire," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Winter 2003/2004): 110-15; A. Gilbert Belles, "The College Faculty, the Negro Scholar, and the Julius Rosenwald Fund," *The Journal of Negro History* 54, no. 4 (October 1969): 387; Reginald Wilson, "Why the Shortage of Black Professors? Slack Enforcement," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 1 (Autumn 1993): 25.
3. On William Stuart Nelson, consult Blanch Wright Nelson, "A Tribute to My Husband," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 35, no. 2 (Fall /Winter 1979). William Stuart Nelson was a philosopher of nonviolence; he met with Gandhi and advised Martin Luther King Jr. of Gandhi's philosophy. Nelson served as president of Shaw University and Dillard University and held several positions at Howard University, including dean of the school of religion and vice president. Nelson founded and was editor of *The Journal of Religious Thought*. Kelsey earned his PhD in philosophy from Yale (1946) and was professor of religion and philosophy at Morehouse at the time of his visiting appointment. See "Biography of George D. Kelsey" in the George D. Kelsey Papers, 1932-1996, Finding Aid, Drew University Archives.
4. See Rayford Whittingham Logan, *Howard University, The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1969).
5. Walter Dyson, *Howard University, The Capstone of Negro Education, A History: 1867-1940* (Washington, DC: The Graduate School, 1941).
6. I would like to thank John McClendon for bringing these individuals to my attention.
7. In 1896, the same year as the infamous *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision, Lewis Baxter Moore became the first African American to earn his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania and his doctoral dissertation was entitled *The Stage in Sophocles' Plays*. For biographical information on Moore consult, "Lewis Baxter Moore (1866-1928), PhD 1896 First African-American to Earn the Doctor of Philosophy Degree from Penn" from the electronic source of the University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/people/1800s/moorelb.html>. Last accessed January 30, 2013. See also "Lewis Baxter Moore," in *The Cyclopaedia of American Biography: Comprising the Men and Women of the United States Who Have Been Identified with the Growth of the Nation*, Vol. 5, ed. John Howard Brown (Boston, Massachusetts: Federal Book Company of Boston, 1903), 538.
8. Locke's career as a philosophy professor began at Howard University in 1912 and extended over a period of forty-one years. In 1921 he became head of the department of philosophy and held this position until his retirement in 1953. In that year, Locke was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters by Howard University. Lewis Baxter Moore, who was the first African American to earn his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania, taught philosophy and established the philosophy department at Howard University. Howard University's department of philosophy historically has been seen as the "Capstone" of African American philosophy. The list of academic philosophers who were either students or on the philosophy faculty at Howard are Lewis Baxter Moore, Forest Oran Wiggins, Eugene C. Holmes, Winston K. McAlister, Joyce Mitchell Cooke, William R. Jones, and William Banner. See Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: The Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Sadly, the Harris/Molesworth recent biography does not mention Eugene Holmes at all. Also, for an excellent introduction to Locke's philosophical architectonic, particularly his value theory, see Ernest Douglas Mason, *Alain Locke's Philosophy of Value: An Introduction*, Thesis (PhD), Emory University, 1975. On McAllister, see William Banner's memorial to Winston K. McAlister (1920-1876) *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 50, no. 2 (November 1976).
9. When Holmes assumed the mantle of the chair from Locke, his philosophical anchor was firmly lodged in dialectical materialism (Marxism). While there were Black leftist scholars at other college and universities (e.g., Oliver C. Cox at Lincoln University in Missouri), Howard was the only institution that had a substantial nucleus of leftist intellectuals that included Alphaeus Hunton, Abram Harris, Ralph Bunche, E. Franklin Frazier, Doxey Wilkerson, Eric Williams, and Harold Lewis. Holmes retired from Howard as an emeritus professor in 1970. (About a year earlier, the Marxist activist, historian, and philosopher C. L. R. James returned to the United States. From 1968 to 1980, James lived in Washington, DC, where he taught at Federal City College and Howard University.) For a biographical treatment on Holmes consult, Charles Rosenberg, "Holmes, Eugene Clay," *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, <http://0-www.oxfordaasc.com.sheba.ncat.edu/article/pr/t0001/e4898> (accessed January 24, 2013). For a philosophical treatment of Eugene Holmes, see John H. McClendon III, "Eugene C. Holmes: A Commentary on a Black Marxist Philosopher," in *Philosophy Born of Struggle*, ed. Leonard Harris (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall-Hunt, 1983): 37-50. See also Alan Wald, *Expiles from a Future Time* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 83, 85-86, 263-66. John H. McClendon, "Eugene C. Holmes: A History of Philosophy at Howard University," unpublished paper, in the possession of the author, presented as the V. J. McGill Lecture, Department of Philosophy, San Francisco State University, 1998. For an examination of C. L. R. James as a Marxist philosopher, see John H. McClendon III, *C. L. R. James's Notes on Dialectics: Left-Hegelianism or Marxism-Leninism?* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).
10. The quotation is taken from the transcript of George Yancy's interview of William R. Jones. I want to thank Dr. Yancy for permission to use this interview. John H. McClendon, "The Philosopher, Rebel," *Freedomways* 22, no. 1 (1982). Eugene C. Holmes, "The Kantian Views of Space and Time Evaluated," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 16, no. 2 (December 1955); Eugene C. Holmes, "Philosophical

Problems of Space and Time,” *Science and Society* 24, no. 3 (1960): 207–27; Holmes, “The Main Philosophical Considerations of Space and Time,” *American Journal of Physics* 18, no. 9 (December 1950): 560–70. Holmes published in *Science and Society* as early as 1937. See his review of “The Negro as Capitalist by Abram Harris,” *Science and Society* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1937): 260–62.

11. The quotation is taken from the transcript of George Yancy’s interview of William R. Jones. I want to thank Dr. Yancy for permission to use this interview.
12. From 1969 to 1976, Jones taught at the Yale Divinity School. He also served as coordinator of Black Studies at Yale University (1974–76). He also was a visiting professor at Brown University, Princeton Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary, and Howard University.
13. Jones, *Is God A White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1998), xvii.
14. *Ibid.*, 41.
15. *Ibid.*, 44.
16. Lenin, “Socialism and Religion,” in *Collected Works*, Vol. 10 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1982), 83–84.
17. See my article, “Teaching Hurricane Katrina: Understanding Divine Racism and Theodicy,” *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 2–6.
18. Adolph Reed Jr., “Class-ifying the Hurricane,” *Nation*, October 3, 2005.
19. Jones, *Is God A White Racist?*, 9.
20. See James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), 267–68, n. 23. See also Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1982), 169–70, n. 20.
21. Winston James, “Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America: Notes on the Ideology and Travails of Afro-America’s Socialist Pioneers, 1877–1930,” *Souls* (Fall 1999), 45–63.
22. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 213.
23. For a great introduction to Feuerbach’s thought, see Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings* (London: Verso, 2012).
24. Quoted in Marx W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 444.
25. For a great discussion of the right and left Hegelian movement, see John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
26. Frederick Engels, “Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy,” in *Selected Works of Marx and Engels*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 344.
27. *Ibid.*, 349.
28. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “The German Ideology,” in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, Vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 41.
29. Jones, *Is God A White Racist?*, xi.
30. William R. Jones, “Theism and Religious Humanism: The Chasm Narrows,” *The Christian Century* (May 21, 1975): 520–25. Accessed January 30, 2013. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1874>.

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## **William R. Jones: Philosophical Theologian Extraordinaire of the Twentieth Century**

**J. Everet Green**  
*Mercy College*

Just as Tillich, Bultmann, and Bonhoeffer defined European theologies, William R. Jones has established a sustained philosophical critique and developed a method of application of Black religious traditions that is without any rival in the twentieth and the emerging twenty-first centuries. He does this by a reinterpretation of the concepts of divine sovereignty and omnipotence by giving primacy to the functional ultimacy of the human person in historical processes and the creation of values. His task involves engaging in a reconstructive theodicy that does justice to perpetual Black suffering and not merely engaging in apologetics for supernatural theism as most philosophical theologians (Black and white) have done.

Jones rejects the controlling categories of most if not all Black theologies—the fundamental belief in the omnibenevolence God. God’s sovereignty is limited by the choices and acts of the human person. Consequently, within the theological framework, humanocentric theism is the only option that will not result in God being a white racist because the white oppressor can point to no other source but human beings in the maintenance of racial oppression. It is not God but man who acts in history and creates value. Nothing is revolutionary in such a statement; theologians have laid waste to classical Christian theism since the eighteenth century.

What is significant is Jones’s sustained methodological critique of all the major African American theologians that emerged in the 1960s ’70s, and ’80s, including those who espoused theologies of liberation. In his critique he convincingly demonstrated that Black theologians can only successfully refute the charge of divine racism by providing a more effective theodicy that would be able to address Black economic social and political oppression. All Christian theologies that subordinate human action to divine will inevitably lead to quietism, and all expressions of secular humanism that speak to universal human values in general are inadequate to address the particularity of Black oppression. Although Jones readily admits that his brand of humanocentric theism is quite similar to secular humanism, it seems that he wants to maintain the psychological insurance policy that many adherents of atheistic theism (not a contradiction by any means) embrace in the Tillichian fashion of existentialism being the good luck charm of Christianity or the Kierkegaardian sense of divine seduction or Whiteheadian natural supernaturalism-god acts but he, she, it does not interfere.

Jones emphasizes the importance of internal criticism tracing and reducing any alleged deficiency in the theological construction of Black theologians to the very principles they established as normative. Using the method of internal criticism Jones concludes that the claim of James Cone and other Black theologians of liberation that God has acted in history and will act on behalf of the oppressed belies the past and present condition of Black people. Indeed, world Christianity in many instances has been used as an ideological tool of oppression. Reformulation of Christian theology is one of many options that have been part of the Black religious experience in response to dehumanization, perpetual oppression, and genocide. A cursory reading of the literature indicates acceptance of atheism, agnosticism, or humanism as appropriate religious options. Jones points to Countee Cullen’s *The Black Christ* as having logical affinity to Black atheism and humanism as well as affirmation of divine racism.

In his long and distinguished career and numerous publications Jones has mined the Black intellectual tradition and produced gems that have altered the course of academic discourse on philosophy and theology. A firm believer in the fact that Black folk and intellectual traditions can inform us in our philosophical ethical and political constructions, his whole body of work is a testimony to his conviction. But Jones as an internationalist, a world citizen, engaged also in a thorough critique of the existentialist tradition, the philosophy/theology of hope, process thought, and Latino liberation theology, enquiring whether they can in any way speak to the dehumanization of Black life.

My own intellectual development has been profoundly influenced by Bill Jones, whose work was introduced to me by Roy D. Morrison II in the spring of 1977, while I was doing graduate work at Howard University. Morrison, a professor of critical philosophy, Black culture, and scientific method at Wesley Theological Seminary, was a close friend of Jones and had great respect for his work. These two scholars, mentors, and friends have taught me the real meaning of personal commitment and intellectual courage and the complications that are often related to that kind of intellectual journey. I have had the good fortune of teaching at different institutions where I highlighted the works of these two great scholars and gifted teachers—courses like the Emerging Black Enlightenment, a constant theme of Morrison, Race Religion and Social Transformation, Africa in the New World, and Africana Philosophy—all related to Jones's intellectual vision and mission. Dr. Jones is the quintessential representation of one who lived and taught by example and the many testimonials of former students will eventually make him a legend in his time. If for nothing else he will be forever be remembered by students for the Jones Oppression Grid, the JOG and JAM.

He was one of the most consistent attendees and willing participants in the annual Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference, and the conceptual framework of the initial conference was highly influenced by the works of Roy D. Morrison and William R. Jones. Consequently, it was received with great pleasure and personal pride when Dr. John H. McClendon III, in October 2008 at Michigan State University, initiated the William R. Jones Award for contribution to African American philosophy under the auspices of the Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference Series and designated Dr. Jones its first recipient. He will certainly be missed at these gatherings.

William R. Jones, I salute you as a philosophical reformer, one who fully embraced the intellectual richness of the African American traditions and in doing so entreated many of us to become aware of the need to participate in the economic, social, and political liberation of African people and, indeed, oppressed people everywhere.

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## **William R. Jones's Humanocentric Theism: Reconceptualizing the Black Religious Experience**

**Brittany L. O'Neal**  
*Michigan State University*

It was during the fall of 2008 when I first met Dr. William R. Jones. I was a third-year doctoral student in the African American and African studies program in the process of deciding on a research topic for my comprehensive examinations and my dissertation research. Upon hearing Dr. Jones's keynote address at the Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference held

at Michigan State University, I began to question my research plans. Dr. Jones's prolific study *Is God A White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* piqued my interest by providing the intellectual and philosophical support I needed to refine my research topic with a new focus on the systematic study of how the conception of God has a direct sociopolitical impact on the oppression of Black Americans. Several years after the publication of *Is God A White Racist?* Dr. Jones continued to clarify the relationship between the cultural context and theological world-view found in liberation theology by asking the prolific question: "Is the historical oppression of Blacks in America more conducive to the development of certain forms of theism than humanism?"<sup>1</sup> This question informs the crux of our challenge towards understanding the existing principles in Black liberation theology, both theologically and philosophically, and the normative classification of how the Black religious experience is understood. Dr. Jones reminds us that the Black religious experience is not a monolithic experience but a "multifaceted phenomenon" that contains a "full spectrum of theistic and nontheistic options."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Jones was committed to challenging his contemporaries in this regard; in fact, he pushed for "rigorous [internal] criticism" to serve the "common goal" of finding the tools for liberation in the Black community, regardless of religious presupposition.<sup>3</sup> From this standpoint, we need to continue the provocative discussion set forth by Dr. Jones by engaging in critical dialogue about Black liberation from the totality of the Black religious experience.

His work not only pushes the boundaries of how we classify Black religious studies but also forces us to question, critique, and reexamine how we understand God and the maldistribution of suffering in the Black community. He encourages us to critically examine the common conceptions of how we understand liberation and the Black experience through the practicality of antithetical fit, multievidentiality of concepts, and a virus-vaccine method of inquiry. Dr. Jones accomplishes this by implementing a method of inquiry devised to categorize whether theologies support oppression or encourage liberation. This virus-vaccine model is a distinct characteristic of Dr. Jones's theological inquiry that is related to the critical introduction of humanocentric theism. He accomplishes this discursive theology by "removing God's overruling sovereignty from human history" and gives humans functional ultimacy in regards to the reality of ESP (economic, social, political) oppression.<sup>4</sup> Humanocentric theism is a brilliant maneuver that provides "a viable framework for theology" while critically assessing the sociopolitical realities in the Black experience.<sup>5</sup>

As we continue investigating the religious perils found in Black liberation theology, Dr. Jones's humanocentric theism adds a fresh conceptualization to the religious history often overlooked or overshadowed by the larger, institutionalized Black theism. Through Jones's humanocentric theism, budding scholars like myself can continue to build on his ideas and concepts as we push the envelope of nontheism to explore more progressive models in our fight for liberation.

### **Notes**

1. Jones, "Religious Humanism."
2. *Ibid.*, 176.
3. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, xii.
4. *Ibid.*, 195.
5. *Ibid.*, 172.

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## **The Legitimacy of Black Philosophy**

**Kimberly A. Harris**

*Pennsylvania State University*

Professor William R. Jones was one of the most passionate philosophers I have ever had the privilege to meet. Our meeting took place in 2011 during the eighteenth annual Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference. I had written a term paper on his piece “The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations” and was eager to discuss with him some of my criticisms of his work. I believed at the time that Professor Jones should not have focused, as he did, on defending the legitimacy of Black philosophy. This was to give too much credit to the mainstream philosophers’ attempts to “protect the philosophical enterprise” by keeping philosophy “pure.” His response to me was that he believed that it was necessary to address the legitimacy question in order to give Black philosophy the foundation it needed, whereas I suspected that there would always be some philosophers intent on refusing Black philosophy a place at the table with the result that the debate would never end.

During our conversation, I asked Professor Jones about what I saw as two types of gatekeeping within philosophy. The first type of gatekeeper has a fixed understanding of meta-philosophy whereby philosophy has one method and that method does not have a place for ethnic categories. The second type of gatekeeper is prejudiced against minorities and women. He responded that critics of Black philosophy usually combine these two types of gatekeeping. He claimed that Black philosophy as a relatively “new entry” into academic philosophy had to justify itself, like all new innovations. He wanted to show that the arguments employed by mainstream philosophers criticizing Black philosophy were misguided and fueled by racism.

Toward the end of his life, Professor Jones was consumed by the concept of oppression and the ways it continued to be underdeveloped within philosophy. He shared with me his thoughts about developing a typology of oppression in which the rejection of Black philosophy could be seen as another form of oppression that had to be opposed in the name of philosophical pluralism. It was during this conference that I decided to pursue the PhD in philosophy. His legacy and the work of doing Black philosophy continue into a new generation.

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## **Dr. William Ronald Jones (July 17, 1933–July 13, 2012): On the Legacy of the Late “Dean” of Contemporary African American Philosophers**

**John H. McClendon III**

*Michigan State University*

### **How I Came to Know the “Dean” of Contemporary African American Philosophers**

When I was alerted this past July of the death of Dr. William R. Jones, a sense of deep sorrow and trenchant melancholy overcame me for I had lost a foremost teacher, mentor, and friend. After hearing the announcement of his demise, my mind was inundated with so many indelible memories of the man I called “Doc.” While Dr. Jones had always been adamant that I call him Bill, my relationship with him as friend and colleague

was intimately joined to my profound regard for him as mentor and teacher. Rather than calling him Bill, the appellation “Doc” better suited my feeling of high regard and personal esteem as the student of the great sage philosopher.

Over forty years ago, I first learned of Dr. Jones through another key mentor, teacher and friend, Dr. Francis A. Thomas. My undergrad professor of philosophy at Central State University, Thomas introduced me to Jones’s works and indicated that Jones was steadfastly confronting the racism within the ranks of professional philosophy and its erstwhile institutional structures inclusive of the American Philosophical Association. Thomas and Jones were kindred spirits; they were both advocates for establishing the academic grounds for Black philosophy as a legitimate scholarly and disciplinary undertaking as well as presenting a critique of Christian-centric viewpoints on Black liberation theology. Thomas was one of the first African American philosophers to join the APA; he welcomed the strides for progressive change that Jones ushered within the APA ranks with his strident calls for meaningful Black representation.<sup>1</sup>

In 1973 Jones first published his magnum opus *Is God A White Racist*; shortly thereafter Thomas became the first (and sadly only) person affiliated with African American seminaries to invite Jones as lecturer on this pioneering and provocative book. As dean of Payne Seminary, Thomas brought Jones to Wilberforce, Ohio, and the outcry from this solitary act resounded throughout the Miami Valley and especially among its various Black clergy. Doc often conveyed to me how he greatly appreciated that Thomas was bold enough to insist that *Is God A White Racist* become an integral part of the seminary (theological) dialogue on African American campuses.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, when I co-organized with Professor Sharon Welch (then director of the Women Studies Program at the University of Missouri) a conference on Black Religion and Spirituality in October 1992 (at the University of Missouri) two of the key participants were Drs. Jones and Thomas. I still remember the thoughtful and reflective conversations we had about their long comradeship and dauntless efforts to transform the landscape of professional philosophy as a more inclusive undertaking; moreover, we reflected on their labors at redirecting the theoretical course of Black liberation theology and the philosophy of religion as it pertained to the African American experience.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently, when I learned of the death of Dr. Thomas (September 2001), George Yancy and I organized “A Special Tribute to Dr. Francis A. Thomas (1913–2001)” for the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* in the fall of 2003. Quite naturally Dr. Jones willingly made his contribution to this endeavor. Jones’s remarks were presented in the form of a letter to Thomas: “Your contributions to the liberation struggle of African Americans has gone unrecognized and underappreciated—except by those who have benefited so much from your exquisite mentoring and unselfish encouragement.”<sup>4</sup> For us today, Jones’s words for Thomas actually gain immense profundity as a prophetic announcement of his own legacy. Those of us as African American philosophers—in and out of today’s academy—who have had the opportunity to interact with Doc know full well of his “exquisite mentoring and unselfish encouragement.” I am particularly proud of the fact that since my time at the University of Missouri I have had the opportunity to invite Dr. Jones to each institution where I have taught. Furthermore, with respect to my students, if not fortunate enough to have actually met him and engaged in his renowned “cuss and discuss” sessions, they have at least studied his works in several of my classes.

I remember that Doc was particularly delighted that at both the Fifteenth and Eighteenth Annual Philosophy Born of

Struggle Conferences (each held at Michigan State University) he had the opportunity to meet with some of my students. The students had rigorously examined his works and were prepared to raise demanding questions and engage in stimulating dialogue about his philosophical corpus and ancillary ideas from notions concerning the legitimacy of Black philosophy and the methodology of internal criticism to the theological problems associated with such issues as theodicy, antithetical fit, humanocentric theism, and the matter of functional ultimacy.<sup>5</sup>

In Doc's view, such occasions—meeting and mentoring younger scholars—were an essential element to the continuance and enrichment of the African American philosophical tradition; he never tired of addressing their issues and concerns. Doc was not only a conscientious teacher, he was also a professor that learned from his students. Consequently, when we read the acknowledgments in his magnum opus *Is God A White Racist?*, he explicitly makes known to his reading audience: “Special thanks must be tendered to the students in my class of Black Theology, where the argument of this book was first launched. Their critical and sympathetic response to my tentative formulations did much to sharpen the final product.”<sup>6</sup>

As a teacher in the classroom, I have discovered, on the one hand, that my students in reading Jones's corpus experienced a formidable intellectual challenge to critically rethink basic categories and methods of thinking and in turn I witnessed their profound intellectual awaking respecting their study of Jones's treatment of African American philosophy and theology. On the other hand, when some students actually had the opportunity to meet him, they were not only intellectually challenged but they also felt a sense of personal inspiration to academically achieve and politically commit to higher levels of excellence and responsibility, respectively. As the various student contributions to this special issue demonstrate, Jones's “exquisite mentoring and unselfish encouragement” has engendered vitally and imaginatively engaged scholarship among a new generation of African American intellectuals.

I must add that the unselfish character of Doc and his willingness to give went far beyond sharing ideas and theories of oppression. I remember on one occasion—when I invited him as our keynote speaker—he requested that I take him to a store where one could buy quality clothes at a discount. Doc purchased so many items that he needed to buy an additional suitcase for the clothing. The purpose of this spending spree was to gather clothes for people he knew in South Africa. Jones had a lecture tour coming up in South Africa and he jumped at the opportunity to help friends in need.

From this example of generosity, we learn that for Doc the political struggle was profoundly personal and on more than one instance I witnessed he would even publicly shed tears. When Doc presented his most erudite theories to an attentive audience, he was unabashed at expressing and openly demonstrating that his ideas were always bound up with his most intimate feelings about oppression and liberation. Doc was a public intellectual, an engaged scholar, and a political activist who gave his whole personal being to the cause of fighting oppression and forging a path to liberation. Jones had no line of sharp demarcation between the personal and the political dimensions of his life activities. Doc's professional existence was deeply entwined in the life of mind and personal involvement on behalf of our collective liberation was the guiding principle.

Whenever I requested that he come to speak, Doc offered not only to abstain from taking any honorarium for his lecture but also conveyed that he could pay his expenses with regard to travel and lodging. In our times when so-called public intellectuals expect payment and treatment as if they were

show business celebrities, Doc stood apart as a humble person who shunned the spotlight of superstar status and monetary gain. Instead he focused on the quest for knowledge and the cooperative building of a liberatory plan to overturn the legacies of systemic mis-education and mis-religion.<sup>7</sup>

By means of Doc's employment of the concepts “mis-education” and “mis-religion,” we discovered that Dr. Carter G. Woodson's *The Mid-Education of the Negro* (1922) loomed large on Jones's notion of the locus Black consciousness in the context of oppression. In Woodson's critical reflections, Jones found the basis for grounding his philosophy of education for liberation and equally important the foundation for his critique of mis-religion and re-conception of Black liberation theology beyond Black Church traditions, classical theism, and Christology. Doc unequivocally states, “Though Woodson's critique of education and religion are equivalent, his indictment of religion is ignored.”<sup>8</sup>

In Doc's estimation, mis-education and mis-religion constituted cardinal institutional and cognitive problems obstructing the path to Black liberation. In his public addresses, time and again he insightfully brought this issue to our attention. In classic Jones terminology, these twin issues were “viruses” that for so long have beleaguered the African American community into a state of intellectual and political “quietism.” Doc was intent on “JOGGING” us out of our dogmatic slumber, which was affixed to the maintenance of mis-education and mis-religion as forms of neo-oppression. Those of us fortunate enough to witness Doc's thought-provoking lectures (replete with slides and visual aids) know full well that the acronym “JOG” stood for the “Jones Oppression Grid.”<sup>9</sup>

Doc contended and effectively demonstrated that “JOG” had predictive value and could direct us—in systematic fashion—to the discovery of the “anti-toxin” that would overcome the “viruses” of racism and oppression. He reports to us, “IGWR [*Is God a White Racist?*] incorporated an early prototype of a ‘hands on’ system of analysis that my students have labeled ‘JOG’ & ‘JAM’—an acronym for Jones Analytic Model, the core of which is the Jones Oppression Grid—which instructs you how to maneuver, how to ‘jog and jam,’ through the minefields of *neo-oppression*.”<sup>10</sup>

Doc had a unique way of employing acronyms as effective pedagogical tools. The elaboration of his theories of oppression from ESP (Economic, Social, and Political) to his “VIP Principle” (the visibility, invisibility pattern) were aimed at systematically uncovering how oppression was established around definite “maintenance needs” that could be mapped in predictive fashion. Although Doc's written works are of the highest academic order and require close/slow reading as well as careful thought, Jones—as public lecturer—was actually that rare teacher that could effectively communicate with any audience. You need not belong to the elite group that Du Bois dubbed “The Talented Tenth” to comprehend what Doc had to say. Doc's logic was penetrating and his arguments stimulating; this was especially the case for the student committed to thinking about the foundational questions surrounding oppression.<sup>11</sup>

### **The historical locus of Dr. William R. Jones: African American philosophical tradition**

George Yancy's interview (included in this tribute) details the philosophical biography of Dr. William R. Jones in specific proportions, while my essay is an effort to capture the general outlines of the context of Dr. Jones's intellectual formation as philosopher along with his contributions to the historical development of African American philosophical and theological thought. As will be demonstrated in this essay, arguably no other

philosopher has had such a significant impact and measure of influence on the elevation of the plight of contemporary African American philosophers and their professional status than Dr. William R. Jones.<sup>12</sup>

It is particularly the unique combination of his vast contributions toward eradicating both the theoretical and practical problems facing African American philosophers that I think established Dr. Jones as the “Dean” of contemporary African American philosophers. The intellectual currents that flow from a largely ignored yet distinctly African American humanism along with the insights from African American historiography, existentialism, and the sociology of knowledge informed Doc’s philosophical vision of struggle. Now the task before us is to assign our concerted efforts at a comprehensive project to reconstruct his life story as philosopher and activist. I recommend that we organize a conference devoted to his life and works and the publication of an anthology that captures his legacy. In my view, the recent website organized around Doc’s life and works by Dan Gerson and George Yancy’s interview of Dr. Jones, in this special issue, are great starting points toward fulfilling this objective.<sup>13</sup>

William R. Jones was born in Louisville, Kentucky, to Henry W. and Lannie Brogdale Jones. A product of a working class family (Jones’s father was a postal worker), we discover that neither young William (Billy, as he was called by his family) nor his parents envisioned that there was even the remote possibility the he would go on to college. In fact, Henry Jones thought young Billy’s sisters were the best candidates for a college education. Thus, the younger Jones thought that perhaps he would join the armed services and later utilize the GI Bill as a means to a college education. With the advent of World War II and later the Korean War, the GI Bill was increasingly viewed as a viable option to financing a post-secondary education. This option was not lost, at that time, on a number of African American males. For example, Broadus Butler, a former Tuskegee Airman, financed his graduate education and hence doctorate in philosophy at the University of Michigan (which he received in 1952) via the GI Bill.<sup>14</sup>

What I think is historically important to note at this juncture is that Jones was not afforded opportunities available to other important African American philosophers such as Gilbert Haven Jones, Richard I. McKinney, and his close friend and colleague Francis A. Thomas, all of whom had emerged from academic families. While Gilbert Haven Jones and McKinney had fathers who were college presidents, Thomas’s maternal grandfather served as president of Wilberforce University and his father as a professor at Payne Seminary.<sup>15</sup>

Yet despite his distance from the academic world, early in his life, Jones became academically oriented and was a strong high school student with a keen aptitude in the sciences. As a matter of happenstance, Jones would ultimately enter into the rich tradition of philosophy that emerges out of the “capstone” of African American education, namely, Howard University. The very idea that Howard represented the pinnacle or “capstone” among the historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) originates from the title of a history text on Howard published to coincide with its seventy-fifth anniversary. In order to capture the splendor and glory of Howard’s place in Black higher education, Walter Dyson, its author, decided to name his book *Howard University, The Capstone of Negro Education, A History: 1867–1940*.<sup>16</sup>

Jones informs us that his opportunity to attend Howard was the result of a high school chemistry examination. Although he was unprepared to take a high school chemistry examination, Jones proved that he was more than prepared to do well on the scholarship examination and consequently won

a full ride to Howard. Although Jones first decided to major in engineering, he found he disliked mechanical drawing and shifted his allegiance to philosophy. Consequently, we discover that two contingent factors—lack of preparation for his high school chemistry exam and a personal dislike for mechanical drawing—pushed Jones to become a philosophy major.

What is more, Jones tells us that early on (even before coming to Howard) he was an avid reader of philosophical literature and even read Plato; we can surmise from these facts that while talented in the natural and physical sciences, he undoubtedly was attracted to philosophy. Under the mentorship of Professor Winston K. McAllister at Howard, Jones’s attraction to philosophy flourished and he became convinced that philosophy would become the road for his future intellectual travels. Drs. McAllister and Eugene C. Holmes were seminal influences in Jones’s quest to formulate a philosophy of liberation. In the Yancy interview, Jones stated,

McAllister did some courses on ethics, but McAllister taught logic, and so forth, so my introduction was basically to logic, logical positivism, and so forth. Keep in mind that Holmes also identified himself at that time as a Marxist so I got a little splattering of that. But the main impact from McAllister and Holmes was to solidify philosophy as an appropriate and useful pursuit for African Americans interested in the struggle. They didn’t themselves focus on that particular issue, but I did begin to see how I could take these kinds of tools and skills and develop an arsenal against oppression.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to McAllister and Holmes, the context of the burgeoning movement for civil rights, we can safely presume, had a direct influence on how Jones envisioned his course of study. In fact, Jones was astutely aware of how context and content of thought were dialectically joined. In response to Yancy, Jones states: “I have found that our world-view, our beliefs and values, our strategies, and so forth, reflect our context. We operate on what we call the ‘CC Connection.’ There is a connection between the *content* of your beliefs and values and the context (economic, social, and political situation) that determines the world you live in.”

The previous decades before Jones enrolled at Howard University, Howard Law School played a decisive and pivotal role on the legal front of the civil rights movement. Under the tutelage of Charles Hamilton Houston and his esteemed student, Thurgood Marshall, among others, the road to the *Brown* decision was forged and it actually preceded Jones’s graduation by one year. Particularly, in view of his expanding social and political consciousness, this dynamic political context of Black struggle, which surrounded philosophical inquiry at this time, was immensely important for Jones. He envisioned that philosophy could serve as a formidable tool and sharp weapon for confronting the challenges of racism and oppression. Philosophy emerges as a life-line, the very foundation for his and our collective survival.<sup>18</sup>

In his interview with Yancy, Jones makes this point transparent: “Philosophy enabled me to enhance my survival and well-being through developing effective coping skills for a context of oppression. The reality of societal oppression pushed me into this kind of analytic, critical, virus detection operation. Hence, I could develop effective strategies, develop a sort of keen, analytical, critical approach, not for the sake of philosophy per se, but because this was a survival, well-being tactic or strategy for me.”

When Jones was an undergraduate student at Howard University in the 1950s there was only a small number of students majoring in philosophy. Nevertheless, the quantitative factor did

not fully reflect the qualitative significance of the philosophy department; from the time that Lewis Baxter Moore founded the Howard University philosophy department until Alain Locke and later Eugene C. Holmes built and developed its scholarly reputation, this program actually emerged as the *capstone* among HBCU philosophy departments. Numerous educators and scholars have since considered Howard University as one of the best, if not *the* best, among the HBCUs with respect to the institutional setting for the discipline of philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to Jones, among the notable African American philosophers (either as faculty or students) over the years at Howard included: Lewis Baxter Moore, Alain L. Locke, William Stuart Nelson, Albert M. Dunham, Forrest Oran Wiggins, Eugene C. Holmes, Winston K. McAlister, Cornelius L. Golightly, Samuel W. Williams, Carlton L. Lee, Broadus N. Butler, Percy E. Johnston, Berkley B. Eddins, Joyce Mitchell Cook, William A. Banner, and Roy D. Morrison. No other institution, before the 1970s, could match Howard in the number of African American academic philosophers as well as students as prospective philosophers, entering into its doors of erudition.<sup>20</sup>

With Howard University, and other HBCUs, having the primary responsibility of addressing the need of securing employment for Black philosophers as well as producing African American students of philosophy, it is evident that Jones's entry into Howard, as student and later faculty, represents the general trend that marked the main course of the history of African American philosophers during the decade of the 1950s and 1960s. The "color-line" casts its shadow wide and long. For African American philosophers the window of opportunity for teaching at white institutions was a very narrow one.

Just prior to 1950, only four of the African Americans with doctorates in philosophy—and related fields—were able to teach philosophy (without the stipulation of visiting professor) at white colleges. The four philosophers were Cornelius Golightly at Olivet College (1945), Forrest O. Wiggins at the University of Minnesota (1946), Francis M. Hammond at Seton Hall (1946), and William T. Fontaine at University of Pennsylvania (1949).<sup>21</sup>

For the entire decade of the 1950s, I can only document that four Black people received the PhD in philosophy (or in a related discipline) wherein these individuals—as holders of doctorates—became professors of philosophy; they were Winson R. Coleman (1950), Carlton L. Lee (1951), Broadus N. Butler (1952), and Wayman Bernard McLaughlin in 1958. What's more, the slim prospects for these lonesome four candidates of pursuing an academic career in the white academy were virtually non-existent. The academic world in which Jones entered as an undergraduate student in philosophy reflected in microcosm the harsh reality of white supremacy.

Growing up in Louisville, Kentucky, Jones was no stranger to the vagaries of Jim Crow and white supremacy. As he matured intellectually, he was quite cognizant that the Black struggle was in need of philosophical insights that could identify and critique the enemy. It is clear from the Yancy interview that Jones became more concerned with fortifying his philosophical acumen than preparing for a professional career sanctioned by the academic philosophy establishment with accompanying offers at white institutions.

We find that the various examples unfolding in this decade of African Americans receiving doctorates in philosophy, although few in number, were nonetheless glaring indicators of Jones's future prospects in the profession. It was more than apparent; Jones was not deterred from his mission to become a philosopher and to apply philosophy to the various Black struggles for liberation. The "color-line" and a career limited to the HBCU context were not reason enough for Doc to give up on philosophy as his life commitment. All of those African

Americans who coveted the PhD in philosophy during the 1950s earned them from highly regarded white institutions; nevertheless, they were not considered for employment beyond the pale of the "color-line." I am sure this was not lost on Jones as he committed to philosophy and rejected engineering.

In 1950 Winson R. Coleman earned his doctorate in philosophy—from the University of Chicago—with a dissertation entitled *Knowledge and Freedom in the Political Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle*. At the time Coleman received his doctorate, however, he had already established (for approximately two decades) a distinguished teaching career at Johnson C. Smith University in North Carolina. Coleman remained at Johnson C. Smith for forty-five years and held several administrative positions including academic dean and tennis coach. He was also a member of the American Philosophical Association and editor of *The Quarterly Review of Higher Education Among Negroes*.<sup>22</sup>

Carlton L. Lee submitted his doctoral dissertation, *Patterns of Leadership in Race Relations: A Study of Leadership Among American Negroes*, to the University of Chicago (Divinity School) in 1951. After departing from Chicago, Lee for a period of nineteen years taught the subjects of philosophy and religion exclusively at several HBCUs. Among the schools where Lee taught were Turner Theological Seminary, Morris Brown, Tuskegee University, Tougaloo College, Central State University (Wilberforce, Ohio), and Cheyney State College. At Central State University Lee taught philosophy with Francis A. Thomas, Jones' close friend and colleague. Lee would eventually go to a predominantly white institution as head of the Black Africana studies program at University of Western Michigan in 1969.<sup>23</sup>

A more conspicuous instance of academic racism is the case of World War II veteran and former Tuskegee Airman, Broadus N. Butler. As mentioned earlier, Butler gained his doctorate through the GI Bill and finished his PhD in philosophy in 1952 from the University of Michigan. His dissertation was titled *A Pragmatic Study of Value and Evaluation*. After completing his doctoral work, he applied to teach at a philosophy department of a white college. In the application process, Butler's University of Michigan professor's letter of reference included the remark, "a good philosopher but of course a Negro." In response to Butler's inquiry about a job at this white school, he was told in a rather emphatic manner, "Why don't you go where you will be among your own kind."<sup>24</sup>

Wayman Bernard McLaughlin was the last of this group to earn the doctorate in the 1950s; he received his degree from Boston University. A classmate of Martin Luther King Jr., McLaughlin's 1958 doctoral dissertation, *The Relation between Hegel and Kierkegaard* was awarded from the department of philosophy. This was a significant departure from the path traditionally taken by African American students attracted to the liberal confines of Boston University. For example, Martin Luther King Jr. and others such as Major Jones pursued degrees in theology. However, McLaughlin's decision to go into philosophy was not due to an aversion to religion; he was in fact an ordained Baptist minister. Before going to Boston, McLaughlin had previously gained his bachelors of divinity (in the psychology of religion) from Andover Newton Theological Seminary in 1952. McLaughlin's teaching career was completely subsumed with the HBCU context, where he taught at Virginia Union, Grambling State University, Winston-Salem State Teaching College, and North Carolina A & T State University; at the last institution, he remained for thirty-five years.<sup>25</sup>

Hence, when Jones graduated from Howard University in 1955 as Phi Beta Kappa and as a magna cum laude student, with highest honors in philosophy, we can see that this was a tremendous personal accomplishment and especially for a

young man who had not initially thought he would have the money to go to college. After Jones earned his degree from Howard, he won a Rockefeller Theological Fellowship and went on to Harvard and received the masters of divinity in 1958. The masters of divinity was the outcome of a practical decision.

With the aforementioned credentials in hand, Jones returned to teach at Howard as a visiting professor from 1964 to 1969. At this time, he was also working on his doctorate at Brown University. In 1969, Jones completed his PhD in religious studies with a dissertation, *Sartre's Ethics in Relation to his Philosophical Anthropology: A Criticism of Criticism*, which he states was essentially philosophical in content, although awarded within the academic framework of religious studies.

Thus, Jones belongs to a very long tradition among African American academic philosophers wherein they had either earned their credentials directly in theology and various forms of religious studies or with doctoral degrees from philosophy departments and dissertation topic focused on a religious topics. John Wesley Edward Bowen's doctoral dissertation on *The Historic Manifestation and Apprehensions of Religion as an Evolutionary and Psychological Process* from Boston University in 1887 is immediately located within religion. Yet, Thomas Nelson Baker's *The Ethical Significance of the Connection Between Mind and Body* is ostensibly in philosophy. Both James L. Farmer's *The Origin and Development of the Messianic Home in Israel with Special References to Analogous Beliefs Among Other Peoples* (Boston University, 1918) and Willis J. King's *The Book of Habakkuk from the Standpoint of Literary and Historical Criticism* (Boston University, 1921) were located in some aspect of religion that is within either theology or biblical studies. Although Baker did not pursue an academic career, Bowen, Farmer, and King embarked on teaching at HBCUs.

Marquis Lafayette Harris's doctoral dissertation *Some Conceptions of God in the Gifford Lectures during the Period 1927-1929* (The Ohio State University, 1933) and Charles Leander Hill's *An Exposition and Critical Estimate of the Philosophy of Philip Melancthon* (Melancthon was the co-reformer of the German Protestant Reformation with Martin Luther) also from The Ohio State University (OSU) in 1938, while both explicitly directed at religious topics were nevertheless dissertations submitted to the OSU philosophy department.

Though Richard I. McKinney's dissertation *Religion in Higher Education Among Negroes* in 1942 and George D. Kelsey's *The Social Thought of Contemporary Southern Baptists* in 1946 were both from Yale University on religious concerns, each man eventually taught courses in both philosophy and theology/biblical criticism. Carlton L. Lee's previously mentioned dissertation, *Patterns of Leadership in Race Relations: A Study of Leadership Among American Negroes*, was submitted to the University of Chicago (Divinity School) in 1951 and he also divided his teaching efforts within both domains.

It should be pointed out, and quite consistent with Jones's humanist outlook, that he criticized this pronounced dominance of ministers/theologians within the African American intellectual culture and particularly its HBCU context. Jones argued this hegemonic influence hindered the development of African American philosophical thought and traditions. Jones argued, "Black colleges have characteristically afforded higher status to religion than philosophy. Black universities have produced more theologians and ministers than philosophers. Too often, it appears, that philosophy is an ugly orphan in a combined department of Religion-Philosophy. . . . Moreover, there are no black schools that offer the PhD degree in philosophy. Nor is there a philosophy department where black philosophy is a central or preeminent concern."<sup>26</sup>

Jones's own dissertation on Sartre's ethics was submitted to Brown University in 1969. Doc's encounter with Sartre enhanced his methodological grasp of internal criticism and phenomenological description; we uncover these tools would serve him well in his treatment Black liberation theology. Jones states:

Now, what I learned from Sartre was in part this issue of the legitimacy and necessity of doing internal criticism, and doing accurate phenomenological description. Sartre is to me essentially a phenomenologist. And if you understand that, the criticisms that people have of him go by the board. For instance, if I am going to describe a phenomenon, then every item presents several different phenomenological angles. Anything is going to have more than one angle, right? So, if I am going to describe that item, I have to describe it from a multi-angular approach, I have to pick different angles of it, and describe them. Also some of these angles may be in contradiction with each other even though they are angles of the same object.

Along with others such as Richard I. McKinney, Jones's dissertation squarely places him in the tradition of African American philosophers associated with and influenced by existentialism. This fact about Jones has not been lost on contemporary existentialist African philosopher Lewis Gordon. Gordon—to his credit—dedicates his *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* to Jones. Most importantly, Gordon provides an instructive overview of Jones's locus within the Africana existentialist tradition.<sup>27</sup> With reference to Jones's dissertation, Gordon astutely notes, "This work was written in the 1960s during the Black Power movement and Vietnam. At the heart of Jones's analysis was the conviction that oppression must be overcome, but no such overcoming can emerge without a critical understanding of human reality. Jones emerged, in other words, as an existential revolutionary. He took very seriously the existential insight that struggle involves negotiating the relationship between institutions and situated human beings."<sup>28</sup>

When William R. Jones completed his dissertation in 1969, he would become the last of four African American academic philosophers to get the doctorate in the 1960s. The three academic philosophers that preceded Jones with doctorates were: Francis A. Thomas at Indiana University in 1960, Berkley Eddins at the University of Michigan in 1961 and Joyce Mitchell Cook at Yale University in 1965. All of these philosophers would investigate, during the next decade, how philosophy could function as an analytical tool of the African American experience.

This group of philosophers would set the stage for the academic pursuit of philosophy and the Black experience by teaching and publishing on the topic. Primarily as a teacher and less by way of publications, Francis A. Thomas guided his various students in the pursuit of philosophy within the context of the African American experience. This author and Leonard Harris, at Central State University, were among those who benefited from Thomas's guidance. Berkley Eddins would publish one of the first articles on the topic of Black studies that would find its way into a mainstream philosophy journal. Eddins' essay "Philosophia Perennis and Black Studies" appeared in the *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (Summer 1971). The managing editor of the *Review of Metaphysics*, Joyce Mitchell Cook, lectured widely across the country. Of particular note is Cook's "A Critique of the Black Experience," which was an address delivered at the Conference on Philosophy and the Black Experience at the University of Illinois (Chicago) in November 1970. Moreover, Drs. Cook and Robert C. Williams would join

forces with Doc at the historic Wingspread Conference on “The Black Philosopher” in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1976.<sup>29</sup>

In the 1970s, Jones would lead the way among African American philosophers and theologians as one of the most prodigious and productive writers. Included among his works are: “Theodicy and Methodology in Black Theology: A Critique of Washington, Cone and Cleage” in the *Harvard Theological Review* (October 1971); “Toward an Interim Assessment of Black Theology” in *The Christian Century* (May 1972); “Reconciliation and Liberation in Black Theology: Some Implications for Religious Education” in *Religious Education* (September–October 1972); “Recent Trends in Black Theology” in *Religious Education* (March/April 1973); “Theodicy: The Controlling Category for Black Theology” in the *Journal of Religious Thought* (Summer 1973); “Black Theology in Black Higher Education” in *Journal of Ministries to Blacks in Higher Education* (1976); “Power and Anti-Power” in *Karios, An Independent Quarterly of Liberal Religion* (Spring 1977); “The Church and Urban Policy: Theological Response” in the *Journal of the Society for Common Insights II* (1978); “Religious Humanism: Its Problems and Prospects in Black Religion and Culture,” in *Perspectives of Black Theology*, edited by Rosino Gibellini (Brescia, Italia: Querimana, 1978).

In my estimation, Doc’s real knock-out punches as a philosopher of the Black experience would come with two of his key scholarly works, both published during the explosive “Black Awakening” of the 1970s. First, we have *Is God a White Racist? Prolegomenon to Black Theology* (1973), where Jones further develops the arguments in the previously mentioned articles published prior to 1973. Second, we find in the historic special issue of *Philosophical Forum* (Winter–Spring 1977–1978) the article, “The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations.” This pioneering and penetrating defense of philosophy and the Black experience sets the course for a plethora of publications from the next generation of African American philosophers that would follow in its wake, in fact, extending over the next thirty years.

*Is God a White Racist? Prolegomenon to Black Theology* was the subject of numerous reviews. I will cite only two among those that I think substantially comprehend the import of Jones’s contribution. As late as 2005, D. J. Hill offers a review that captures the essence of the broad implications of Jones’s text for Black liberation theology. Hill tenders:

Bill Jones’ pointed critiques of traditional Black theologians rationalization of black suffering is arguably the most enlightening theological work of its kind ever written. Unless we are willing to acknowledge that God is a racist, then there is absolutely no reasonable way to arrive at any other conclusion than the discomfiting reality that God is not physically involved in the affairs of humankind. Whether God is powerless and unable to intervene or powerful and unwilling to intervene is entirely irrelevant. The result is what is practically important.<sup>30</sup>

Fellow African American philosopher of religion, dear colleague, and close friend, the late Roy D. Morrison II evaluates the exceptional gifts that Jones brings to philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. Morrison is uniquely qualified in his judgment because he was a specialist in the above areas in addition to his own seminal works in Black philosophy. Morrison incisively argues,

Jones is probably the only member of the family of thinkers who employs critical philosophical analysis to make a critique of the internal structures of traditional black religion. . . . In other words, when all of the

technical terminology and all the apologetic arguments have been explored, black theology asks what, if anything, does God *do* for black people. . . . Jones goes further than any of his colleagues in pursuing this issue because he gives philosophical attention to the question of *methodology* in this context.<sup>31</sup>

When we turn to Jones’s article, “The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations,” in *Philosophical Forum* (Winter–Spring 1977–1978) we witness that he openly challenged the hegemonic notion that philosophy in its universality was not—in any manner—concerned with ethnic particularity. Jones also brings into sharp relief how the question of legitimacy is an overriding principle in the defense of what constitutes Black philosophy as a distinctive form of philosophical inquiry. Jones argues,

In recent years the concept of an ethnic approach to a discipline has emerged. Central to this approach is the self-conscious concern to accent the characteristics of a given cultural, racial, religious, or national grouping and to establish its history, perspective, culture, the agenda, as central as indispensable for the content and method of various disciplines. Black philosophy is a representative of this development.<sup>32</sup>

Jones perceptively declares, “As a new entry in the philosophical marketplace, black philosophy finds that it must reply to questions not generally addressed to other neoteric developments. Other newcomers are asking to justify their adequacy and significance. Black philosophy, however, must respond to the prior question of its legitimacy; it must establish its right to exist as an appropriate philosophical position.”<sup>33</sup>

Jones’s contributions to the process of establishing the legitimacy of Black philosophy is indicative of a major development and turn in the history of African American philosophy on two levels. First, in terms of the academic research and teaching, he links African American philosophical inquiry to the general development and emergence of African American studies as an area of inquiry. Second, with respect to professional status, Jones facilitated the development of the concerted and collective effort to challenge the racism in the professional ranks of the American Philosophical Association.

On the intellectual front, we discern a decisive shift in the kind of topics undertaken for doctoral dissertations in the 1970s. In part due to the changing character of Black intellectual and political culture during the 1960s and 1970s, the African American academic philosopher of the 1970s found the Black experience to be an important area of research. Among those academic philosophers from this period that are no longer with us, we have: Ernest D. Mason’s *Alain Locke’s Philosophy of Value: An Introduction* at Emory University in 1975, the aforementioned Robert C. Williams and his dissertation on *A Study of Religious Language: Analysis/Interpretation of Selected Afro-American Spirituals, with Reference to Black Religious Philosophy* at Columbia University in 1975, and Charles A. Frye’s *The Impact of Black Studies on the Curricula of Three Universities* at the University of Pittsburgh in 1976.

Furthermore, with the rise of Black Studies, philosophers not only carried out research in this field but also began serving as administrators in this academic endeavor. For example, William R. Jones became the coordinator of Black Studies during the period of 1974–1976 at Yale Divinity School and then later, beginning in 1977, served as the long-time director of African American Studies at Florida State University. He was in the vanguard of a growing trend that pre-dated some of our contemporary philosophers in that capacity today. Along with Jones, there was Carlton L. Lee, who founded and was the

first director of Black Americana Studies at Western Michigan University; he held that post from 1970 until his death in 1972. Additionally, Robert C. Williams was acting director of Afro-American Studies at Vanderbilt University and he also served as the chair of the APA Committee on Blacks in Philosophy. Charles A. Frye was director of a similar program at Southern University in New Orleans from 1991 to his untimely demise in 1994. Thus, as philosopher, Jones was not only one of the first to head up an African American Studies program but he also had the longest tenure in that capacity.

As for the professional status of African Americans in the APA, Doc would indeed lead the fight with his “Crisis in Philosophy: The Black Presence,” which appeared in the 1973 *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*. Jones developed this crucial report on the status of Black philosophers with the expressed aim of reforming the American Philosophical Association. Subsequently, this report was the catalyst for one of the most significant institutional changes in professional philosophy, namely, the advent of the Committee on Blacks in Philosophy. Under the charge of the Committee on Blacks in Philosophy, our *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* owes its existence to Dr. Jones.

Jones was the chair of what was the Subcommittee on the Status and Future of Blacks in Philosophy, which in turn became a permanent APA committee. Foundational to the host of Jones’s recommendations was his keen analysis of the “cancer of racism” both in the country at large and specifically in the profession of philosophy. Jones pointed out, “Philosophy, unfortunately, exhibits the image of a lily white fraternity. Philosophy has not addressed in a focused way the issues that blacks find relevant and stimulating. The topics that the special history and existential situation that blacks spawn have only rarely been included in APA division programs. . . . Admission into the philosophical community, especially its inner sanctum, appears to require the adoption of the particular orientation controlled by the white majority.”

Jones continued: “I submit that there are hidden and improperly examined opinions as to what constitutes philosophy which dictate the policy for the entire discipline, especially as regards training for the profession. These opinions must be exposed and critically examined if the participation and entrance of blacks into the profession is to be substantially increased.”<sup>34</sup> Undoubtedly, the challenge that Dr. Jones put forth in 1974 is quite relevant and significant for us today. There is so much more that can be said about the person I call the “Dean” of contemporary African American philosophers. However, George Yancy’s interview with Dr. Jones provides the opportunity to reflect on Jones’s legacy. With the Yancy interview we can read Doc’s own evaluation of his life as philosopher; in fact, we discover the philosophical gems that no other can completely capture with such eloquence and profundity.

Over the years, Doc has been the recipient of many awards. They are the following: the African American Studies and Research Center Award for Outstanding Contribution to Philosophy and the African American Community from Purdue University; Distinguished Visiting Professor in Afro-American Studies at Lafayette College in 1983–84; first recipient of the William R. Jones Most Valuable Mentor Award, which was established by the Florida Endowment Fund for Higher Education to recognize the contribution of faculty members in the state of Florida university system to McKnight Black doctoral students; Florida State University Faculty Teaching Award in 1989 and 1994; state of Florida Ida S. Baker Black Distinguished Educator Recognition Award; Richard Allen

Award from Yale Divinity School; Bragg Humanist of the Year; American Humanist Association Humanist Pioneer of the Year; and the first recipient of the Martin Luther King Jr. Distinguished Scholar Award. In 2008 at the Fifteenth Annual Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference, Jones received its first William R. Jones Award, established in his honor for a lifetime of achievement. I was fortunate enough to participate in that ceremony. Yet, I know full well that the greatest reward and the one thing that Doc cherished most was none other than engaging in a good old fashioned “cuss and discuss” session. With the passing of Doc, we have lost our Dean; however, we cannot forget that he left us with a rich legacy that we are mandated to continue.<sup>35</sup>

#### Notes

1. Dr. Francis A. Thomas had been a member of the American Philosophical Association since the 1942, when he taught at Wilberforce University. See *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 16 (1942) along with 17 (1943): 172 and 19 (1945–46): 466. Other notable African American philosophers that were members in 1945–46 and the following academic year (1946–47) included: Cornelius Golightly, Eugene C. Holmes, Alan Locke, and Forrest Oran Wiggins. See *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 20 (1946–47): 565 for the Thomas listing. From this list, the only philosopher to precede Thomas as an APA member was Wiggins, he who was a member in 1939. On Wiggins, read *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 13 (1939): 194. For additional information on Thomas, see John H. McClendon III, “My Tribute to a Teacher, Mentor, Philosopher, and Friend: Dr. Francis A. Thomas (March 16, 1913 to September 17, 2001)” *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2003).
2. William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (New York: Doubleday, 1973).
3. For Jones’s seminal piece on the academic defense of Black philosophy, read William R. Jones, “The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations,” *The Philosophical Forum* 9, no. 2–3 (1977–1978): 149–160. On Jones’s assessment of the professional status of Black philosophers and the APA, consult William R. Jones, “Crisis in Philosophy: The Black Presence,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1973–74) and also published in *Radical Philosophers’ News Journal* (August 1974). One of his earliest published critique of Black liberation theology is William R. Jones, “Theodicy and Methodology in Black Theology: A Critique of Washington, Cone and Cleage,” *Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 4 (October 1971): 541–57.
4. William R. Jones, “Dear Francis,” *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2003).
5. At the eighteenth Annual PBOS Conference, a panel discussion entitled “Conversation across Generations of Struggle with Dr. William R. Jones” included Dr. Jones with Ms. Brittany O’Neal and Ms. Kimberly A. Harris. See the program of the eighteenth Annual Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference (October 28 & 29, 2011), Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. [A copy of the program in possession of the author.]
6. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 251. An important work by one of his doctoral students that displays the indelible imprint of Jones’s philosophical and theological position is Reginald F. Davis, *Frederick Douglass: A Precursor to Liberation Theology* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005).
7. At the Fifteenth Annual PBOS Conference, Dr. Jones gave the keynote address, “Beyond Mis-Education and Mis-Religion: Correcting the Mismanagement of Human Liberation.” See the program of the Fifteenth Annual Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference (October 24 & 25, 2011) Michigan State

- University, East Lansing, Michigan. [A copy of the program in possession of the author.]
8. Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1922); Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 216, n. 5.
  9. A number of Jones's public lectures were ultimately reworked into published pieces. See, for example, "Process Theology: Guardian of the Oppressor or Goad to the Oppressed," *Process Studies* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 268–81. This was originally a paper presented at a conference on process theology and the Black experience at the University of Chicago. This conference was co-sponsored by the Center for Process Studies and Meadville/Lombard Theological School on November 9, 1985.
  10. Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*, 216, n. 6.
  11. For a number of years after the publication of IGWR, Doc was hard at work developing a written text that would capture "The Anatomy of ESP Oppression," which he articulated and continually refined in his lectures. One of his proposed titles was *Oppression-Centric Pedagogy 101: A Reference Manual and Workbook*.
  12. Jones, "Crisis in Philosophy," and also published in *Radical Philosophers' News Journal* (August 1974).
  13. For Dan Gerson's website consult "Dr. William R. Jones: In Memoriam" found at <http://www.williamrjones.org/>. The Yancy interview of Dr. Jones was initially conducted to serve as a chapter in George Yancy, ed., *African-Americans Philosophers: 17 Conversations* (New York: Routledge, 1998). For an overview of Yancy's method of philosophical biography, please see the "Introduction: Philosophy and the Situated Narrative Self," in *The Philosophical I: Personal Reflections on Life in Philosophy*, ed. George Yancy (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).
  14. On Butler as a Tuskegee Airman, please consult "Dr. Broadus Nathaniel Butler, 75, Tuskegee Airman and Educator, Dies in Washington, DC," *Jet* 89, no. 11 (January 29, 1996).
  15. Gilbert Haven Jones's father was Joshua H. Jones and was president of Wilberforce University from 1900–1908. He received a BA from Claflin University, SC, in 1885 and also attended Howard University. He later earned both his BD (1887) and his DD (1893) from Wilberforce University. See Richard R. Wright, *Centennial Encyclopedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the A. M. E. Church, 1916), 141. In 1909, Gilbert Haven Jones earned his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Jena in Germany with his dissertation topic, *Lotze und Bowne: Eine Vergleichung Ihrer philosophischen Arbeit* (Lotze and Bowne: A Comparison of Their Philosophical Work). Thus, Gilbert Haven Jones became the first African American to earn the PhD in philosophy from a German university and the third African American to earn the doctorate in philosophy. Gilbert Haven Jones also served as president of Wilberforce University (1924–1932). Consult George Yancy, "Gilbert Haven Jones as an Early Black Philosopher and Educator," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 51–52. The father of Richard I. McKinney was Dr. George P. McKinney Sr. He was editor of *The Florida Baptist*, *The Florida Baptist Herald*, and *The Florida Baptist Watchman*, and he was pastor of The African Baptist Church in Live Oak, Florida. In 1892, George P. McKinney Sr. was appointed president of the Florida Institute in Live Oak, Florida. George McKinney was also a graduate of the Florida Institute. See G. F. Richings, *Evidences of Progress Among Color People* (Philadelphia: G. S. Ferguson, 1902), 53–55. Richard Ishmael McKinney earned his doctorate from Yale University in 1942 with a dissertation on *Religion in Higher Education among Negroes*. McKinney was also president of Storer College from 1944–1950. See John H. McClendon III, "Dr. Richard Ishmael McKinney: Historical Summation of the Life of a Pioneering African American Philosopher," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2006). Francis A. Thomas's maternal grandfather was Benjamin F. Lee. Lee was an 1872 graduate of Wilberforce University. He was also a professor of homiletics before assuming the position as president of Wilberforce (1876–1884). Thomas's mother was also an educator and taught Latin and French. Consult Richard R. Wright, *Centennial Encyclopedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the A. M. E. Church 1916), 149. Thomas earned his doctorate in 1960 from Indiana University with a dissertation on *Philosophies of Audiovisual Education as Conceived in a University Center and by Selected Leaders*. Thomas was chair of the philosophy department and after he retired in 1978 achieved Philosopher Emeritus status in 1981. Thomas was also dean of Payne Seminary from 1979–1997. See McClendon, "My Tribute to a Teacher," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2003).
  16. Walter Dyson, *Howard University, The Capstone of Negro Education, A History: 1867–1940* (Washington, DC: The Graduate School, 1941).
  17. Winston K. McAllister (1920–1976) earned his AB from Talladega College in 1938 and his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Michigan in 1947 with a doctoral dissertation, *The Compatibility of Psychological Hedonism and Utilitarianism*. McAllister joined the Howard philosophy department in 1946 and served as chair of the department from 1966–1976. See William A. Banner, "Winston Kermit McAllister (1920–1976)," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 50, no. 2 (November 1976): 136–37. Eugene C. Holmes (1905–1980) earned the AB from New York University and his PhD in philosophy from Columbia University in 1942. His dissertation topic was *Social Philosophy and the Social Mind: The Study of Genetic Methods of J. M. Baldwin, George Herbert Mead, and J. E. Boodin*. Holmes followed Locke as chair of the philosophy department and immediately preceded McAllister. See McClendon, "Eugene C. Holmes: A Commentary on a Black Marxist Philosopher," in *Philosophy Born of Struggle*, ed. Leonard Harris (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt publishing Company, 1983), 37–50.
  18. Rawn James Jr., *Root and Branch: Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, and the Struggle to End Segregation* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013); Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).
  19. On Lewis Baxter Moore see the electronic submission on "Lewis Baxter Moore (1855–1928), PhD 1896 First African American to earn the Doctorate of Philosophy from Penn," University Archives and Records Center University of Pennsylvania, <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/framer/moorelb.html>; and Leonard Harris, *Philosophy Born of Struggle: An Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1983), xiii. On Alain Locke, consult Eugene C. Holmes, "The Legacy of Alain Locke," *Freedomways* 3 (Summer 1963): 293–306.
  20. John H. McClendon, "Eugene C. Holmes: A History of Philosophy at Howard University," unpublished paper, in the possession of the author, presented as the V. J. McGill Lecture, Department of Philosophy, San Francisco State University in 1998.
  21. For Golightly, see Richard B. Angell, "Cornelius L. Golightly 1917–1976," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 49 (1975–1976): 158–59. For Wiggins, see John H. McClendon, "Forrest O. Wiggins (1907–1982)," *Blackpast.org Online Encyclopedia*, and Clark Johnson, "Biographical Sketch of Forrest Oran Wiggins," in the Forrest Oran Wiggins Papers, University of Minnesota Archives. On Hammond as first African American professor at Seton Hall, see Alan Delozier, "History of Seton Hall," <http://events.shu.edu/150/history.html#1916>. Hammond was the only person to chair both the psychology and philosophy departments at Seton Hall. Consult "The Dr.

- Francis Monroe Hammond Collection of Social Sciences at Seton Hall University,” <http://library.shu.edu/libnews/n20021107.htm>. For biographical treatment of Fontaine, see Rhonda Williams, “Dr. William Thomas Valeria Fontaine,” <http://www.upenn.edu/VPGE/FontaineBio.html> [accessed 2008]. James Ross, “William T. Fontaine (1909–1968) *APA Proceedings and Addresses* 43 (1969–1970). Bruce Kuklick, *Black Philosopher, White Academy: The Career of William Fontaine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Read R. B. Atwood, H. S. Smith, and Catherine O. Vaughan, “Negro Teachers in Northern Colleges and Universities in the United States,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 18, no. 4 (Autumn 1949): 566. John H. McClendon III, “On the Politics of Professional Philosophy: The Plight of the African American Philosopher,” in *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge*, ed. George Yancy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 121–45.
22. Among the official listings of Winson Coleman as philosopher, consult Archie J. Balm, *Directory of American Philosophers* 3 (1966): 122 and the *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 51 (1977): 59. Johnson C. Smith University has recognized Dr. Coleman’s legacy of contributions to the University by establishing the Winson R. Coleman Endowed Scholarship, which is awarded to an outstanding junior scholar in the humanities and also by co-naming the University’s tennis courts after him. See Benny L. Smith, “JCSU Honors Three Distinguished Coaches: Eddie McGirt Football Field and the Coleman-Cuthbertson Tennis Courts,” Official Website of the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association, <http://theciaa.com/news/2007-08/jcsu062608>.
  23. Carlton L. Lee, “Black Americana Studies,” *Negro History Bulletin* 34, no. 5 (May 1971). Also consult, for biographical material, “Resume of Carlton L. Lee (August 16, 1970),” in Box 2, Folder 23: Lee, Carlton L., Director Black Americana Studies, University of Western Michigan, 1970-1972 Series: Department of African and African American Studies Records, 1966-1981, Duke University Libraries, <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findaids/uaafa/#da>. Also see John H. McClendon, “Afro-American Philosophers and Philosophy: A Selected Bibliography,” *Afro-Scholar Working Paper No. 7* (Urbana: University of Illinois Urbana Champaign Afro-American Studies Research Program, 1981), 58.
  24. See the electronic article on a street named after Butler by Nicole Bickford, “Curtain goes up on Bolling’s Dazzling New Housing Area, Streets Named,” [http://www.dcmilitary.com/airforce/beam/archives/mar17/bm\\_h31700.html](http://www.dcmilitary.com/airforce/beam/archives/mar17/bm_h31700.html). On the issue of Butler’s job search also see Leonard Harris, ed., *Philosophy Born of Struggle: An Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917* (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co. 1983), ix.
  25. Ann Anderson, “Local Man’s Legacy Began as Classmate of King,” *Danville Register Bee* (January 18, 2005). My account of Dr. McLaughlin substantially draws on the research of Dr. Stephen C. Ferguson. I want to thank him for sharing his unpublished work on McLaughlin.
  26. William R. Jones, Report of the Subcommittee on the Participation of Blacks in Philosophy, “Crisis in Philosophy: The Black Presence,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1973–1974), 122.
  27. Richard I. McKinney, “Existential Ethics and Protest Movement,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 22, no. 2 (1965–66): 107–20.
  28. Lewis Gordon, *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), x.
  29. For comments on Thomas by his former students, see John H. McClendon III, “My Tribute to a Teacher, Mentor, Philosopher, and Friend: Dr. Francis A. Thomas (March 16, 1913 to September 17, 2001);” Leonard Harris, “Francis Thomas: Gate Keeper,” and Cheryl D. Marcus, “Tribute to Francis A. Thomas, Ed.D.,” all in *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2003). Berkley Eddins, “Philosophia Perennis and Black Studies,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (Summer 1971). The above cited Cook lecture and a listing of other lectures by Joyce Mitchell Cook can be found in George Yancy, ed., *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 285. For the Wingspread Conference on “The Black Philosopher,” there is a tape recording at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. See “The Black Philosopher” Conversations from Wingspread/Radio Program, Racine, Wisconsin, The Johnson Foundation, 1976. Robert C. Williams served as chair of the APA Committee on Blacks in Philosophy. See “Memorial Notes” for “Robert C. Williams 1935–1987,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 61, no. 2 (November 1987), 385.
  30. Please consult the review of D. J. Harris, “Impenetrable Logic,” (January 18, 2005), <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0807010332/002-2044554>. Also see Mary Paula-Walsh, review of “Is God a White Racist? Prolegomenon to Black Theology” 35, no. 4. *Sociological Analysis* (Winter 1974); and Rosemary Ruether, *New Republic* 170, no. 1/2 (January 5, 1974).
  31. Roy D. Morrison II, “Self-Transformation in American Blacks: The Harlem Renaissance and Black Theology,” in *Existence in Black*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon (New York: Routledge, 1997), 46. Also consult Roy D. Morrison II, “Black Philosophy: An Instrument for Cultural and Religious Liberation,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 33 no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1976), 11–24. For a comparative view of Morrison and Jones’s treatment of process theology, read Roy D. Morrison II, “Process Philosophy, Social Thought, and Liberation Theology,” *Zygon* 19, no. 1 (1984): 65–81; and William R. Jones, “Process Theology: Guardian of the Oppressor or Goad to the Oppressed,” *Process Studies* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 268–81.
  32. William R. Jones, “The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations,” previously published in *The Philosophical Forum, A Quarterly* IX, no. 2–3 (Winter–Spring), 77–78. All citations to this article are to the 1999 edition in *Yours in the Struggle: Celebrating the Devotion to Freedom*, Special Collection of Works by William R. Jones, p.0 a-b.
  33. *Ibid.*, p.0 a-b.
  34. William R. Jones, Report of the Subcommittee on the Participation of Blacks in Philosophy, “Crisis in Philosophy: The Black Presence,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1973–1974), 121.
  35. See the program of the Fifteenth Annual Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference (October 24 & 25, 2011), Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. [A copy of the program in possession of the author.] Jones’s acceptance speech, “Oppression, Race and Humanism,” for the American Humanist Association Humanist Pioneer of the Year Award can be found in *The Humanist* 52, no. 6 (Nov.–Dec. 1992).

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*

James Cone (Orbis Books, 2012). 202 pp. \$14.64, ISBN 978150759376.

Reviewed by Timothy Joseph Golden  
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James Cone, the premier twentieth-century theologian on Black liberation theology, who has succeeded in weaving African American religious history and tradition with scripture, giving us landmark theological texts like *Black Theology and*

*Black Power, A Black Theology of Liberation, and God of the Oppressed*, has yet again written a book that shakes Christian theology to its very core. In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Cone provides a theological analysis of what is perhaps the most compelling yet most overlooked similarity between the cross of Christ and the history of American terrorism against African Americans: that the lynching of African Americans, which resulted in numerous innocent Black bodies hanging from trees, often done at the hands of white, self-professed Christian mobs, is akin to the crucifixion of Christ, itself a lynching at the hands of an angry mob of self-professed religious zealots, which resulted in Christ's innocent body hanging from the tree that was the cross of Calvary. As only Cone can do, he reminds white theology of its failure to see such a striking similarity, and appropriately characterizes this failure as indicating first, a symptom of the inability of the white Christian conscience to fully comprehend and adequately respond to the tragedy of Black suffering at the hands of white American terrorism, and second—and perhaps *because* of the shortcomings of the white Christian conscience—a deep need for Black theology to develop its own distinct hermeneutic of liberation. This book is thus needed, and Cone has delivered to Black theology—and to Black philosophy—a work that will yield theological and philosophical reflection on profound moral questions for decades to come.

A central theme of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* is the failure of Reinhold Niebuhr, perhaps considered to be the greatest of the socially conscious theologians of the twentieth century, to critically engage the abomination of the lynching of African Americans. Cone points out that for all of Niebuhr's insights on other moral subjects, Niebuhr failed—miserably—to address the moral problem of the lynching of African Americans. One would think that a theologian of Niebuhr's erudition and moral sensibility would immediately see such a connection between the cross and the lynching tree, given the epigraph of Cone's first chapter, entitled "Nobody Knows De Trouble I See": "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree."<sup>1</sup> But Niebuhr does not see the connection. Cone admits that Niebuhr was, among white theologians, "particularly sensitive to the evils of racism and spoke and wrote on many occasions of the sufferings of African Americans" (32). Cone's critique of Niebuhr is thus a well balanced one, which does not castigate Niebuhr for his failure to see the connection between the cross and the lynching tree, but rather recognizes his moral sensibility and sympathy for the plight of African Americans in the twentieth century as an aggravating factor in failing to make such a connection; for surely a theologian of such keen social and moral consciousness would be aware of the connection between the cross and the lynching tree. But Niebuhr was not. Cone accurately describes the implications of Niebuhr's oversight of lynching when he writes, "To reflect on this failure is to address a defect in the conscience of white Christians and to suggest why African Americans have needed to trust and cultivate their own theological imagination" (32). Indeed, no one has cultivated the African American theological imagination as insightfully and consistently as Cone has, and *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, with its critique of white theology as personified by Niebuhr, and its appeals to the African American poetic/literary tradition, demonstrates that Cone's cultivation and trust of the African American religious traditions is what has made Black theology the intellectual and moral force that it is today.

Cone's critique of Niebuhr sets the stage for a poetic and literary turn in Cone's theological reflection; for also at the core of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* is a powerful critique of theoretical abstraction, which has been a tool of white theology that has turned Christian soteriology on its head. On the account

of salvation in the Gospels, there can be no salvation except that the Word (John 1:1) is made flesh, dwell among us, and we behold its glory.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the speech—the *logos* (λόγος) of John 1:1 must become incarnate in the *sarx* (σάρξ—human flesh) of John 1:14 in order for humanity to experience salvation. Without the incarnation of Christ as a poverty stricken Jew in a colonized land, and dying an underserved death by crucifixion reserved for the underside of the Roman Empire, according to the Christian Gospel, humanity could not be saved. But the theoretical abstraction of white theology, overemphasizing word over flesh, speech over action, concepts over embodiment, and theory over praxis and political engagement, has effectively made the *flesh a word*, instead of making the word flesh; that is, Jesus Christ has become an abstraction, a mere disembodied symbol of theological reflection. Thus stripped of its social and cultural moorings, the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes an ersatz one that can fulfill neither the prophetic calling of Micah,<sup>3</sup> nor that of Isaiah.<sup>4</sup> White theological reflections thus appear to be more akin to the Rawlsian original position, with its dehumanizing effects of theoretical abstraction that, as Charles Mills has argued, will not only fail to address the social injustices directed at African Americans but will likely perpetuate them;<sup>5</sup> and all of this despite the fact that Jesus proclaims that the truth is not objective and theoretical, but rather is flesh and blood.<sup>6</sup> One plainly sees this critique of theoretical abstraction on theological matters in the opening of chapter four, entitled "The Crucified Christ in Black Literary Imagination," where Cone points out that "Like Countee Cullen, many black poets, novelists, painters, dramatists, and other artists saw clearly what white theologians and clergy ignored and what black religious scholars and ministers merely alluded to: that in the United States, the clearest image of the crucified Christ was the figure of an innocent black victim, dangling from a lynching tree. Such victims were not abstract or anonymous symbols. They were particular people" (93). So it is that Cone understands that, theologically speaking, the truth is not a concept. The truth is a person; in the words of Ralph Ellison, the truth is "flesh and bone, fiber and liquids"; the truth is always already embodied in a socio-economic, historical, and cultural situation.<sup>7</sup> And for Cone the socio-economic, historical, and cultural situation of the Jesus in the Gospels is the same as that of African Americans: poor, colonized, and despised. Cone argues as much when he cites W. E. B. Du Bois's reflections from his essay, "The Church and the Negro" from *Crisis*, in October 1913 (103).

So although the virtues of clarity and rigor are virtues to be sought in any scholarly work, theologians and philosophers often overemphasize them to a fault, resulting in a morass of theoretical abstractions that never make the word flesh; to the contrary, such approaches ignore questions of racial embodiment and convert bodies into theological symbols, and logical variables and connectives. Not so with Cone, however, who understands that literary and poetic expression, if I may borrow a term from Kierkegaard here, results in "double reflection": the speaker gets the listeners to not only hear the message but also to appropriate it in such a way that their behavior changes. The poetry and music that Cone references, from Claude McKay to Countee Cullen, to Billie Holiday's song "Strange Fruit," are intended not only as aesthetic expressions of what Nietzsche would call the "Dionysian," but also tell stories of Black suffering that represent calls for social consciousness and political action that aim to change the behavior toward African Americans from injustice to justice, from being terrorized to being recognized and appreciated, from being contemptible and disregarded to being morally respected as human beings. The poetry and music of the Black aesthetic imagination, as Cone presents it to us, was thus a call to moral obligation through storytelling. And in the Christian tradition, this was the way of

the Savior. Indeed, when Jesus was asked the question “who is my neighbor?” he did not engage in theoretical abstraction to the point of obfuscation. Instead, he told a story, which we now know as the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus, of course, could have easily avoided a substantive reply to the question “Who is my neighbor?” by providing an abstract, conceptual definition such as: “a neighbor is one who lives less than fifty paces away from you.” But if he had done this, there would have been no appropriation, no application to the questioner’s life; indeed, the questioner could have easily avoided responsibility for those in need with such a bright-line rule for “neighbor” by excluding any person beyond the fifty pace limitation of the objective definition. But instead of providing this loophole to avoid one’s moral obligations, Jesus told a story that showed that the neighbor is anyone in need. With this broader definition, the moral responsibility of the questioner is heightened to an astonishing degree. Thus is the value of storytelling in the form of poetic and musical expression; it is an expression that Cone recognizes is preferable to the social and moral complacency attending an overemphasis on theoretical abstraction.

If we are honest with ourselves as philosophers and theologians, we would readily admit that the emphasis on clarity, rigor, and objective truth is, historically speaking—at least in the Western philosophical tradition—taking place outside the tradition of Homeric poetry and storytelling which preceded it; for when Thales claims that “all is water,” he is making a subtle yet noticeable break from the songs of Homer and Hesiod, which were inspirational and not scientific in nature. Cone, through his analysis of the African American literary tradition and its aesthetic/storytelling-oriented response to lynching, reminds us that the inspiration of poetry, music, and story can more effectively address social injustice than the obfuscations of overly theoretical theological and philosophical reasoning. In reading Cone’s work, it can be said that perhaps Nietzsche was right; perhaps the Socratic quest for objective definition does represent a theoretical obfuscation that actually did destroy Greek culture; indeed, one could argue that such theoretical obfuscation has certainly contributed to the oppression of African Americans. As yet another example of the effectiveness of poetic passion to address social injustice as compared with dispassionate theological abstraction, Cone recounts the discussion between James Baldwin, a giant of the African American literati, and Niebuhr, a theologian who had no answer for the social problems that Baldwin so courageously addressed both in his immense literary corpus, and in his lectures when the two met in a radio interview to discuss the response to the Birmingham church bombing of September 1963 (53–55). Notably, Cone points out that Baldwin—neither a philosopher nor theologian—“was relentless in his critique of white Americans for failing to live up to their own political and religious traditions about love and justice” (54). Moreover, Cone perceptively points out that “although the Baldwin-Niebuhr dialogue did not reveal sharp disagreements, it did reveal different levels of passion in their responses, a gulf of emotional orientation to the racial crisis, reflected in the bombing” (54). Cone also observes that “Niebuhr, identifying with the powerful white majority, was calm and dispassionate in the face of what most blacks regarded as an unspeakable evil” (54). Thus it is that Baldwin and Niebuhr represent aesthetic/poetic, and rational/theological/philosophical points of view, respectively. Cone correctly, in my view, points to the former of these two approaches as more effective in fighting against social injustice, and correctly points to the latter as being complicit in social injustice.

Two virtues of this fine book—its emphatic yet balanced critique of Niebuhr, and its embrace of poetic inspiration as a means to address social injustice—are discussed here by way

of illustration, not limitation. Others who read *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* will undoubtedly find many others. I leave a discussion of those virtues for what I know will be fruitful philosophical and theological reflection on the moral problem of lynching and its relationship to the Christian Gospel for decades to come. Only a theologian and scholar of Cone’s quality could spawn such an enduring dialogue, and *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* does precisely that.

#### Notes

1. Cone, *Cross and the Lynching Tree*; *Holy Bible*, King James Version, Acts 10:39.
2. *Holy Bible*, King James Version, John 1:14.
3. “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” *Holy Bible*, King James Version, Micah, 6:8.
4. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” *Holy Bible*, King James Version, Isaiah, 61:1.
5. Charles Mills, “Rawls on Race/Race in Rawls,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XLVII, pp. 161-84, 2009.
6. See *Holy Bible*, King James Version, John 14:6, where Jesus proclaims himself, his “flesh and blood” to be the “truth.”
7. *Holy Bible*, King James Version, John 14:6.

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## ***Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?***

George Yancy, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012). 224 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-69998-3.

**Reviewed by Jessica Patella Konig**  
*Duquesne University*

Many theologians and Christian ethicists have looked to the historical Jesus as an exemplar for how one ought to live. Indeed, it is this impulse that drove the historic *What Would Jesus Do?* movement that gained traction in the 1990s among evangelical Christians. The movement had a relatively simple premise, namely, that when faced with a moral dilemma, asking oneself what Jesus would do in a similar circumstance would grant one insight into the proper course of action. While this movement is typically framed in relation to individual moral agency, it is worth asking if it has larger applicability, say, to what we might term “collective social sin.” In *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* George Yancy insightfully asks this very question. Specifically, he challenges a distinguished and diverse group of contributors (philosophers, theologians, biblical exegetes, and religious scholars) to reflect on the question, *What Would Jesus Do (About Whiteness)?*

Yancy introduces the problem of whiteness and its relationship to Christology through a phenomenological description of the experience of being a Black body in a predominantly white space, most notably in a *Christian* space (at church). He describes the ease with which white bodies occupy space and the taken-for-grantedness with which they<sup>1</sup> understand their own existence vis-à-vis other bodies. Indeed, he comments that unlike bodies of color, white bodies do not command attention. That is to say, whiteness functions as a system of unearned power and privilege, normalizing white experience, essentially transforming it into the transcendental norm. While Yancy describes such similar experiences in spaces

other than at church (i.e., at APA meetings and in classrooms), the fact that this phenomenon is equally present at church presents an important *theological* problem. Indeed, specifically, while Christianity espouses a praxis of love and community (read through a certain hermeneutic), it has nevertheless been unable to escape the hegemony of whiteness. Yancy convincingly argues, “Whiteness is not some extraneous and vague problem that exists outside the domain of ecclesia, but something rooted right there and all too often invisible” (4). With his characteristically seamless blend of personal storytelling and philosophical rigor, Yancy works to make the invisible visible, thus forcing white people into the uncomfortable position of having to face their own complicity in structures of domination. This volume presents an impressive array of responses to the problem of whiteness in relation to Christology. I will first summarize the insight that each author brings to the fore, and afterwards evaluate the value of the book as a whole.

### Summary of chapters

W. E. B. Du Bois famously begins *The Souls of Black Folk* with a description of the strange experience of being deemed a problem, or, in other words, of being a Black man in a world that is divided by the color-line. It is also here that Karen Teel begins her chapter, though she argues that the *problem* is, in fact, “white notions of white superiority” (19). Hence, her chapter is framed by an insistence that white people turn the problem back onto themselves. She goes on to explore Christology in relation to this problem of whiteness, arguing that the very question asked by many white Christians, namely, *What Would Jesus Do (WWJD)?*, is already steeped in whiteness in that this strong identification with Jesus works to reinscribe white superiority. As such, Teel aims to “trouble the presumption that we can be like Jesus because he might be like us” (26). Drawing on the work of James Cone, she disentangles this identification by pointing out that the historical Jesus was not white (historically or analogically) and hence that a contemporary Jesus “might have only fleeting and tangential contact with privileged whites” (29). In order to fight against whiteness, she concludes that whites ought to reframe the question *WWJD?* to the more distant, and, yet, personally demanding, *What Would Jesus Have Us Do?*, forcing them into an existential feeling of discomfort in their own skin.

Laurie M. Cassidy also finds the white identification implicit in the question *WWJD?* problematic in that whites have been taught to imagine Jesus as powerful and white. She takes the privileged position of white power as a starting point to explore the distancing mechanism in white visual spectatorship of human suffering. Cassidy specifically analyzes Kevin Carter’s 1993 photo of a Sudanese Child, arguing that looking at photos like this from privileged positions is doubly problematic: it reinforces an us/them dichotomy and it gives whites the feeling of knowing *about* suffering without forcing them to recognize their own responsibility in the creation of it. Rather than identifying with Jesus, she argues that Christianity may give us tools that will help us to “resist the voyeuristic formulation of contemporary American culture” (38). Indeed, she argues that Christianity urges a “vulnerable stance toward our own radical complicity as white” (38). That is, the task of white Christians is to share in the vulnerability of those photographed by engaging with the photograph in a way that makes visible the unnamed and unmarked white privilege that lies outside the frame. Therefore, *WWJD?* shifts the focus from a form of *doing* to a way of *being* in relation to the images.

In order to answer the question *WWJD?* Cheryl Townsend Gilkes looks to Biblical accounts of Jesus’s ministry in Samaria. Indeed, she looks to what Jesus *did* do in relation to the marginalization of his time, with the recognition that while

race as we understand it did not exist in biblical times, national and tribal relations can function as an important analogue. In this context, she argues that “Samaria mattered mightily,” and, moreover, that by insisting on going through Samaria, “Jesus addressed a long-standing schism among the people of God and reintegrated the foundations of salvation history in Israel/Judah” (53). Gilkes contends, for example, that when Jesus asked the Samaritan woman at the well for water, fully intending to drink from her dipper, he did so with a willingness to ignore the boundaries that kept Samaritans and Judeans apart; that is to say, by intentionally moving across borders and boundaries Jesus serves as an important example of how to overcome separation and exclusion. Most importantly, this biblical story points to the fact that Jesus was willing to spend time in the places where the oppressed resided, which in essence worked to heal a historic divide and challenge the established hierarchy.

Moni McIntyre begins with an overview of both the historical and contemporary importance of the Black church in the United States, arguing that while Christianity as an institution excluded Blacks, the Bible itself offered hope in that it convinced the enslaved that “God is on the side of the poor and marginalized” and as such could help to bring about an exodus “from the bondage of chattel slavery” (76). Moreover, the enslaved strongly identified with Jesus given the depth of Jesus’s suffering. McIntyre gives a description of the early Black churches established by the enslaved, with their distinct style that reflected God’s solidarity with the oppressed. She then traces the formation and development of these early Black churches to contemporary Black churches that served as powerful centers in the lives of many African Americans. Lastly, she turns to the predominantly white mainline Episcopal Church (which has a very different history than the one outlined above), and specifically to the Church of the Holy Cross in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She argues that while the Episcopal Church was “riddled with racism in polity and practice since its inception” (79), this particular congregation has managed to overcome many obstacles and become the type of welcoming and inclusive space that Jesus would condone.

Jennifer Harvey draws the question *WWJD?* back to the problematic identification with Jesus that underlies the question, reminding us that the problem is particularly pointed for white Christians. She defines whiteness as a “complex and hydraheaded phenomenon intrinsically related to white supremacy,” which “normaliz[es] and mak[es] normative the collective dominance of persons racialized as ‘white’” (84). This normalizing process locates white people at the center of most narratives, which plays out over again when white Christians implicitly align themselves with Jesus, essentially reaffirming the centrality and power of the white actor. As such, she strongly claims that “identifying with the divine is about the last thing that a white person whose life is embedded in white-supremacist structures should be doing” (95). Instead, she suggests that the better question for white Christians seeking to overcome white supremacy is *What Would Zacchaeus Do?* This intentional dis-identification with the divine in favor of the identification with Zacchaeus (a member of the dominant class who became a “race traitor” once he underwent a radical conversion) can give white Christians important clues as to how to overturn white supremacy.

Rosemary Radford Ruether also works to highlight the problematic identification of white people and Jesus, though she does so by suggesting that the problem is not that white people try to identify with Jesus, but rather that they have identified Jesus as a white person, which is evident in most artistic depictions of Jesus in Western Christian iconography. She argues that this is more than mere artistic convention in

that it reflects assumptions about the superiority of whiteness over and above that of non-whites; indeed, “that Christ should be represented as ‘white’ because only ‘whites’ possess the fullness of human nature and the imagine of God” (111). In order to reconceptualize the role of Jesus as a way of overcoming white supremacy, Reuther turns to liberation Christologies, surveying a wide array: from Black American Christologies, to African, Latin American, and Asian views. This range allows her to examine both Christologies that make use of Black/white symbolism and those that focus more on colonial domination. She concludes that we ought to form a Christology where Christ is identified with those who suffer systematic oppression. This identification holds the possibility for both the liberation of the oppressed and the dismantling of white hegemony.

Tracy C. West locates the question *WWJD?* within a discourse of anti-Black, white racism, with a particular emphasis on the way that this discourse has been psychologically harmful to Black Christian converts. She does so with an eye toward establishing an everyday Jesus-ethic that would have the power to dismantle white-supremacist Christologies. The force of her critique of missionary work lies in her identification of early Christologies with truth-claims, allowing missionaries to understand themselves to be “bringing truth to the converts” (119), a message which reifies racial hierarchies. Indeed, she argues that this missionary work promotes a “Christological-cultural fusion where Jesus is comfortably positioned within the mores of a racist, Christianized political economy” (119). As such, Black Christian converts were encouraged to prove their loyalty to the white Christ by “declar[ing] their nothingness before God” (120). She argues that this presented Black people with “dueling moral messages” about Christ’s love for them, which echoes “the fluctuating responses of an abusive intimate partner” (116). These dueling messages (I love you, you are nothing . . . come to me, not as you are . . .) caused many Blacks to reject cultural ties in order to embrace Christianity, a move that has been both psychologically and culturally damaging. West calls for a new Jesus-ethic that undermines these social hierarchies and psychologically and culturally damaging assumptions, a Christology that undergoes a “blackening” process, allowing Black converts to come to Christ as they are.

Josiah U. Young III argues that believing in Christ alone is an ineffective way to fight racism and white privilege, which is evident in the vast number of contemporary Christian churches that are racist in practice. In light of this, he claims that anti-racist Christologies depend on Christ’s arrival (Parousia) in order to fight against racism. In fact, Young argues that Parousia is necessary in that “without the irrefutable presence of the Christ in the midst of history . . . every anti-racist Christology is the waning candle in the dark” (129). Yet, he acknowledges that there is a problem: there is nothing in either the Old or the New Testament to suggest that Jesus would work against white privilege since the issue of white privilege did not arise in biblical times. In order to justify his use of the risen Christ as an anti-racist hero (while the historical Jesus remained silent on the issue), Young draws on the work of Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch. Bloch insists that as a species we are forward looking, striving for something new, the “Not-Yet-Become.” The risen Christ, as the one who can usher in the new, can be seen as “a prototype of an eschatological species liberated from sin and death” (132). Parousia promises, in other words, to bring about the hoped for future, the future in which “free people . . . strive to be like the future they pray for daily” (134).

Methodologically, James W. Perkinson’s chapter takes the form of a complex call and response that shifts back and forth between contemporary issues of whiteness and interpretations of the ancient texts, drawing the two together in a way that is

more akin to continual improvisation than doctrinal confession. He begins with a definition of whiteness as a “force of cultural habituation” (137) that has become so engrained that it allows those who are white to simply be without ontological problematization. He then ties this current cultural phenomenon back to biblical history. Perkinson poetically and forcefully argues that whiteness is a fiction that hides a history of violence, one that stretches all the way back to Able’s murder. He then shifts back to the contemporary violence that whiteness veils, the socio-economic oppression that is racialized; indeed, he comments that the color of Wall Street is white and that “the exposure of this connection between cultural whiteness and big finance . . . [is a] minimum for any contemporary messianism worthy of the name” (140). Drawing on the work of James Cone, Perkinson looks to Jesus as an important model for how one ought to dismantle whiteness and bring about economic justice.

William David Hart problematizes the historical person of Jesus as a model for the dismantling of whiteness. His analysis is two-fold. First, he questions the legitimacy of the historical Jesus, regarding him “as a discursive object, a site of ideological contestation, and a form of cultural capital in a struggle of position among social groups” (157). This hermeneutical skepticism leads him to conclude that Jesus is a fictional character whom we can claim no reliable access to. The force of Hart’s argument, however, lies not in this first claim (though of course this has its own significance), but rather in the second one: the assertion that what we do claim to know about Jesus does not provide an example that ought to be followed (at least in regards to whiteness). Contra previous interpretations, Hart takes Jesus’s interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well to be marked by bigotry and prejudice. In fact, Hart’s view suggests that prior to any substantial interaction with the woman, Jesus seemed to believe that she was a serial adulterer. In this short interaction, Jesus makes transparent how he imagined *people like her* to live. As such, Jesus should not be regarded, according to Hart, as an answer to whiteness.

Anthony B. Pinn traces African American identification with Jesus in order to evaluate its effectiveness in overturning racist structures of domination. He evaluates the motivations for such identification for enslaved Africans, African Americans during the civil rights movement, and, finally, womanist theologians. While sympathetic to this impulse, he concludes that there are problems with this reliance on Jesus imagery as a means of racial liberation. First, this heavy identification of African Americans with a suffering Christ both normalizes suffering and re-enforces the social stigma that suffering is an essential part of Black life. Second, the very act of re-imagining Christ in a Black body, as opposed to the dominant white one, suggests that it is still being understood in relation to whiteness. Indeed, “‘Black’ Jesus imagery re-enforces whiteness, in that Blackness remains a response to, or consequences of, whiteness” (175). Third, this attempt rests on the problematic assumption that power relationships are something that can straightforwardly be overturned, and does not recognize the complexity of the problem. Pinn powerfully argues that despite the good intention, understanding Jesus as Black (at least theologically) cannot help to dismantle the complexity of racial and gender discrimination.

M. Shawn Copeland begins her chapter with a reminder that the Black identification with the suffering of Christ began with the sorrow songs of the enslaved Africans. In Jesus, they found someone who made visible the suffering and oppression of slavery. While this element of identification was still present in the non-violent civil rights movement inspired by Martin Luther King Jr., Copeland argues that for many who were attracted to the Black Power movement, Jesus had become unidentifiable as Black. In line with Vincent Harding, she argues, “this Christ

was far too meek and mild; he was the ineffectual, effete, compliant (white) American Christ” (187). The Black Power movement, in other words, was not happy with a Christ that just appeared Black; rather, they were interested in one that took the suffering and pain of Black people seriously and was willing to take action to end such suffering and pain. In this sense, Copeland paints the Black Power movement and its insistence on an active, co-suffering Jesus as a gift that can “uncover and disrupt white hegemony” (192). She suggests that this image of a powerful Black Christ can change our sacramental imagination and economy.

Finally, Victor Anderson argues that Christian theologians have interpreted Jesus’s ministry in terms of Christian supersessionism, or, in other words, they have understood Christ’s work to supersede all prior covenants making the reconciliation of God and all God’s people possible. Yet, Anderson argues that this understanding of supersessionism in the gospel of Jesus is scandalous in that it “mimetically joins Christology and whiteness” (197). Drawing on the work of Rene Girard, he argues that Christian supersessionism is rooted in mimetic desire, which carries with it violence generated by rivalry. This is problematic in terms of whiteness because the end result of a “dangerous history of repetitions, reversals, renunciations and racial supersessions” is the production of a white Jesus (208). Hence, the Gospel of Jesus is scandalous in that the mimetic desire to follow Jesus is good news for some, while at the same time reproducing a history of alterity for others. In light of this, Andersen suggests that completely dispensing of all mimetic desire to follow Christ may not be the answer, but rather that Christians (particularly white ones) should be aware of the dangers and scandals inherent in the gospel of Jesus Christ, thus developing a critical orientation toward Christology.

### Reflections

This collection of essays begins with a seemingly simple question: *What Would Jesus Do (About Whiteness)?* As a whole, the book takes Jesus ministry seriously as a possible avenue for understanding Christian responsibility in relation to whiteness, while neither making definitive theological claims as to the historical reality of Jesus nor his metaphysical status as divine. It is this very ambiguity as to the status of Jesus as a model for a Christian ethic that is so compelling.

This ambiguity begins in the introduction where Yancy describes the profound doubt he experiences when he confronts the thought that perhaps the collective prayers of the people performed at church do not extend beyond its walls. Indeed, he questions: “What if the discourse of prayer lacks all vertical metaphysical significance and is only an expression of shared community, shared pain and sorrow, a way of engaging in a form of collective, group catharsis?” And moreover, “What if the theological discourse, prayers, conceptions of the divine, visions of immortality, and ‘sacred’ texts remain socially horizontal, tied exclusively to human persons as *homo narrans* and *homo significans*?” (3). Yet, despite this doubt, Yancy goes on to say that he remains hopeful for something more, something that extends beyond us. He points to a hopeful theism that endures “despite the reality of massive world suffering [. . .] despite [his] own inevitable demise, and despite a profoundly complex universe filled with quiet” (3). The collected essays in this volume occupy the space between doubt and hope, thus complicating our understanding of our world, our God, and ourselves.

The fact that this “space between” takes so many forms is an important cautionary reminder to avoid the smugness inherent in thinking that one knows anything about God or what God is calling us to be/do. One of the places in which this is

evident in the book is in the diversity of attitudes toward Black liberation theology. While Black liberation theology, with its insistence that the historical Jesus demonstrates God’s solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, seems like a natural point of departure in the theological dismantling of white privilege, this quick appropriation is problematized. Indeed, while some of the authors argue that identifying Jesus as Black (or at least as non-white) can work as both a critique of whiteness and as the possibility for liberation of the oppressed, others warn that identifying Jesus with Blackness qua suffering is essentialist (defining Black bodies as bodies that suffer). To complicate the matter even more, some argue that identifying Jesus as Black is a misstep that won’t solve the problem because Blackness, in this case, is only understood in relation to whiteness. Or, in other words, even the Black Jesus is Black in reaction to or as a reaction against whiteness, which, once again, reinforces the priority of whiteness.

Getting back to the question at hand (*WWJD?*), several authors have cautioned against white Christians even asking themselves this because the question itself relies on the assumption that Jesus is enough like them that they could both know what he would do, and do likewise. Furthermore, even turning to Jesus’s works as a possible guide is contentious as some have interpreted Jesus’s life to be an example of how one ought to fight against oppression, while others have argued that Jesus himself held bigoted assumptions, and, thus, reinforced stereotypes even as he tried to cross them.

So where does this leave white Christians? Where does this leave the white Christian who is trying to confront her whiteness in ways that are consistent with her hope for a better world? The word that came to my mind as I closed the text was *disoriented*. While individual authors struggled to answer the question *WWJD?*, the collection as a whole offers no easy out. Instead, it leaves the white reader in the space between doubt and hope, forcing her to confront difficult questions about her own privilege and her ability (or lack thereof) to move outside of it. Indeed, the volume pushes the white reader to feel herself as a problem. For this reason, the book should be viewed as a gift to any white reader who takes oppression and social injustice seriously, and, indeed, to any white reader who wants to understand herself in relation to the world and God. As it is theologically and existentially challenging, I strongly recommend this book to anyone who is willing to take on the difficult problems of whiteness and Christology.

### Notes

1. The reader should note that in this review, while I will often use the term “they” when referring to white people, I include myself within the “they” category as I am also white. This enables me to avoid distancing myself, as a white woman, from the problem of whiteness vis-à-vis Christology as examined within the context of Yancy’s edited book and within the context and implications of this review.

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## ***Beyond the White Shadow: Philosophy, Sports, and the African American Experience***

John H. McClendon III and Stephen C. Ferguson II (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2012). 240 pp. ISBN 978-1-4652-0510-0.

**Reviewed by Floyd W. Hayes III**  
*Johns Hopkins University*

Black athletes have become central figures in the popular

culture of the United States of America and in the dominant society's culture of sport. Indeed, they are an integral part of the fabric that defines American identity at home and abroad. Black athletes are prominent subjects of news media commentaries; they don the covers of major sports magazines; and they are paid millions to have their names and images used in order to sell all kinds of sportswear, especially athletic shoes. Even some of the more quixotic Black athletes, like Dennis Rodman, have written memoirs that captivated sports fans and others, if only for a moment. Additionally, the manner in which the media represent, stereotype, and commercialize Black athletes has a major impact on the cultural imagination of a sizable proportion of Black American youth, encouraging them to pursue careers in intercollegiate and professional sports as the highway to personal success. Significantly, sports have increasingly influenced their economic opportunities, and educational direction, while shaping the dynamics of African American family life.

Yet, it is significant to consider that the extraordinary presence of Black athletes in America's culture of sports has a relatively short history. Prior to the 1950s, the structure of white supremacy and anti-Black racist practices largely excluded African Americans from participating in the dominant society's sports arena. From the dehumanizing period of chattel slavery to the racist segregation of the Old Jim Crow south, the social relations of white power, violence, and exploitation controlled the participation of Blacks in the field of sports. This is the background for studying the long march of Black athletes toward the American dream of freedom, justice, and equality. However, the critical question is whether they have achieved a dream or encountered a nightmare.

In *Beyond the White Shadow: Philosophy, Sports, and the African American Experience*, philosophers John H. McClendon III and Stephen C. Ferguson II provide a monumental study of the history of American sports and how that history has shaped Black American athletes and the culture of Black sports. This textbook also examines the historic struggle for Black sports ascendancy and the resultant contradictions that now characterize African American sports culture. What is innovative about this text is that the authors employ a Marxist analysis that examines the dialectical relationship between the system of United States capitalist political economy and the commodification and exploitation of all athletes, but most especially Black athletes. In so doing, the authors introduce a methodological framework that brings together both the philosophy of history and the philosophy of sport. Here is a critical and progressive perspective that demonstrates the interconnections of racist oppression, class exploitation, and gender domination in the analysis of the history of Black American sports.

*Beyond the White Shadow* is composed of an introduction and six chapters. In the introduction, the authors offer a justification for the value of philosophical analysis in understanding the history of American sports and the Black American experience. They assert:

One of the primary tasks of our text on the philosophy of sports and the African American experience is identifying how concrete social relations, institutions and practices, which compose the essential social makeup of sports, have an impact on our knowledge, values, beliefs and judgments about African American life circumstances with reference to sports. This is because with philosophy we are able to pierce beyond appearances to the essence of sports as a bourgeois (and often racist) social institution grounded on the exploitation of African American athletes by

predominantly white team owners, managers and collegiate institutional apparatuses. (xxvii)

The authors then discuss elements and categories of their philosophical approach. The authors point out that the "color-line," as an interpretation of historical events, has its origins in America's racist past. The "color-line" is the racist dialectic of Black inclusion and exclusion and the manner in which it has influenced the interpretation of Black sports history. From the construction of the "color-line"—which was W. E. B. Du Bois's characterization of racist segregation at the beginning of the twentieth century—has come the dubious discourse of "Black firsts" in the history of America's sports culture, according to McClendon and Ferguson. Because of the limits of the "Black firsts" idea, the authors point to the necessity of empirical data. The authors indicate that they also employ an assortment of Black athletes' autobiographies in order to provide concrete, empirical data for their analyses. Next, McClendon and Ferguson indicate that they will put forward a philosophy of history that utilizes empirical data in order to reflect directly on the concrete historical experiences of Blacks in American sports, revealing how values, beliefs, and meaning are interconnected in the interpretation of American history of sports. Here the authors note the significance of their book's title, *The White Shadow*, which springs from the title of a television series that depicted a Black principal recruiting a white former professional basketball player to coach at his urban high school. Here was a myth in which the "white shadow" represented the catalyst for solving the pathological difficulties of Black and Latino male youngsters. An additional element in the authors' philosophical arsenal is the political economy of sports. For McClendon and Ferguson, it is essential to analyze sport within the context of the political economy of capitalism, for it is through this method of analysis that the class character of the history of American sports and the Black experience can be properly and critically examined.

The first chapter, "What's Philosophy Got to Do With It? On the Meaning of Sports and the African American Experience," examines the tasks, substance, and scope of philosophy and then seeks to apply this understanding to the idea of the philosophy of science. Instead of the conventional or Western tradition that conceives of philosophy's function as the building of grand systems of thought based upon rigorous thought and reasoning and that results in an artificial world picture, McClendon and Ferguson see themselves as activist philosophers in the interests of the social change; hence, they argue that the function of philosophy is the transformation of the status quo. In regard to the substance of philosophy, the authors discuss a brief history of philosophy's subject matter—the nature of reality (ontology), the issue of morality (ethics), and the constitution of knowledge (epistemology). As a theoretical inquiry, philosophy also seeks to evaluate the importance of empirical accounts of science and the world. Since philosophy is a reflective inquiry and sport is a participatory social activity, there appears to be some tension between the two. It is this tension that encourages the authors to think through the long history of philosophy; they suggest that an examination of this history shows that philosophy has shown a tendency for changing and expanding its boundaries. Just as philosophy has incorporated the cognitive sciences, physics, mathematics, literature, religion, art, education, and human existence as subfields of inquiry, McClendon and Ferguson assert that philosophy of sports also is a subfield.

This reviewer found profoundly insightful and singularly informative the authors' philosophical inquiry into the meaning of sports and the Black American experience. The authors recuperate the dehumanizing system of chattel slavery in order to emphasize its significance for understanding the meaning and value of sports to Black American athletes. While

conventional philosophers have employed the concept of “fair play,” racist insults and assaults have rendered sports anything but “fair play” for Black athletes. From the early experiences of chattel slavery, sport was never a matter of simple play; free play, games, and leisure time were not part of the everyday life experience of slaves. Rather, white economic power controlled Black athletic activity.

In the second chapter, “The Emergence of the African American Athlete in Slavery: A Materialist Philosophical Interpretation,” the authors utilize the chattel slave plantation as an interpretive device for understanding trends and developments related to Black athletes in American sports history. The authors employ a slavery/plantation analogy in order to analyze the contemporary Black athlete’s relationship to means of capitalist sports production. As the slave was the exploited worker in the plantation system, the contemporary Black athlete is an exploited wage worker (though highly paid) in the modern capitalist sports business.

The remainder of the chapter provides a materialist analysis of the Black engagement with sports in the context of the dehumanizing system of chattel slavery. Although Aristotle considered slavery to be a natural element of society, and that some groups were by nature better suited for slavery, he did view slaves as human beings. In contrast, white American slave holders denied the humanity of captured African slaves, arguing that slaves came from the continent of Africa where civilization, reason, and cultural achievements were nonexistent. Hence, slavery took on a racist character: one was a slave because he/she was Black! This meant that white slaveholders could justify the most brutal and sadistic treatment of Blacks. Controlling slave sports activities, whites took enormous pleasure in pitting male slaves against each other in brutal bare-knuckle fights. Hardly free play, games, or leisure time activities for Black slaves, these and other athletic events served as entertainment for whites. Slaves were not allowed to engage in athletic activities with whites. Chattel slavery, therefore, was the structure of domination that established the racist “color-line,” which would define and delimit the Black experience in American sports history.

Chapter three, “Who’s on First? The Concept of African American Firsts and the Legacy of the ‘Color-Line,’” analyzes the contributionist philosophy of Black history as a response to the social structure of the racist “color-line.” To the white historical exclusion of Blacks on the underside of the racial divide, suggesting that Blacks had no history and, thus, made no contribution to the forward march of human development, many Black American historians developed a methodology and philosophy of history that put forward the fundamental importance of great individual achievements; the authors also refer to this historical approach as methodological individualism. Associated with this historiographical practice is the view that individual Black athletic achievement is good for African American social development and contributes to the forward movement of sports. McClendon and Ferguson criticize this perspective, arguing that it gives rise to “a fundamentally impoverished understanding of the dialectical complexities surrounding the institutional character of the African American experience, particularly the Black experience in sports” (60).

In an attempt to challenge the “color-line,” the contributionist philosophy of history asserts the significance of “Black firsts” in all aspects of American social life, especially the history of Blacks in American sports culture. Hence, adherents of methodological individualism constantly present stories of the first Blacks to break through the “color-line.” The problem is that this view fails to pay adequate attention to the history of Black athletes before the so-called breakthrough of the closed door

of the white imposed “color-line.” Moreover, the conceptual and empirical question of Black firsts in American sports history becomes problematic. For example, to emphasize the first Black player to enter the ranks of professional basketball is difficult and even inaccurate because there were Black professional players, teams, coaches, and leagues long before their entrance into white professional sports. Yet, even as Black athletes entered the professional ranks of white sports, this emergence did not terminate racism or advance Black social development. Black breakthrough in the structure and dynamics of white athletic competition did not result in the transformation of the social relations of power for Black athletes or for Black Americans, as such.

Entitled “The Black Athlete and the ‘White Shadow’: The Matter of Philosophy of History and the Problem of the ‘Color-Line,’” chapter four rehearses in more detail the authors’ perspective on the interrelationship between the philosophy of history and the philosophy of sports as a strategy for exploring the meaning of the Du Boisian concept of the “color-line.” According to McClendon and Ferguson, this concept is significant because it has circumscribed the history of Black athletic competition in the United States of America, and its formulation by W. E. B. Du Bois is central to the meaning of Black identity. That is, Du Bois grounded his theory of Black identity in the historical context of an emerging system of racist segregation in the coming twentieth century.

The authors engage in a thoroughgoing examination of Du Bois’s formulation of the “color-line” and its contextual foundation of the problem of Black identity in the history of American sports. McClendon and Ferguson maintain that sports was one of the earliest arenas in which Blacks could defy the racist “color-line” and compete against white athletes. It was in these settings that Black athletes could defeat their white adversaries and, thus, challenge the racist philosophy of Black inferiority. Black athletic success also fueled the notion that Black progress toward freedom could be achieved. Even so, as Black athletes crossed the “color-line,” they found themselves still caught in the cauldron of white supremacy and anti-Black racism. In a discussion of several Black athletes, McClendon and Ferguson put forward a philosophy of history and a philosophy of sports wherein the concept of the “white shadow” plays a central role. Crossing the “color-line” did not result in Black athletic liberation; rather, many Black athletes, coaches, and trainers who had demonstrated expertise in Black institutional settings on the underside of the “color-line” found that in order to cross over the “color-line,” they had to submit to a “white shadow” who would shepherd them through the process. Yet, the authors provide numerous examples of how the “white shadow” was a myth, as many progressive Blacks refused the advice of “white shadows,” who urged non-violence and submissiveness in the face of white brutality and violence.

In Chapter five, “Keeping Black Women in Their ‘Place’: The Triple Burden of Sexism, Racism, and Class Exploitation,” McClendon and Ferguson examine the too often neglected history of Black women in American sports. In a materialist analysis of the concrete historical experiences of working class Black female athletes, the authors reveal the complex interrelationship among gender domination, racist oppression, and class exploitation. Although Black American women have waged a powerful struggle against the ideology and practice of racism and sexism, their careers and life experiences in retirement from sports have been plagued by insidious forms of discrimination. In this regard, the authors assert that the dominant discourse, which posits that sports are a “level playing field,” masks the realities of institutional racism, structural

sexism, and the system of capitalist exploitation of Black American female athletes.

The authors demonstrate that Black women, especially working class Black female athletes, must fight for a measure of self-worth in America's bourgeois, racist, and sexist social order. In addition to struggling to overcome poverty, Black female athletes have fought back against racist discourse and practices that were intended to restrict their activities. Black female athletes also have been the targets of the bourgeois notion of the "culture of true womanhood" as they often have been described as unfeminine or masculine. The authors provide examples of working class Black female athletes who have struggled, sometimes in vain, for financial security. What is important to note is that the dominant ideology of "fair play" is a myth, and that sports, like all aspects of the American social order are political.

The authors put forward a philosophy of history and a philosophy of sports that recapture the dehumanizing system of chattel slavery for an analysis of Black women's sports history. Although the objects of rape and other forms of brutal physical violence, Black female slaves struggled, often in vain, to maintain the stability of their families. To be sure, white laws did not protect Black families; Blacks were slave-owners' property! The dehumanizing system of chattel slavery rendered slaves unpaid and exploited laborers; when there was time, intra-Black competitive sporting events were largely for white entertainment. However, when this kind of interracial sports competition (e.g., horse racing) occurred, it was solely among males. Although Black females generally were nonexistent in the early sports of boxing and horse racing, female slave Sylvia Du Bois was a well-known exception. The authors discuss the life and times of Ms. Du Bois, who escaped to freedom in New Jersey from Pennsylvania in 1808. She was known as a fierce boxer, taking on and defeating white male boxers. Bold, courageous, physically powerful, Du Bois was a prize-fighter who was allowed to challenge the "color-line." However, this reality came with a price, as white men were willing to fight this Black woman because they did not perceive Black women as embodiments of the bourgeois "cult of femininity" that was restricted to white women. Since Du Bois's identity as a Black female athlete was directly connected to her social position as a slave, she was considered outside of the bounds of the feminine. Indeed, this was the case with female slaves in general.

Significantly, the authors suggest this dynamic as the genealogy of the male-dominated conception of the "cult of femininity" and the bourgeois notion of "feminine respectability." In addition to racist oppression and class exploitation, Black female athletes have been caught in a discursive system of racialized gendering. The authors conclude that bourgeois cultural values about race, class, and gender have served to circumscribe and delimit Black working class culture and Black women's life chances within the context of America's capitalist order of sports. It is this structure of triple oppression that intervenes in the struggle for Black female advancement, which is predicated on white acceptance and approval.

In the final chapter, "He Who Make the Rules, Controls the Games: The Political Philosophy of Capitalist Sports in Black and White," McClendon and Ferguson seek to clarify the meaning and purpose of political philosophy so that they can employ this discipline in the interest of critiquing the political economy of sports. The authors initially offer a conventional understanding:

*political philosophy* deals with the nature and purpose of political life. Similar to political science, the philosophical investigation of political life has a broader focus. It examines the relationship between civil society and the State and related concepts such

as power, political obligation, political authority, democracy, freedom, equality, law and justice. The penultimate objective of political philosophy is to replace groundless *opinion* (doxa) about the nature of politics with justified *knowledge* (episteme). (165)

Further, as Marxist philosophers, who write in the interest of philosophical activism and societal transformation, McClendon and Ferguson refer to the late Pan-Africanist and philosopher Kwame Nkrumah whose political philosophy centered on anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, and who argued for scientific socialism as an engine for social development in Africa. As such, Nkrumah's class analysis called for workers and peasants to overthrow national oppression and class exploitation. To be sure, Nkrumah and other progressives in Africa and its diaspora saw the direct link between capitalism and racism as systems of power. The Black Power protest by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics, which challenged the structures of political and economic power, and the manner in which they were immediately dismissed from the American Olympic team, clearly punctuated this political reality.

The authors return to the concept of the "level playing field" in sports. They argue that although this term suggests that the ethical principle of meritocracy is operative in the athletic arena, nothing could be further from the truth. It is a white ruling class structure of power that governs sports. Upon examining the historical record, it is obvious that Black athletic advancement has been shaped by institutional racism and conformity to white standards. Merit has been a secondary variable. Hence, the idea of a "level playing field" is a myth.

This observation suggests a re-examination of the purpose of conventional political philosophy. In their focus on ethics and the relationship between civil society and the state, modern Western thinkers have given little, if any, attention to the concept of civility. How should members (i.e., citizens) behave toward each other in a civilized democratic society? Does the United States of America actually represent a modern civil(ized) or savage society? Can a discussion of civility be sustained in a society that articulates lofty political values (e.g., liberty, justice, equality, and the pursuit of happiness) but has failed to practice those values? Why have these questions received such little attention? What might these questions mean with respect to the philosophy of history and the philosophy of sports in relation to Black Americans? While an answer to these questions would take another essay, this reviewer, with insight drawn from Frederick Douglass, argues that American democracy is a sham; from its origins to the present, this country cannot be prudently characterized as a civil society.

McClendon and Ferguson have written a formidable textbook. It represents a masterful and intriguing discussion of the philosophy of history and the philosophy of sports as critical approaches to the examination of the history of Black sports in the United States of America. Philosophers and students of philosophy will find this book to be both informative and thought-provoking. Some years ago at another university, this reviewer offered a course on popular culture and Black American athletes. *Beyond the Black Shadow* has rekindled an interest in this subject, and this course will be offered once again next fall.

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## ***The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King Jr.: Critical Essays on the Philosopher King***

Robert Birt, ed. (Lexington Books, 2012). 380 pp. Hardcover \$85.00. ISBN-13 978-0739165522.

**Reviewed by Chike Jeffers**  
*Dalhousie University*

The work of Martin Luther King Jr. should be seen as a very special resource for the practice and study of African American philosophy. To engage with King is to wrestle with a giant. He is a cultural presence like no other in the history of African American thought, a figure officially celebrated and monumentalized, an orator whose voice is etched deep into our aural memories, the man who gave us one of the most famous speeches in the English language. He has become the common property of the world in many ways, a cherished portion of the world's heritage. What African American philosophers and those who work on African American philosophy make of this figure and his corpus is an intriguing test of our ability to illuminate that which has been seen as already brightly shining, to complicate the simplicities attending our understanding of so familiar a personality, and to demonstrate the need for continuous debate concerning the topics he treated in his work.<sup>1</sup>

In his 1997 book, *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Philosophy of Nonviolence*, the only book-length study of King by a professional philosopher so far, Greg Moses notes that “[a]t last check, the *Philosopher's Index* posted but few listings about King.”<sup>2</sup> It remains the case, more than fifteen years later, that surprisingly little has been written by professional philosophers or in professional philosophical venues on King, making Robert E. Birt's anthology, *The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King Jr.: Critical Essays on the Philosopher King*, an important event. Birt has brought together seventeen contributors (including himself), almost all of them trained philosophers, in order to orchestrate a dialogue on the importance of reading King as “a moral and social philosopher whose thought shapes and is shaped by the movement for freedom and social justice” (2).

Measured by its ability to display the rich potential for philosophical reflection that engaging with King as a thinker offers us, I consider Birt's anthology a success. Indeed, I have begun planning an article of my own on some of King's ideas as a result of reading the anthology. As is generally the case with anthologies, there are a number of different styles and approaches combined here, and I imagine that few would find all of the chapters equally compelling, astute, or thought-provoking. But this is precisely why I believe the book is best read as an open invitation to explore King for ourselves, a sampling of angles and perspectives from which we might view King that ought to whet our appetite for direct engagement with his work as well as for participation in the contemporary dialogue to which the chapters contribute.

My plan for the remainder of this review is to mention and briefly discuss some of the themes in King's work that are helpfully isolated by one or more of the authors in the anthology as useful sites for exploration. One aid in isolating these themes is the organization of the anthology into four sections: (1) “King within Philosophical Traditions,” (2) “King as Engaged Social and Political Philosopher,” (3) “King's Ethics of Nonviolence,” and (4) “Hope Resurgent or Dream Deferred: Perplexities of King's Philosophical Optimism.” I will first discuss the theme of nonviolence from section three, then the themes of socialism and cosmopolitanism from section two, and then, finally, the

themes of God and hope from sections one and four. I will close by bringing up some issues unaddressed or only briefly addressed in the anthology.

So, firstly, *we need more work in African American philosophy on King's commitment to nonviolence*. Section three of Birt's anthology, which deals with the theme of nonviolence, features some of the strongest essays in the volume. I was impressed, for example, by what might be grouped as a trilogy of essays showing King's philosophical and political relevance by juxtaposing him with Levinas, Fanon, and Obama. Scott Davidson and Maria del Guadalupe Davidson (“King, Levinas, and the Praxis of Peace”) do a great job of making Levinas clear in order to draw a contrast between King and Levinas on the topic of peace. King emerges as more radically committed to peace than Levinas, thus casting a provocatively critical light on the latter, who—in the essay's most fascinating moment—is treated as more in line with Robert F. Williams, author of *Negroes with Guns*. Kathryn T. Gines (“Martin Luther King Jr. and Frantz Fanon: Reflections on the Politics and Ethics of Violence and Nonviolence”) explores the obviously sharp contrast between King and Fanon, facilitated partly by the fact that King directly addresses Fanon in his 1967 book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* The differences between these two seminal figures is clearly of great consequence for African American political philosophy and Gines provides a substantial comparison of their views on racism and its relation to violence, including intragroup violence. She closes by claiming they converge upon, among other things, the importance of “the politicization of the people as full citizens,” a point that is suggestive though much too quickly argued (257). Finally, we find in between the essays by the Davidsons and Gines a great piece of engaged philosophy by Gail M. Presbey entitled “Martin Luther King Jr. on Vietnam: King's Message Applied to the US Occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.” Presbey ably summarizes the development of King's thinking on Vietnam and then brings King's thinking to bear on Iraq and Afghanistan, criticizing Obama's relationship to King's legacy in an admirable display of speaking truth to power.

The question that these essays lead us to ask but do not answer, however, is how well the various aspects of King's elaborate critique of violence hold up to critical scrutiny. What might be said, for example, against King's claim, quoted by the Davidsons, that the “means must be pure as the end, that in the long run of history, immoral destructive means cannot bring about moral and constructive ends” (208)?<sup>3</sup> If we delete “immoral” on the grounds that it is question-begging, does the claim still stand? Is it strengthened if revised so that it is about what *should* be used to bring about ends of a certain moral character rather than about what *can* bring about such ends? How well is the claim supported by the prior claim, not quoted by the Davidsons, that “the end represents the means in process and the ideal in the making”?<sup>4</sup> We need more work in African American philosophy that will, step by step, critically consider King's striking case against violence, identifying that which fails and that which can be saved.

In connection with this point, note that Moses, in his contribution to the volume (“A Shocking Gap Made Visible: King's Pacifist Materialism and the Method of Nonviolent Social Change”), builds upon his previously mentioned work on King by offering us the bold and interesting but not quite convincing thesis that we can see King as a “pacifist materialist.” A pacifist materialist renounces violence strategically, on the falsifiable assumption that it is the appropriate means to liberation, whereas a pacifist idealist sees the renunciation of violence as an absolute duty and end in itself. Moses admits that “King expressed a duty to this kind of nonviolence,” i.e.,

the pacifist idealist kind, but then he argues that King justified nonviolence from the pacifist materialist point of view as well (263). It is not clear, though, that one can be both a pacifist idealist and a pacifist materialist, as the pacifist idealist seems precisely concerned to deny the pacifist materialist claim that nonviolence can be understood as merely strategic. Moses does not provide textual evidence for his claim that King viewed nonviolence as “refusing a right to exercise violence in a situation where it is justified” (264).<sup>5</sup> Thus, while there is no doubt that King saw violence as a doomed strategy and nonviolence as the most strategically effective path to liberation, the fact that this can be taken to show merely that he believed strategy and duty converge leaves Moses’s thesis undefended and thus also leaves King open to the criticism that his argument for nonviolence was problematically unfalsifiable. The final essay in section three, “Socrates, Thoreau, Gandhi, and the Philosopher/Activist Dr. King: Politics of Civil Disobedience and the Ethics of Nonviolent Action” by Benjamin O. Arah, does a fine enough job of charting King’s foundational reliance on the other figures mentioned in the title in developing his thoughts on nonviolence, but the question of how well these thoughts withstand scrutiny remains insufficiently addressed there as well.

*We also need more work in African American philosophy treating King’s views on socialism and on cosmopolitanism.* The dominant theme of section two is *community* and I believe the anthology demonstrates the need, going forward, to deepen our appreciation of King’s vision of community by paying special attention to his views on the political and economic structure of society and on the condition of a shrinking world. Beginning first with the structure of society, both Richard A. Jones’s essay, “Martin Luther King Jr.’s *Agape* and World House,” and Birt’s essay, “King’s Radical Vision of Community,” discuss the important matter of King’s development toward a more radical left perspective on socioeconomic issues in his last few years. Birt provides a sophisticated and well-developed analysis of King’s ideal of the dignity of persons within community. Among other things, he argues that, for King, “community requires the transcendence of capitalism and its alienations” (164). He furthermore takes the interpretive position that “King’s critique of capitalism, which some writers think begins only post-Selma [i.e., 1965], actually precedes Montgomery [i.e., 1955], and proceeds from the same moral principles as does the critique of racism” (ibid., clarifications mine). All of this should excite and inspire those of us interested in political philosophy to delve deeper into King’s commentary on capitalism and community and to build upon and/or challenge Birt’s claims.

Jones similarly argues “that King was a socialist—if not in name, in spirit—and that it is this spirit that is, and will in the future be, his contribution to political philosophy” (146). His essay, more ambitious and less tightly focused than Birt’s, covers a number of topics, but its primary contribution, I think, is its invitation to reflection on King’s concept of the “world house.” There are few depictions of the reduction of the world’s size through technological, political, and economic transformations (i.e., globalization) more evocative and more morally powerful than King’s image of the world as a house we must learn to share. Used by King to argue passionately against racism, militarism, and poverty as global systemic injustices, we find here a fruitful connection between King and contemporary debates in political philosophy about cosmopolitanism and the nature of global justice. Birt says of King that he did not provide us with a “detailed blueprint” of the transformed society toward which he strove to push his nation and the world, but surely we have enough reflections on political structure in his writings that we can elaborate and evaluate various *Kingian* proposals (170).<sup>6</sup> African American political philosophy thus requires more active

debate about the positive potential and the possible pitfalls of the transcendence of capitalism and the robust global unity that King began to demand and argue for in the last years of his life.<sup>7</sup> Such debate will be informed by, among other things, consideration of the ways in which he linked the values of love and democracy, which is among the themes treated in the third essay of section two, Tim Lake’s “Martin Luther King Jr.: Toward a Democratic Theory.” Unfortunately, I found that essay unstructured and hard to follow.

*We need more work in African American philosophy on King’s conceptions of God and hope.* Although section one is the least unified section thematically, King’s understanding of God and religion is a recurring theme there, as it is in section four, where the theme of hope naturally raises questions of faith. In section one, King as theologian is a central topic in three essays, two of which reveal this focus in their titles: George Yancy’s “Dr. King’s Philosophy of Religion: Theology of Somebodiness” and James B. Haile III’s “Dr. King as Liberation Theologian and Existential Philosopher.” Yancy argues that, for King, “having been created in the image of God, the somebodiness of human persons and their freedom are underwritten by God” (55). What I find most memorable about Yancy’s piece, though, is not its theological analysis but its sharp presentation of King’s theory of racism, during which Yancy convincingly argues that King was “unequivocal in marking whiteness as the source of the problem” (49). Yancy’s efforts to show King’s sophistication as a theorist of white supremacy will be helpful in the pursuit of the questions in African American political philosophy discussed above. What is of interest in Haile’s piece, on the other hand, is definitely theological, but it is an open question how much it reveals of King given the extent to which it is, at heart, a Cone-inspired but nevertheless quite original articulation of Black liberation theology. The essay is also a difficult read, at times—it relies heavily, for example, on a metaphorical usage of the term “chiasmus” that is never fully explained.

The other essay in section one in which King as theologian is centrally important is the first essay in the volume, John H. McClendon III’s “Is Our Belief That Martin Luther King Jr. Is a Black Philosopher Justified? Introductory Concerns about King and Philosophical Cartography.” The essay begins by displaying McClendon’s masterful knowledge of metaphysical debates concerning African American philosophy, as he uses contributions to that debate by William R. Jones, E. Franklin Frazier, and Broadus N. Butler to situate King as a Black philosopher. This is a very useful exercise. Upon completing it, however, McClendon abruptly switches to considering King as a theologian and eventually concludes that it makes sense to see this identity as primary, because philosophy for King “was instrumental to the task of constructing a theological framework for his social activism” (36). McClendon does not claim that being a philosopher and being a theologian are mutually exclusive, but he thinks it is important to recognize the substantive difference between the two disciplines: “the apologetic function of theology overrides the need for a critique of the presupposition that God exists” (30). While I found the two halves of McClendon’s essay to fit somewhat oddly together, both raise penetrating questions and it is ironic that, directly following his charge that we must not let philosophical critique of the concept of God out of view, we find Yancy and Haile’s essays proceeding without addressing such concerns.

I think we need more work in African American philosophy on King’s conception of God because, while I do not think we have an obligation to always discuss the possibility of atheism when philosophically engaging with a figure like King, it does seem like there is an unfortunate evasion of theodicy in essays like those of Yancy and Haile. Where is the recently departed

William R. Jones and his seminal 1973 text, *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology?*<sup>8</sup> Only in section four, in the last essay of the volume, do we find Clanton C.W. Dawson Jr. directly confronting the problem of evil in his essay, “The Concept of Hope in the Thinking of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” Dawson claims that belief in the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God that he tells us King believed in is “no longer rationally justifiable,” but since Dawson ultimately aims to support King’s call to hope, he also argues for openness to alternative conceptions of God and God’s connection to hope (353). In saying we need more work on King’s conception of God, I am calling for further debate on these matters: must we leave behind King’s God in the face of the problem of evil? Does he provide us with resources that may help us deal with that problem, particularly in the form constructed by Jones? How might the alternative conceptions of God that Dawson calls us to consider still remain, in some sense, Kingian?<sup>9</sup>

Before I discuss the other essays in section four, I will describe the non-theological essays in section one that I have not yet mentioned. Stephen C. Ferguson II’s “The Philosopher King: An Examination of the Influence of Dialectics on King’s Political Thought and Practice” is helpful for encouraging study of King’s own philosophical self-understanding. Ferguson looks, in particular, at King’s relationship with Hegel, arguing that, despite the fact that King called Hegel his favorite philosopher, he was more Fichtean and Kierkegaardian than Hegelian up until his post-Selma political development. Some of the difficulties of the subject matter—the very malleable, abstract notion of dialectics—make the essay unclear at times, but it joins the essays by the Davidsons and Arah in doing the interesting work of situating King in relation to important figures in the Western tradition.<sup>10</sup> Maurice St. Pierre provides what might be seen as the book’s main interdisciplinary moment, as he brings his viewpoint as a sociologist to bear on King’s role as an intellectual in “Martin Luther King Jr. as Social Movement Intellectual: Trailblazer or Torchbearer?” This essay is also notable for being the only one to focus at length on questions of gender. Sadly, I found it disjointed in its development, which made its attempts to move between thought and practice awkward rather than fluid.<sup>11</sup>

Turning now to the theme of hope, the essays in section four other than Dawson’s are by Floyd W. Hayes III (“Hope and Disappointment in Martin Luther King Jr.’s Political Theology: Eclipse of the Liberal Spirit”) and Bill E. Lawson (“The Aporia of Hope: King and Bell on the Ending of Racism”). Both cast a more critical light on King than most other contributions to the anthology, which is welcome given the goal of treating King’s philosophical thought as living and worthy of serious, critical engagement. Hayes’ essay, though, is the harsher of the two, a fiery condemnation of both American hypocrisy about the country’s systemic evil and “King’s thoroughgoing hope in the American dream of freedom, justice, and equality” (314). Hayes compellingly depicts King as becoming conflicted in his last years but still tending strongly toward optimism, and his portrayal of that optimism as fundamentally misguided is very effective as well. This provides, of course, the perfect setup for Lawson’s juxtaposition of King and Derrick Bell. While Lawson sometimes tries to appear neutral, he gives us a number of hints that he inclines toward Bell’s pessimistic belief in the permanence of racism in America rather than King’s faith that the end of racism is coming. That being said, perhaps the most surprising and interesting aspect of the article is his argument that King, like Bell, rejects liberalism. The argument is bound to be controversial, especially as Lawson relies primarily on King’s 1960 article “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” in which King’s focus is not on liberal politics but *liberal theology* (thus, for example, the opposite of liberalism in this essay is “neo-orthodoxy”).<sup>12</sup>

Hayes and Lawson appropriately force us to interrogate King’s ability to trust that “the arc of a moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”<sup>13</sup> We need more work in African American philosophy that attempts to make sense of this claim while subjecting it to as much critical scrutiny as possible. Insofar as it is a theological claim, this need is tightly connected to the need for more work on King’s conception of God. Consider, however, Joshua Cohen’s important 1997 article, “The Arc of the Moral Universe,” in which he tries to give secular meaning to King’s statement through an argument for connecting the injustice of slavery to its demise.<sup>14</sup> There is room for more work like this, especially work that will focus more squarely on working through and reworking King’s thought than Cohen’s article.

I have now discussed, at least briefly, all of the essays in Birt’s anthology. To speak for a moment about what was not in the anthology, I begin with an intriguing methodological issue in King scholarship: the issue of ghostwriting. David Garrow tells us that the first article published King’s name, 1956’s “Our Struggle,” was written by Bayard Rustin and that “King approved it with hardly any alterations.”<sup>15</sup> Ghostwriting and heavy editorial involvement by others would be part of a significant amount of his publishing thereafter as well, especially in the case of books, which has led Garrow to claim that the “King” many scholars have studied through reading the standard sources “is at some considerable distance, in many particulars, from the King one sees in the largely unpublished, spontaneously delivered sermons in black churches and mass meeting addresses at Southern community rallies.”<sup>16</sup> Many reject the notion of such a divide, such as King scholar Lewis V. Baldwin, who argues that there is no great distinction between the published and unpublished works and that “[i]n cases where ghostwriters prepared King’s books, essays, and speeches, they took words out of his mouth instead of putting words into his mouth.”<sup>17</sup> I raise the issue here mainly because it is never mentioned in the anthology, even though, if Garrow is right, it is inaccurate to call the essays in the anthology studies of King. They are, rather, studies of the team efforts published under King’s name and thus presumably sometimes bearing the stamp of, say, Rustinian rather than Kingian ideas. While Rustin himself once said (in a phone conversation transcribed by the FBI) that he “would never write anything that wasn’t what [King] wanted to say,” I think it is reasonable to acknowledge the complexities of voice involved in such a writing process.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, while there is some discussion of gender issues in the anthology, many will wish for more. There is no essay in which gender is a central theme except for St. Pierre’s, and what he discusses at length are historical facts about the victimization of Black women in the Jim Crow South and the vital participation of Black women in the freedom movement. He does not investigate the functions of gender in King’s thought. Gines includes some interesting comments on King’s use of gendered language and the relationship between him and Coretta Scott King in her footnotes (258, n. 2; 260, n. 44). But *we need more work in African American philosophy on King on gender*, work that will critically—and yet also as charitably as possible without compromising an anti-patriarchal stance—engage with passages of King’s like the one in which he claims that the “tendency to ignore the Negro’s contribution to American life and to strip him of his *personhood*” makes it the case that “[t]o upset this cultural homicide, the Negro must rise up with an affirmation of his own Olympian *manhood*.”<sup>19</sup> Birt’s anthology is a very welcome spur to the kind of philosophical work that will treat passages like these as opportunities to take someone who has so deeply shaped our world seriously, with all the sharp, progressive criticism and sympathetic reconstruction necessary to doing so.

Notes

1. I speak here as an African Canadian philosopher who works on African American philosophy.
2. Greg Moses, *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Philosophy of Nonviolence* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997), 14.
3. Martin Luther King Jr., “Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 45.
4. Ibid.
5. I say this even as I have managed to find moments in King’s writings that would seem at least potentially supportive of the claim, such as his view that it “goes without saying that people will protect their homes.” Note, though, that nonviolent demonstrations are not instances of the same situation as that involved in the “protection of one’s home and person against assault by lawless night riders.” See King, “Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 56. I agree with the view articulated by Moses in *Revolution of Conscience* that “King’s arguments for nonviolence stand at various rungs on a kind of ladder that ranges from material calculations to spiritual speculations,” but I think the “spiritual speculations” Moses goes on to cite remove the possibility of categorizing King as a pacifist materialist (although I do not believe this counts as an automatic condemnation of King’s position). See Moses, *Revolution of Conscience*, 164.
6. In doing so, it will be important to continuously return to earlier pioneering efforts like Hanes Walton Jr.’s critical study, *The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1971). Sadly, Dr. Walton joined the ancestors on January 7th of this year.
7. Another major figure to which we must return for the purpose of exploring these themes is Huey P. Newton, whose notion of “Revolutionary Intercommunalism” (note: “intercommunalism,” as opposed to “internationalism”) is a unique combination of socialism and cosmopolitanism developed in connection with a theory of globalization. See Huey P. Newton, “Speech Delivered at Boston College: November 17, 1970,” in *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Random House, 1972), 32.
8. Jones passed away on July 13, 2012. Richard Jones, in his essay, uses quotations from *Is God a White Racist?* while describing King’s thought, but he does not directly discuss the critical challenge the book poses to King and others (140, 152–53).
9. It is certain that we will be aided in reflecting upon these questions by considering the work of Rufus Burrow Jr. in his book, *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). McClendon, Yancy, Birt, and Dawson draw on Burrow in their essays (and Birt also draws on his work in the volume’s introduction).
10. Ferguson’s essay also usefully shows the importance of critically engaging with John J. Ansbro’s *Martin Luther King Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), which remains one of the most in-depth studies of King as a philosophical thinker.
11. Also, there is a problematic moment in the essay that it would have been useful for Birt as editor to have caught and to have advocated fixing: St. Pierre says King made use of “the Hegelian notion of thesis, antithesis, synthesis” (119). The misattribution of this Fichtean terminology to Hegel is a common mistake, but what makes it particularly problematic in this case is that St. Pierre’s essay is directly preceded by Ferguson’s, in which the fact that this is a mistake is not merely mentioned but discussed at length (99). St. Pierre also describes utilitarianism, Hobbes, and Kant in highly questionable ways (120, 128).
12. King, “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 36.
13. King, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 277.
14. Joshua Cohen, “The Arc of the Moral Universe,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 26 (Spring 1997): 91–134.
15. David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1986), 73.
16. Quoted in Lewis V. Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 12.
17. Ibid. For more of Baldwin’s excellent work on King, see Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The Cultural Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).
18. Quoted in Garrow, 649, n. 21.
19. King, “Where Do We Go from Here?” in *A Testament of Hope*, 246. Emphasis mine.

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**“If We Must Die, Let It Not Be . . .”<sup>1</sup> A Review Essay of Pursuing Trayvon Martin: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Manifestations of Racial Dynamics**

George Yancy and Janine Jones, eds. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012). 302 pp. ISBN: 9780739178829.

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George Zimmerman killed seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012. As I write this review in January 2013, the most basic academic search will yield over three hundred items in response to the keywords “Trayvon Martin”—scholarly articles, investigative reports, op-ed pieces, and books. It is within the latter array that we find George Yancy and Janine Jones’s *Pursuing Trayvon Martin: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Manifestations of Racial Dynamics* (Lexington Books, 2012). The proliferation of thought and talk (not always coupled) in response to Martin’s death produces an uneasiness in me. The spurt of writing, of which I am part and potentially complicit, could be accused of co-opting Martin’s tragedy; it all but courts the criticism that an academic industry, plying in Trayvon Martin’s memory, has emerged. Such a critique may well be warranted for many of the items generated within my database search. It would, however, be grossly misplaced if applied to Yancy and Jones’s thought-provoking collection of essays.

In the text’s overview, the editors observe that *Pursuing Trayvon Martin* was envisioned as “a book that was fueled by a collective sense of passion and urgency that would capture, through the collective voices of a critical cadre of scholars, the multifaceted implications and concerns surrounding the killing of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin” (17). The collection of essays respond to a tragedy that has touched a nerve in our social collective, and the tone of its conceptualization gives the collection a kinetic effect; there are many points that will prompt differently positioned readers to nod in recognition, to grimace and shift with dis/ease, to pause to remember. *Pursuing Trayvon Martin* is productive. *Pursuing Trayvon Martin* is as much about justice as it is about presenting the reader with a moment to reason and language with which to reason.

When the memory of the dead gets caught in the cross-fire between assumption and allegation, we are bound in the very re-visiting of the scene to repeat the epistemic violence that comes from the mere repetition of events. Yet, these moments

offer an opportunity to reason together to *learn how* to think otherwise. In the trenches of teaching the reader to think otherwise, this twenty-chapter edited collection may be said to sit squarely within a critical and self-reflexive writing praxis.

The chapters in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin* are written from a wide and diverse range of disciplinary perspectives: women's studies, religious studies, criminology and criminal justice, Africana studies, philosophy, and psychology. While some authors sit firmly and incisively within their disciplinary location, others draw on an interdisciplinary analysis. Such a disciplinary and interdisciplinary point of departure, taken together, offers the reader an insightful engagement that responds to this socio-political trauma by analyzing its parts and the sum of its parts. There is a similar analytical heft in the book's thematic breadth: color-blind racism, parenting and Black motherhood, anti-Black white supremacy, and state sanctioned terror are among the thematic threads that bind the text. This text collectively tells a story that extends beyond death into issues of life and the social structures that constrain the lives of racialized and gendered subjects in the United States.

A book with this wide array of critical perspectives will invariably have voices that are in consort and at odds with each other. The editors have mined this tension into a critical whole that warrants detailed attention. Racial literacy, human value, anti-Black white supremacy, and an engagement of space and race are the four anchors that not only ground the pieces within the text, but position the book as an important contribution to our growing understanding of critical race theory. These categories not only help us to think about Trayvon Martin's demise but also offer a way to engage questions of race writ large in the contemporary United States of America.

### **“Conjuring acts”: expanding our racial literacy**

More often than not, the tenor and tone of the conversations that follow racially charged occurrences such as Martin's killing point to a lack of racial literacy. This lack ought not to be misconstrued as an absence but as a deficit of language that can take us *beyond* the recycling of old phobias and words that do violence. A number of the pieces in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin* work forcefully and deftly against this deficit, a deficit co-constituted, as it were, by a failure of imagination. The authors challenge these deficits by, on the one hand, unmasking the epistemological frame that naturalizes Black abjection and, on the other, providing language that facilitates an undoing of this frame and a pushing forward into the formulation of new reference points. Consequently, in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin*, the reader finds a conceptual arc that is in a sustained and confrontational engagement with the naturalized assumptions of racialized subjects as well as with historical and contemporary anti-Black, white supremacist strategies of containment.

Zimmerman's killing of Martin did not thrust us into new territory; we have been here before and, sadly, we have subsequently had to revisit this “moment.”<sup>2</sup> *Pursuing Trayvon Martin* pushes against the reader's inclination to make Martin's case an anomaly by consistently focusing on his killing as a structural, systemic manifestation as well as a tragically individual moment. To ignore these structuring devices, as Cynthia and Julie Willett suggest, is to believe the neo-liberal myth of agency; a myth that offers “choice” as the only explanation for decision making (216). Martin's killing gave pause to the deafening rhetoric of “post raciality.” In this perverse respite, a number of questions emerged, from the belief that we had indeed entered a racial Nirvana, and conversely, from the exhaustion of repetitive questioning: Why are our young Black men still so disproportionately vulnerable to public violence while just being? How can Zimmerman be

a racist when his father identified him as Hispanic? How could this have been avoided?

*Pursuing Trayvon Martin* is no panacea. Such an expectation would be an over-simplification of the complexities that reside within these questions. The text, however, expands our racial literacy and offers provocative responses to these contentious interrogations. In “No Bigots Required: What the Science of Racial Bias Reveals in the Wake of Trayvon Martin,” authors Phillip Abita Goff and L. Song Richardson take on the very common distraction that a racist-driven act requires an overtly racist actor. Goff and Richardson undermine this populist assumption with their use of the concept of “suspicion cascades,” which references “the multiple ‘waves’ of decision making errors that can warp perceptions and lead to racial bias” (60). They draw on this concept as a means of exploring how “racialized suspicion” can be generated “even absent bigots or thugs” (59).

Many of the authors draw from and expand on Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's discussion of color blind racism. In applying Bonilla-Silva's discussion of racist speech acts to a more in-depth structural critique, they demonstrate the life and death ramifications of color blind racism more clearly. William David Hart's “Dead Black Man, Just Walking,” like other pieces in the collection, critiques the masking effects of contemporary color blind racism. Hart observes that color blind racism “obscures the legacy of social death, the ongoing crisis of civil death, and the virtual probation that shadows the lives of black Americans” (93). Hart's is a particularly persuasive argument in terms of its capacity to analyze how narratives of racialized criminality are generated through practices of color blind racism. He notes the effects of a “criminogenic gaze,” the perception that Black males (in particular) are criminals. Like Goff and Richardson, Hart also notes that this gaze holds “virtual unanimity” (95–96). A reading of *Pursuing Trayvon Martin* helps us to understand why the labeling of Zimmerman as a racist is both irrelevant and a mere distraction, since it is this very criminogenic gaze that produces a “transracial consciousness” of a known ontology, one that Zimmerman knew prior to his encounter with Martin (96).

The willful inattention to the systemic aspects of racialized criminality (both as act and a perceived embodiment) also informs Vanessa Wills's argument in “What Are You Doing Around Here? Trayvon Martin and the Logic of Black Guilt.” Wills critiques the perception of guilt as a universally and similarly expressed gesture. Positioning Wills's argument alongside Goff and Richardson's discussion of “stereotype threat” or “the concern with confirming or being evaluated in terms of a negative stereotype about one's group” (63), and alongside Hart's discussion of the transracial internalization of a criminogenic gaze, what emerges is the always already guilty Black subject. For Black people, this can lead to the performance of guilt where such is unwarranted and potentially reinforces the belief held by the panoptically white gaze (Hart) that the Black subject is guilty (Wills, 228–31).

There are aspects of this tragic encounter that can only be speculative. What, for example, were the thought processes potentially at work as Zimmerman and Martin faced each other? Drawing on epistemological referents found in Levinas and Augustine, Timothy Joseph Golden in “Two Forms of Transcendences: Justice and the Problem of Knowledge” critiques the semiotic field “in which the black male is criminalized before his appearing” (74). We cannot know how Zimmerman imagined himself in relation to Martin in that moment since many revisions have and will continue to occur. However, in challenging the symbolic associations that align the Black body with “‘criminal’ and ‘up to no good’” (80),

Golden calls for the re-formulation of how dominant subjects come to know themselves in relation to the designate “Other.” What is useful about Golden’s discussion is that it is one of only two pieces that places some form of explicit albeit weak responsibility on whiteness to work against the privilege of anti-Black white supremacy. Our encounters with the designated “Other,” Golden notes, presents a crisis to the self, one that we may meet with violence as a means of re-assuring the self, or one, informed by Levinas’s notion of transcendence, where we resist the desire to “[make] demands on the Other that the Other disregards at the peril of death . . . the overwhelming transcendence of the Other [that] makes the demand on the self not to be harmed” (82).

*Pursuing Trayvon Martin* yields significant value when the pieces are read against each other; arguments of one chapter so clearly reinforce and enhance the arguments of another, generating a reading experience that feels cumulative and coherent, a task not easily achieved in edited collections. For example, the logic that these aforementioned arguments challenge is nicely captured in Anderson, Hoagland, and Leighton’s use of the term “conjuring acts” (25) in “Now You See It, Now You Don’t: Magic Tricks of White Supremacy in the United States.” “Conjuring” captures white supremacy’s sleight of hand. The authors draw on the notion of conjuring to point to the shifting stratagem deployed to maintain practices of white supremacy: shifting narratives, perpetrators who disappear and re-appear as victims, victims who are investigated as criminals, racist language and practices deployed as narratives of law and policy. We know these gestures, for when the breeze of unrest blows at the curtain, we have seen the magician’s hand.

### **Does my body become me? Ontological dilemmas of race and death**

One of the fundamental questions at the heart of *Pursuing Trayvon Martin* is the question of Black worth, of human value. Regardless of whether or how the state holds George Zimmerman culpable and therefore legally accountable for Trayvon Martin’s death, the inherent and seemingly irresolvable ontological questions will persist. Regardless of our diasporic point of origin, those of us who identify as Black as a political location will continue to theorize the February 26, 2012, encounter as a fundamental question of recognition and intelligibility of the putative “Other.”<sup>3</sup>

Empathy and identification played a significant part in the modes of outrage that followed the Martin shooting. Multiply expressed through the wearing of hoodies, the recognition of Martin as potentially one’s own child, and narratives of self-identification (“it could have been me”), these gestures served to craft Martin as familiar and familial. These empathetic gestures, limitations notwithstanding, redirected a conversation about Martin’s death into a deeply ontological interrogation of self worth and a demand for recognition.

George Zimmerman in his call to the police declares that Trayvon Martin looked “like he was up to something.” That a young man with only one hand free and potentially neither hand free (i.e., one possessed a cell phone and the other may have possessed a can of iced tea and a bag of skittles) could be “up to something” has little to do with what was in Zimmerman’s actual range of vision. Zimmerman had, prior to this moment, already given himself over to the perceived constitutive nature of Blackness, masculinity, and criminality, to the “criminogenic gaze.”

The apparent hermetic seal on this constitutive embodiment is such that, for Martin to be recognized otherwise, he had to be remade<sup>4</sup>—remade as a child (emphasis on the possession of candy), as someone’s child (the sustained call for justice by

his parents, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin), and potentially, as a child who was trans-racially adoptable (“your child”).<sup>5</sup> The recourse to childhood as a redemptive narrative becomes an innocence project gone awry. Martin’s masculinity and raced humanity had to be remade as that of a non-threatening child to produce a “worthy” victim. That such empathetic gestures would have been harder to generate for Martin, the adolescent truant, who, as adolescents are wont to do, may have indulged in the occasional use of marijuana, show the limited scope of ontic possibilities that existed for Martin.

David Polizzi summarizes the starkness of this devaluation in “Social Presence, Visibility, and the Eye of the Beholder: A Phenomenology of Social Embodiment” by asking, “Would a positive test for an illegal substance have justified Martin’s killing and if so, how?” Polizzi’s larger argument is an important one; if as raced subjects we are to share this world, then we must have a shared notion of value and worth. He writes, “Reciprocity or co-existence becomes impossible here; there is no world to share, no possibility for this ‘experience’ to be equally lived by both individuals” (176). The duality of social consciousness therefore demands that one, often the marginal subject, crafts ways of translating notions of value, dignity, and self worth. Translating worth is very rarely a passive exercise, as in “Indignity and Death: Philosophical Commentary on White Terror, Black Death, and the Trayvon Martin Tragedy,” where Ferguson and McClendon observe: “African Americans—from slavery to now—have constantly faced White violence with a sense of indignation and with an ancillary struggle for self-respect. The quest for self-respect is dialectically joined with expressions of indignation” (44). In “The Irreplaceability of Black Struggle,” Lewis Gordon examines the importance of this ontological assertion through an interrogation of Martin’s struggle with Zimmerman. To expect Martin to have done otherwise “is reminiscent of laws of days presumed long gone, of, in other words, an expectation for any black individual to be under the yoke of an antiblack social order” (88). Black struggle is an announcement of Black worth.

Tracey McCants Lewis’s “A Mother’s Pain: The Toxicity of the Systemic Disease of Devaluation Transferred from the Black Mother to the Black Male Child” reasons that these ontic limitations actively shape contemporary parenting practices by Black mothers, practices that for Carol E. Henderson, as well as for Lawson and Lawson, require a maternal resilience of hoping against hope (256). The historical and ongoing devaluation of Black mothers, Lewis argues, is inextricably linked to the subsequent devaluation of Black children. These are not matters of abstraction. McCants Lewis observes that we need only look at the difference in the media reporting of harm done to differently raced children to see how value translates into care.

That the extensive and expansive devaluation of Black subjectivity constrains our imaginative capacity is a well-honed point argued by the book’s co-editor, Janine Jones. Her piece “Can We Imagine This Happening to a White Boy?” offers an incisive critique of the dangers of post-raciality, that is to say, the banal sense that we are all oppressed somehow and that race is merely another such marker. Jones carefully draws out why race has very specific ontological resonances as a result of the history of enslavement in the US: “Many poor White people have been devalued, but their devaluation marks out how they are, not who/what they are. By contrast, the superiority that attaches to them, in spite of their devalued positionings and precarious lived situations, marks out who/what they are—namely, White people” (150). Whiteness, unlike Blackness, becomes a Teflon subjectivity, as Anderson et al. note in reference to men like Timothy McVeigh, Ted Bundy, and I would add Charles Manson—“nothing attaches to white men” (27).

Blackness, meanwhile, marks all that it touches. Following on Martin's killing, much furor resulted following Geraldo Rivera's assertion that Martin's dress (a hoodie) contributed to his demise. In examining the hoodie as an artifact of a racialized youth culture, Chike Jeffers reminds us that racism not only creates difference, but stigmatizes the very difference it has created (133). Consequently, "[c]lothing worn by young people across racial lines such as 'hoodies' is viewed as a marker of criminal danger when worn by black people . . . the problem is not the hoodie but the body in the hoodie. It is the body that marks the hoodie and makes the ordinary behavior of just walking a suspicious act" (97).

The ontological questions in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin* are marked by a distinct sense of afro-pessimism. My use of afro-pessimism of course draws on Frank Wilderson's observation:

Afro-pessimism explores the meaning of Blackness not—in the first instance—as a variously and unconsciously interpellated identity or as a conscious social actor, but as a structural position of noncommunicability in the face of all other positions; this meaning is noncommunicable because, again, as a position Blackness is predicated on modalities of accumulation and fungibility.<sup>6</sup>

This sense of Black men's fungibility in part leads Hart to identify Martin's death as a "post-mortem event" where "To be a black man is to be marked for death" (91). Vargas and James, in "Refusing Blackness-as-Victimization: Trayvon Martin and the Black Cyborgs," similarly see Black death as embedded in the US political imagination which places subjectivities such as Martin's on "borrowed, impossible time" (197). In such a "democracy," the only subjectivity that is left for the Black subject is that of cyborg, the Black subject who despite the abjection of their humanity inhabits a moral ground characterized by strength and infinite capacity at redemption (198). Cyborg, though this may be, this is not their cyborg of the future; such a cyborg is but a version of a magical negro. Theirs is a revolutionary, "part divine, part mechanical, part biological . . . who demand(s) not democracy but freedom" (201). Fictional, speculative aspects notwithstanding, by invoking the revolutionary, one also invites the struggle. Black struggle is an announcement of Black worth.

### **"When death becomes a political event": challenging anti-Black white supremacy**

Samantha Vice observes that "when death becomes a political event it is a sign that things are not as they should be" (211) in "Politics, Moral Identity, and the Limits of White Silence." Yet, if we accept the afro-pessimist sentiment that informs many of the ontological arguments made in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin*, one could conceivably argue that death is itself a reminder that the project of American "democracy" is working as it should. The pervasive nature of white supremacy is such that Zimmerman's presumption of Martin's guilt and unbelonging, the presumption that this dead young man was not being looked for, are all ideologically constituted moments. Martin was shot a mere seven yards from his home. His father's anxious reports to the police that his son was missing at no point translated into a presumption of kinship, of care, and of value. This logic is rendered unproblematic and potentially benign by sentiments such as "an overworked" police department.

These ideologically constituted moments are what, in "Distorted Vision and Deadly Speech: Enabling Racial Violence through Paradox and Script," Jennifer Harvey refers to as common sense, reflexive responses that are rooted in white supremacy (105). When these "common sense" reflexive responses conjoin with state power, we are left with doubly enforced power and proportional declarations of benevolent

intent and state goodness, the "mal-intent" of which Devonya N. Havis reminds us "often do not operate through conscious choice. State actors often claim to be unbiased, and they may be unaware of the ways in which their actions are infused with racial bias" (123).

Disrupting the relationality that attends the "common sense" of racial animus requires a profound sense of "unlearning as loss."<sup>7</sup> Drawing on lessons learned from South Africa's apartheid system, Samantha Vice's becomes the second and final piece that directly holds individual, embodied whiteness accountable. Vice points to judicious speech welded together with silence as a critical, reflexive response to tragic manifestations of white supremacy, for whites "to cultivate a quieter, more humble and inconspicuous presence, particularly in the political domain" (205).

Anderson et al. lament that, protests notwithstanding, little will change in terms of the endemic nature of anti-Black white supremacy (26). This is not merely a persistent mode of relationality; it is a relationality that is exportable. The naturalized anti-Black symbols that riddle American cultural globalization has made American-honed white supremacy one of America's primary exports, producing and disseminating, to quote Yancy, "a global spook." Yancy points to an account by one of his Chinese students who stated that her Chinese father, though having never met a Black man, "knew" that he would not want to dine with a Black person.

The adaptive terrain of white supremacy is such that, as Jennifer Harvey argues, it thrives on the rhetorical performance of "paradox and script" to ensure its longevity (103). Paradox points to the malleability of white supremacy, "[t]he coexistence of explanations, perspectives or claims that appear to be contradictory . . . resistant to deconstruction, and destruction" (103). Scripts, alternatively, "provide us with the whole story ahead of time" (ibid.). "Facts" hold little sway in the face of these rhetorical strategies. Indeed, "facts" become expedient deployments in this schema. Such an argument prompts the reader to double back to Yancy's astute and counter-intuitive unpacking of the presumed knowledges that are offered firmly as "facts" in the Martin case (1-17) as Yancy reads against the grain of anti-Black, white supremacist presumptions of fact.

### **"Criminal doppelgangers": unwhite-ing space**

"What are you doing here?" A query that solicits information? An announcement of contamination? The fantasy of flight from urban danger has propelled the remaking of public space through privatized and militarized logics at an alarming rate. *Pursuing Trayvon Martin* offers penetrating analyses of the contemporary refashioning of space via the logics of anti-Black, white supremacy, whether by extraction—for example, there are more African Americans under correctional control than there were slaves in 1850 (29)—or by social-quarantining via gated communities or by white Americans' desire for and subsequent scaffolding of a "*locus amoenus*" characterized by deracinated, nostalgic formations (35).

In this post-Martin moment we see clearly how dangerous the possessive "your" becomes in the idea of "standing *your* ground." "Your" in the context of state-sanctioned, anti-Black, white supremacist sentiment facilitates a demarcation of legitimate and illegitimate space that is marked by shifting and spontaneous geographies so that one can stand one's ground anywhere (car parks, basketball courts, supermarkets). Blacks in the context of anti-Black white supremacy are more likely to be deemed "suspicious," "a threat," "guilty," "a criminal," leading to a disproportionate number of Black people, specifically Black men, falling victim to white entitlement to

all “ground.” The geographic homogeneity that is crafted as a result of white flight increases a sense of entitlement (“this is the space that I have created for me”) and by extension, such spaces are more easily deemed to be violated by the very presence of the designated “Other.” One easily imagines that these were the dynamics that informed Zimmerman’s response to Martin’s presence in Martin’s father’s community. As Havis notes, drawing on the investigative reporting of the *Tampa Bay Times*, “defendants who claim self-defense under the ‘stand your ground’ statute are more likely to prevail if the victim is black. Seventy-three percent of those who killed a black person faced no penalty, compared to 59 percent of those who killed a white person” (119).

*Pursuing Trayvon Martin*’s strengths—its exhaustiveness in its thematic and analytical scope and the diversity of its authors and their approaches—also leads to one of its weaknesses: in a desire for diversity and breadth, the depth of analysis is sometimes sacrificed. Some pieces in their brevity promise more than they are able to deliver, and some of the analyses would have been strengthened by an engagement with “class” as an analytical category. In an anti-Black white supremacist framework that has facilitated the structural disenfranchisement of Black people, class always lurks within the cloak of race. It is the presumption of poverty and the racialization of class that makes need appear dangerous (“they want what we have.”) The absence of class feeds into Martin’s situation as an interchangeable one, though, commensurate with the racial profiling experiences of Ivy League professors Cornel West and Henry Louis Gates. Martin is made into an everyman in the most problematic sense of the term, emptied out of his specific and contextual limitations. Many Black people, regardless of gender, have had the experience of being the criminal doppelgänger. The fundamental difference between Martin and these professors is the deployment of cultural and economic capital post facto. Public knowledge of these instances is itself a mark of the person’s cultural capital to draw attention to state harassment and state endorsed violence. As Yancy and Jones point out, it was not until Benjamin Crump, civil rights lawyer for the parents of the deceased, hired a media strategist that we learned of Martin’s killing—a full *ten days* after he was killed (15–16). This is in contrast with the immediate reporting of Skip Gates’s encounter with the law at his home, followed by a subsequent invitation to the White House to meet with the president, vice president, and the arresting officer, Sgt. James Crowley. These are not inconsequential differences. We need not conflate these differences in order to highlight the destructive mode of anti-Black white supremacy. Rather, to fully understand such an ideology requires more attention to its contextual and adaptive practices. Why and how does it shift in relation to the intersecting identities that become salient in the face of state power?

*Pursuing Trayvon Martin: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Manifestations of Racial Dynamics* will serve as an important point of reference as we continue in our struggle to understand this horrendous tragedy. Each piece begins a conversation that we should be on the alert for further development in a range of different fora. Yancy and Jones are to be commended for beginning this conversation and for their astute solicitation of work. The text’s scope, conceptual innovativeness, and thematic breadth give the work an archival quality. As best as we are able to do as academics, this is a text that honors the memory of Trayvon Martin.

#### Notes

1. As do contributors Ferguson and McClendon, I draw on Jamaican poet Claude McKay’s poem “If We Must Die” for the title of this review essay because it so poignantly captures

the relationship between Black struggle and the articulation of Black worth; a theme that I will revisit throughout my discussion of *Pursuing Trayvon Martin*.

2. Seventeen-year-old Jordan Harris was killed by forty-five-year-old Michael David Dunn at a gas station in Jacksonville, Florida, after Harris refused to turn down his music at Dunn’s “request.” Dunn has subsequently invoked the “stand your ground law.”
3. See “Obama on Trayvon Martin: ‘If I Had a Son, He’d Look Like Trayvon,’” *The Washington Post*, March 23, 2012, accessed March 28, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-if-i-had-a-son-hed-look-like-trayvon/2012/03/23/gIQAkPpVS\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-if-i-had-a-son-hed-look-like-trayvon/2012/03/23/gIQAkPpVS_story.html). Social protest also included a *Million Hoodie March* and the members of the Miami Heat wearing hoodies as an act of solidarity.
4. I use “hermetic” quite deliberately, drawing on its association with Hermes, “the author of all mysterious doctrines, and especially of the secrets of alchemy” (*OED*, Online version, Oxford University Press, December 2012).
5. Note, for example, Martin’s mother’s call to action: “Trayvon was our son, but Trayvon is your son.” Boston.com, “Trayvon Martin’s Parents Go to Capitol Hill,” March 27, 2012, accessed April 22, 2013, [http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2012/03/27/trayvon\\_martins\\_parents\\_go\\_to\\_capitol\\_hill/](http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2012/03/27/trayvon_martins_parents_go_to_capitol_hill/).
6. Wilderson, *Red, White, Black*, 58–59.
7. Spivak, “Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution,” 9.

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## ***Critical Affinities: Nietzsche and African American Thought***

Jacqueline Scott and A. Todd Franklin (Sunny Series, Philosophy and Race, 2006). 288 pp. ISBN 0-7914-6862-3.

### **Reviewed by Chris Mountenay** *Duquesne University*

Being a Nietzsche scholar has always carried with it a certain amount of uncomfortable baggage. While previous interpreters such as Walter Kaufmann made great strides in separating Nietzsche from the connotation of being the ideological grandfather of the Third Reich, there is still an uncomfortable association that Nietzsche has with racist ideologies. Even though I have taught *On the Genealogy of Morals* a dozen times to undergraduates, I still always wince when teaching the “blonde beast” and make sure to offer a disclaimer by insisting that Nietzsche is describing a lion, not the ideal Aryan. Moreover, I once had the misfortune of giving a woman I was dating a Nietzsche anthology for Christmas. This ended poorly, not for the obvious reason of it being perhaps the least romantic gift ever, but because she insisted that Nietzsche’s term, “slave morality,” was offensively racist. So, I have sometimes wondered if Nietzsche is in fact an inherently racist philosopher and my white privilege is blinding me to that fact.

This sort of problem is definitely in the background of Jacqueline Scott and A. Todd Franklin’s *Critical Affinities*:

*Nietzsche and African American Thought*, a collection of ten essays that focus on the interesting and often surprising connections that can be drawn between two disparate subjects. In his forward, Robert Gooding-Williams provides a quotation from William Preston that if accurate would make an anthology such as this untenable from the start. “Nietzsche’s whole philosophy—and not just his view of blacks—is racist” (viii). Further quotations from Preston claim that Nietzsche is of no use to Black existentialists and that he is a “cruel racist” and “man of the Right.” To address these points, Gooding-Williams examines Nietzsche’s attitude towards colonialism and his early dalliance with German nationalism. The combination of the troubling judgment of Preston (which will haunt the rest of the pieces) and the possibilities of resistance that arise in unlikely places in Nietzsche’s corpus set the tone for the rest of the book.

Following the forward, the introduction uses Nietzsche’s own provocative description of the philosopher as a cultural physician. This idea dates back to one of Nietzsche’s earliest works, the unfinished *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, where he examines the role that the philosopher plays in the health of a culture. A similar analogy appears in Nietzsche’s late works in the subtitle of *Twilight of the Idols*, “How to Philosophize with a Hammer.” Nietzsche is not describing a sledge hammer, but rather a tuning hammer that could detect if an idol were hollow or, in more medical language, he thought it may indicate bloated intestines. The introduction also cites passages in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil* that express a similar focus on health, vitality, and the treatment that philosophy may provide the sick culture. This medical imagery helps inform the project that *Critical Affinities* undertakes. In fact, Scott and Franklin cleverly use the medical imagery by dividing the essays into three categories: “Diagnoses,” “Prescriptions,” and “Regimes of Recovery.” The first section pursues Nietzsche’s goal of testing the hollowness of idols by using his philosophy to examine the illnesses of the culture, both describing them and providing their genealogies. The second section deals with the reconstruction of racialized identities as healthier ways of living. Finally, the third section provides suggestions for how to overcome the illnesses of the culture.

We open the book with diagnoses. Franklin’s first essay, “Kindred Spirits: Nietzsche and Locke as Progenitors of Axiological Liberation,” begins the book on a strong foot. The similarities between the thought of Alain Locke and Nietzsche are striking, as both seek to transcend the “axiological hegemony” of their respective cultures. Franklin highlights two of Nietzsche’s true strengths as a figure of liberation: his rejection of absolute values and his championing of critical consciousness. In both instances, similar traits are found in Locke, showing how the two philosophers’ works bolster each other.

The essay that follows, John Pittman’s “Nietzsche, *Ressentiment*, Lynching,” applies the genealogical method of *On the Genealogy of Morality* along with the concepts of *ressentiment* to the heyday of American lynch law from the end of Reconstruction to the 1950s. Pittman provides an excellent summary of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche’s work followed by a brief history of lynch law. The relationship between lynch culture and *ressentiment* is highlighted by the reactionary nature of lynching and the mob mentality that is a striking example of herd mentality. He shows the relation of the idea of punishment being inspired by the relationship between a creditor and debtor in the second essay in *On the Genealogy of Morality* wherein punishment is a means of paying the creditor back in pain. The victim of a lynching was often innocent of any crime, but this only proves what might be Pittman’s most

provocative insight, which is that lynching often involved the transference of the revenge born of the feeling of powerlessness onto an innocent victim. While Nietzsche’s description of the slave revolt describes the slaves getting their revenge on the master, the reality of lynching was that the downtrodden whites in their impotence had to transfer their revenge to the Black body rather than the actual source of oppression, that is, white wealthy elites. This essay does a remarkable job of showing how Nietzsche’s genealogical method and concepts can be applied to actual historical events, and could serve as an inspiration for a larger project of a Nietzschean examination of race relations in the United States.

Kathleen Marie Higgins continues the string of strong essays with her “Double Consciousness and Second Sight,” a comparison between W. E. B. Du Bois and Nietzsche. She begins with Du Bois’s account of the feeling of “double consciousness” wherein, in the case of the African American, he feels that his identity is split into the actual inner identity which he possesses and the identity based on skin color that covers him as a veil because of the mark that is put upon him by the observation of whites. In other words, Du Bois’s identity is *reduced* to that of a raced Black man (pure and simple), while he knows himself as an individual. Sadly, this leads to the internalization of the disparaging racist myths about Blackness. Moreover, this leads to the temptation to be co-opted by white society to escape this split. Yet there is hope for the fractured Black psyche in the possibility of merging the two disparate selves into a stronger self. In fact his awareness of the split allows him a sort of insight that is unknown to most. The comparisons between the struggle of Du Bois and Nietzsche that follow are fascinating. Nietzsche, like Du Bois, believes that the feeling of alienation is a great teacher and when we learn to overcome those hardships that our loneliness ultimately leads to triumph. Higgins does acknowledge that Nietzsche is dealing with a less severe form of discrimination due to his ideas (and in one delightful quotation from *Daybreak*, his mustache), but this more generalized feeling of loneliness can be applied to isolating elements outside of race, including gender. The descriptions of self-overcoming provided by both Nietzsche and Du Bois make this an inspiring read.

The final element of the diagnoses is Lewis Gordon’s “Of Tragedy and the Blues in an Age of Decadence: Thoughts on Nietzsche and African America.” Gordon’s project is an interesting one: the piece is inspired by Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* with jazz filling the role of Greek tragedy. Moreover, he applies the Nietzschean idea of health to the African American experience. Rather than defining health as a lack of disease, health is confronting and overcoming disease. So the African American is not weak because of her struggles, but empowered by them. The struggle against whiteness is shown as a surplus of strength in African American art, which explains why the co-opting of said art by white artists essentially destroys the art. The arguments made in this piece are quite interesting, but of all of the essays in the book, Gordon’s essay relegates Nietzsche most to the periphery.

Beginning the prescriptions portion of the book is Paul Taylor’s “Ecce Negro: How to Become a Race Theorist.” Taylor begins on an autobiographical note, describing an early fascination with Nietzsche, which was soon eclipsed by interests in pragmatism and Afrocentrism. But the lessons that Taylor picked up from Nietzsche’s work, particularly “On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life,” *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *Ecce Homo*. The former work is implemented when Taylor gives us a brief summary of Molefi Asante’s theory of Afrocentrism and shows us how Asante fuses two of Nietzsche’s three forms of history, monumentalism and antiquarianism, while failing

to integrate successfully critical history. Asante's shortcoming is in being unable to shed the prevalent nineteenth-century formulation of race. Taylor then turns to K. Anthony Appiah who, as an eliminativist, wishes to dismantle the outdated notion of race completely. While Taylor is sympathetic to Appiah's views, he acknowledges the near impossibility of putting this into place in the current social environment. Nietzsche aids Taylor by first showing that all philosophers color their views with their own backgrounds, but are often blind to it, believing that they have a God's eye view, making analytic thought experiments, like those posed by Appiah, deeply problematic. Moreover, Nietzsche also tells us to be wary of denying non-eternal "interactive kinds," that is to say ones that do not exist outside of human perception. So while race may be a man-made construct, it does not mean that it is not a real phenomenon that should be examined as such.

The next prescription, Daniel Conway's "Nietzsche's Proto-Phenomenological Approach to the Theoretical Problem of Race" is the first to address Nietzsche's own theories of race. Conway opens the piece by describing how Nietzsche spent much of his adulthood traveling in Europe and thus "witnessed firsthand the effects of the 'racial mixing' that characterized Europe, or so he believed, in the nineteenth century" (126). This led to his unorthodox view that Europeans were the product of racial mixing, while the purest blood on the continent belonged to the Jews. By "race," Nietzsche means a hereditary collection of traits that impose their form upon successive generations. A race is marked by its cultivation of these traits and its ability to transmit them into the future. What makes Nietzsche's racial formalism interesting is that while he does speak of the material components of race, he seems to be more interested in the "gestures, diet, physiology" that are contained in bodily inheritances. While this betrays Nietzsche's Lamarckian sympathies, it also elucidates his description of the body as more than mere matter, but also the lived experiences that prior generations had viewed as being part of the soul. This latter characteristic of Nietzsche's thought is potentially useful for those who wish to provide a phenomenological view of race. Conway closes the essay with another examination of the Nietzschean conception of science. Overall, this essay provides new directions in which Nietzsche scholarship can be taken and is enhanced by Conway's rapport with Nietzsche's writing.

Jacqueline Scott continues the examination of Nietzsche's racial views while applying his method to larger problems in "The Price of the Ticket: A Genealogy and Reevaluation of Race." Scott's essay proves to be an excellent companion to Conway's previous entry. The essay opens with Scott's description of our being at a turning point in history where we have an opportunity to reevaluate the concept of race. This is followed by several examples of contemporary race theory, which she says could be enhanced by incorporating Nietzschean views. She then provides a brief explanation of Nietzsche's genealogical method and then provides an analysis of his concept of decadence. Weak decadence is the nihilistic inability to cope with the decline of values, while strong decadence recognizes the fact that all values eventually decay, but celebrates their transience. The strong decadent is able to construct new values. Thus, the strong decadent when faced with the problem of race seeks to redefine the concept. Rather than attempting to abandon the concept of race or falling prey to the prevalent paradigm of purity, Nietzsche changes the idea of racial health to be one that champions the mixing of races and the creation of new ways of being in the world. Scott warns us that while Nietzsche is progressive for his time, he is still working with a nineteenth-century paradigm with some of his language and that we must move past that as well. But Nietzsche's ability to look at a concept, trace its origin, and posit how it could be reimaged

is useful for today's philosophers who critically grapple with the concept of race.

Moving past the prescriptions, we now come to the final section of the book, the regimens of recovery. The section begins with a particularly strong entry, "Unlikely Illuminations: Nietzsche and Frederick Douglass on Power, Struggle, and the *Aisthesis* of Freedom" by Christa Davis Acampora. She begins the piece by stating that Nietzsche and Douglass's work complement each other, but that we should neither attempt to bowdlerize Nietzsche as a "progressive egalitarian" nor paint Douglass as a Nietzschean. Rather, both authors illuminate each other's work by presenting different views of a similar experience. She describes an incident in Douglass's life as a slave where he successfully fended off his master's attempt to beat him. This incident produces a feeling which Acampora describes as "the aisthesis of agency" (176), which is the experience that one has where one becomes aware of a new feeling of possibilities open for the agent. What Nietzsche adds to this description is the aspect of the agonistic contest, which he attributes to Hesiod's "good Eris," a struggle that does not seek the domination of one competitor over the other, but to allow the participants to continue the struggle perpetually and find new conceptions of excellence. This is in contrast to the cruelty of unrestrained agonism, Hesiod's "bad Eris," which destroys possibilities rather than creates them. The restraint that Douglass showed his cruel master is an example of the line that separates the two. The agonistic struggle is neither intended to show how much pain one can inflict nor how much pain one can endure, as is the case of the ascetic individual. This actually shows that Nietzsche's admittedly regrettable comments about Africans being able to endure more pain than so-called civilized people is less a degrading remark that justifies ill-treatment and slavery, but is an ill-worded and ignorant compliment.

Interestingly enough, Acampora addresses one of the problems that is brought up in the following essay, "Masculinity and Existential Freedom: Wright, Ellison, Morrison, and Nietzsche," by Cynthia Willett. Unfortunately, Willett falls prey to one of the fundamental mistakes made by readers of Nietzsche: assuming that Nietzsche's description of master morality is prescriptive. A close reading of Nietzsche's work shows that while he has admiration for the master, he does not intend for the reader to emulate him. The master is a creature of an earlier age and a rather stupid and uninteresting one despite his abundant health. In fact, Willett believes that Nietzsche champions the hubristic individual, but in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, he actually says that hubris is inferior to the sort of creativity demonstrated by a child at play. The child versus violence imagery reappears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where the lion is seen as being a prior and inferior version of the child. As the lion is the same metaphor as the blonde beast in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, I find it hard to believe that Nietzsche would think that the blonde beast/master is the paragon that we should aim to emulate. Rather, Nietzsche wants us to transcend both the master and the slave. Moreover, Nietzsche actually goes on to praise mercy in the tenth section of the second essay of the *Genealogy*. I think that this fundamental misunderstanding of Nietzsche's work renders the essay problematic.

Finishing up both the section on recovery regimens and the book itself is "Why Nietzsche (Sometimes) Can't Sing the Blues, or Davis, Nietzsche, and the Social Embeddedness of Aesthetic Judgments" by James Winchester. Like Gordon's earlier essay, Winchester's piece attempts to see if Nietzsche's theory of aesthetics can be applied to African American music, in this case, the blues. I believe that Winchester is much more successful overall in synthesizing Nietzsche and modern culture than Gordon was. Winchester makes clear distinctions between

the early Nietzsche of *Birth of Tragedy* and the later Nietzsche. The early Nietzsche's view of art is that it is the attempt to deal with the suffering of the world through the combination of the Apollonian and Dionysian. The later Nietzsche tends to characterize art as being the product of individual genius, though he never seems to be consistent in his evaluation of how much social conditions influence the artist. Winchester sees the former as being generally more conducive to the attempts of the blues to express the hardships of the African American experience since it taps into a universal feeling of suffering, but that the latter may be overly alienating as it relies too much on genius that may not be held by all people. The essay does a fine job of showing the tension in Nietzsche's work between a highly individualistic and a more communal aesthetic theory.

Overall, this volume is highly successful. The depth of interpretation of Nietzsche's work is generally quite remarkable. With the exception of the above-mentioned missteps, the only quibble I have with the interpretations of Nietzsche is that for the most part, Schopenhauer is relegated to passing mentions and footnotes. While I understand that these are short essays and thus cannot be exhaustive, I do feel that any attempt to explain *Birth of Tragedy* that does not show its roots in Schopenhauerian philosophy is incomplete. But besides that admittedly idiosyncratic quailm, I was generally very satisfied with the level of scholarship. Moreover, I appreciate that the book shows that Nietzsche's philosophy is indeed helpful to critical philosophy of race and that Nietzsche is not the raging racist that Preston makes him out to be. At the same time though, the uglier side of Nietzsche's philosophy is never glossed over, nor is he posthumously baptized as a post-racial thinker. And I also think it's worth mentioning that this work does not seem to be at all exhaustive. If nothing else, this book provides ten jumping off points for future scholarship. This book stands not only by its own merits, but also for opening a door for future projects that examine Nietzsche and the African American experience.

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## CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

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**Timothy Joseph Golden** (JD, Texas Southern University, Thurgood Marshall School of Law; PhD, University of Memphis) is associate professor of philosophy and director of the Frederick Douglass Institute at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. His areas of specialization are nineteenth- and twentieth-century continental philosophy, African American philosophy/critical race theory, and philosophy of religion/philosophical theology. His most recent publication, "Two Forms of Transcendence: Justice and the Problem of Knowledge," appears in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Manifestations of Racial Dynamics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012). His next publication, "From Logos to Sarx: Black Philosophy and the Philosophy of Religion," is forthcoming in *The Black Scholar*. A member of the Pennsylvania Bar, Golden also practices criminal law both in Pennsylvania courts and as

a member of the Criminal Justice Act Panel of the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, where he represents indigent criminal defendants who appeal their convictions and sentences.

**Lewis R. Gordon** is professor of philosophy, African American studies, and Judaic studies at the University of Connecticut at Storrs. He is the author of several influential and award-winning books and many articles translated into English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Mandarin. The URL for Professor Gordon's website, which contains a list of his publications, audio and video presentations, and his blog, is <http://lewisrgordon.com/>.

**J. Everett Green** has had a long career in education and taught at every level from elementary education to the university. He has taught extensively in different philosophical traditions, religion and culture and the history of ideas. He is also founder of the Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference Series and editor of Value Inquiry Book Series Special Series on African American Philosophy.

**Kimberly A. Harris** is currently a PhD student in philosophy at the Pennsylvania State University. She is a recipient of the Bunton-Waller Fellowship. Her interests include African American philosophy, critical philosophy of race and nineteenth-century continental philosophy.

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**Chike Jeffers** is an assistant professor of philosophy at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He specializes in Africana philosophy and philosophy of race, with general interests in social and political philosophy and ethics. He is the editor of *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 2013).

**William R. (Bill) Jones** was professor emeritus of religion and director of Black studies at Florida State University, and director of PICOTS (Policy Institute for Conflict, Oppression and Terrorism Studies), which is a think tank at Tallahassee Community College. Jones received his BA with highest honors in philosophy from Howard University (Phi Beta Kappa), MDiv from Harvard University, and his PhD in religious studies from Brown University. An internationally recognized scholar in liberation theology, conflict resolution, religious humanism, and African American humanism, he retired as a professor of religion and director of the Black studies program at Florida State University (FSU) in 1998 where he had served since 1977. Prior to going to FSU in 1976 to set up FSU's Black studies program, Jones was a member of the faculty at the Yale Divinity School and served as coordinator of Black studies. He had also held visiting professorships at Brown University, Princeton Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary, Iliff School of Theology, and the Humanist Institute in New York. His more than four decades career as a scholar, educator, philosopher, social activist, and minister, including a decade of research in post-apartheid South Africa, generated a new generic model of human decision-making and system analysis. This highly predictive model of human behavior documents oppression as the foundational human behavior and shows its link to the origin of human conflict. His analysis highlights the socio-moral theory that group conflict and dysfunctional fragmentation in the body politic will increase, not decrease; that the gross

imbalance of unequal distribution of economic, social, and political power is the root cause of conflict in the public square. According to Jones, “For more than three decades, I have warned that oppression is our fundamental geopolitical mega trend, that group conflict would grow like the plague and that counter-violence would be the response from the oppressed to the violence inherent in society’s systemic oppression. In sum, that oppression is the preeminent religious and moral issue that we and our children will have to cope with. As an oppressed people, we are still ill-prepared for this task because we still do not understand the ‘what, how, and why’ of oppression and its mutations, especially how our own deeds and creeds keep oppression alive.” Jones conducted extensive field research on social change in the Republic of South Africa and lectured widely on the changing face of apartheid and the dynamics of neo-racism. He was invited to share his research with numerous universities, societies, labor unions, religious organizations, school systems, and juvenile justice programs throughout the United States and abroad. He presented his research in South Africa, Kenya, Martinique, Ghana, Korea, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, Canada, and Great Britain. In addition to endowed and major lectures at such institutions as Cornell, Union Theological Seminary, Tufts, Vanderbilt, Ohio State, Tuskegee Institute, and Wesley Theological Seminary, he consulted with many grassroots organizations and churches across America. Although his speaking activities comprised an important part of his work, Jones also made unique contributions to African American graduate education in Florida and nationwide. While he was the principal investigator for the Patricia Roberts Harris Fellowship Program, Florida State University produced 50 percent of the nationally earned PhDs in criminology from 1987–1990. He developed several programs to enhance graduate student retention and graduation rates. Due in large part to these programs, FSU became a national leader in the production of African American doctorates across the disciplines. Dr. Jones was the recipient of myriad humanitarian, teaching, and scholarly awards. Among these are: honorary degrees from Starr King School of Religion and Meadville Theological Seminary, the William R. Jones Most Valuable Mentor Award, which is an annual award established by the Florida Endowment Fund for Higher Education (first recipient, 1991), the Martin Luther King Jr. Distinguished Scholar Award (1986), the American Humanist Association Humanist Pioneer of the Year (1992), the Jim Barrett Social Justice Award (first recipient, 1995), African American Culture and Philosophy, and the Unitarian-Universalist Service Award.

**Jessica Patella Konig** is currently a PhD student in philosophy at Duquesne University. She holds an MA in philosophical theology from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA, and a BA in philosophy from the University of San Diego. She works in feminist philosophy and critical race theory, focusing the majority of her work on systems of power and oppression and how they impact our embodied, lived experiences. She published “A Call to Look: An Essay on the Power of the Sartrean Gaze,” in the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the*

*Black Experience* 12, no. 1 (Fall 2012). She won the Philosophy Graduate Essay Prize for 2012 at Duquesne University. Her essay is entitled “The Dancing Philosopher: Nietzsche and the Art of Aphorism.” This year, 2013, she also won the Women’s and Gender Studies Eleanore Holveck Essay Award at Duquesne University. Her essay is entitled “Francis Bacon on Nature: The Secret, the Erotic, the Dominated.”

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**Christopher Mountenay** is a PhD student at Duquesne University. He is currently putting the finishing touches on his doctoral dissertation, which deals with Nietzsche’s unfinished work, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, and how it relates to Schopenhauer’s pessimism. He will defend later this year. Among his primary research interests are ancient philosophy, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Sloterdijk.

**Brittany O’Neal** is a doctoral candidate in African American and African Studies at Michigan State University. Her dissertation project is tentatively entitled “Religion, African Americans, and Black Liberation Theology: A Philosophical Assessment.” This dissertation plans to critically examine the various conceptions of God in several Black liberation theologies from the mid-twentieth century.

**Michelle V. Rowley** is an associate professor in the women’s studies department at the University of Maryland, College Park. Before joining the department in 2006 she served in the women’s studies department at the University of Cincinnati (2004–2006). She completed her PhD as a Fulbright Scholar at Clark University, Worcester MA (2003). She presently serves on the editorial collective for *Feminist Studies*. Her publications include “When the Post-Colonial State Bureaucratizes Gender: Charting Trinidadian Women’s Centrality Within the Margins,” “Where the Streets have no name: Getting Development out of the (RED),” “Rethinking Interdisciplinarity: Meditations on the Sacred Possibilities of an Erotic Feminist Pedagogy,” and “Whose Time Is It?: Gender and Humanism in Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Advocacy.” Her book is entitled *Feminist Advocacy and Gender Equity in the Anglophone Caribbean: Evisoning a Politics of Coalition* (Routledge, 2011).

**George Yancy** is professor of philosophy at Duquesne University and coordinator of the Critical Race Theory Speaker Series. He is the author of *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), which received an honorable mention from the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Bigotry and Human Rights. He is also the author of *Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Temple University Press, 2012). He has also edited fourteen influential books, three of which have received *Choice Awards*. He was also recently nominated for the Duquesne University Presidential Award for Excellence in Scholarship.