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A Liberatory Pedagogy: The Underground Railroad as a Model for Christian Education

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**Abstract**

The Underground Railroad (UGRR) holds a sacred place in U.S. history and race relations, or rather it should. The UGRR was this country's first racially integrated civil rights movement in which whites and blacks worked together, taking great risks together, saving tens of thousands of lives together and ultimately succeeding together in one of the most ambitious political undertakings in American history.[1] As such, their coordinated, overt-covert, cross-cultural/cross-class/counter-hegemonic subversive acts of civil disobedience offers a paradigm of liberatory engagement by which we can address the various discriminatory –isms of our time that leave people oppressed and similarly disenfranchised socially, politically, economically and theologically with their humanity in question, and their *Imago Dei* in doubt in what bell hooks has called "a political system of imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy."[2]

The fundamental non-denial of discrimination enabled participants in the UGRR to address it and the basic concept of *escape* and *travel* undergirding the UGRR offers a way of envisioning the teaching/learning experience leaving behind or abandoning unhealthy ideologies, and therefore as journeying with students from one place of understanding to another. Primary participants, *(i.e. conductor, station-keeper/agent and freedom seeker/fugitive* and other key aspects *(i.e. safe space and the signs/symbols of communication)* of the movement also offer a way of better understanding the role and responsibility of the instructor, including assignment selection, and facilitative practices such as room setup, and non-verbal or coded communication. The benefits of employing

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[1] Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan. The Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America's First Civil Rights Movement* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 4.

[2] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), xiv.

a model of Christian education based upon the interworking of the UGRR include, but are not limited to: developing a personal conviction, a sense of responsibility for others, a socio-political/theo-political awareness, and a radical counter-cultural, counter-hegemonic perspective informed by faith and evidenced by praxis.

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## Introduction

In a seminary class on the psychology of whiteness and feminist theology, a middle-aged white female student said that she did not see Jesus as "raced." When asked by a young black male student to articulate the rationale for her belief, she responded defensively saying, "*I just don't see him that way.*" Yet, according to biblical descriptions and Christian tradition, Jesus was a Jewish man living under Roman imperial rule in his occupied Palestinian homeland. His historical and enfleshed body had a socio-political identity. That identity, moreover, even in the first century was clearly "other," as Jesus did not belong to the hegemonic Roman elite whose colonial expansion controlled access to resources and opportunities for all those in the occupied territory, and who also established the governing politics and social ordering that (in)formed the identity formation of both the Roman conquering colonizer and of the militarily conquered Jewish colonized bodies in that region. Moreover, Jesus was from Galilee, a rural, backward region separated from the religious and cultural elites in Jerusalem. Jesus was, therefore, an outsider in both civic society and in the hierarchy of his own faith and cultural community.

By contrast, some white and all black students saw Jesus as "raced" as a sign of human differentiation and distinction from the Roman colonizers under these geo-political conditions and were able to articulate the rationale for our belief. Recognizing, of course, that "race" as it is used today is a modern term, we nevertheless saw Jesus as "raced" as a mark of human differentiation and as a socio-political statement because the concept of othering based upon differences (i.e. tribal affiliations, cultural customs, religion, etc.) and upon conqueror-over-conquered is not a modern concept. In fact,

human differentiation is an ancient practice and was applicable under the circumstances to the historical and enfleshed Jesus.  The concept and practice of theo-political othering for the socio-economic benefit of the hegemony was applicable to the day-to-day reality of Jesus in first century Palestine, even if the word race, referring to a racialized identity as it does today, was not. No doubt for black students, our belief in a "raced" Jesus was informed by our own self-identity as "raced" and as "othered" in the country of our birth, our American homeland.

My white classmate's inability to see the embodied and enfleshed Jesus as raced as either a socio-political or as theo-political statement under the circumstances of his physical existence is rooted arguably in the colorblind rhetoric of that time, where race is not seen. Her view could also be rooted in the tradition of the blonde-haired, blue-eyed, white Christ who has been pictured historically to look like her or perhaps in an inability to see her own white self as raced. For many whites, in fact, nonwhites are raced, but their own race is not named. For Euro-Americans, their own racial group often becomes the great unsaid.[3]

My white female classmate's inability to articulate the rationale informing her belief is reflective arguably of a number of possibilities including: an immature faith or is rooted in an public education system and/or a religious education system that has not acknowledged, taught, or encouraged critical interrogation of authority, of biblical and theological perspectives with a sociological lens or has not provided the opportunity to articulate a biblical or theological perspective different than those of the controlling traditions. Another possibility could be that her position is reflective of white supremacy

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[3] Thandeka, *Learning to be White* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 3.

that yields white privilege, which is not required to give account of itself. White America is largely unconscious and mute, unable to address the question of its identity as white.[4]

I do not share this story to ridicule or to embarrass my classmate. Rather, I share it to illustrate at least two problematic tendencies in the Church that Christian educators both in the academy and in the church can and should address. These are:

1. A lack of consciousness about the role race and racism had, and continues to have in contemporary U.S. society, theological discourse particularly theological anthropology and ecclesial practices, and

2. The inability of Christians to articulate what they believe and why they believe it.

These tendencies are problematic because they prevent persons of the faith from understanding the impact race and racism has upon Christian identity formation and upon theological anthropology, from understanding how racial identification informs one's understanding and praxis of faith, from taking responsibility for faith-based beliefs and practices both inside and outside of the church, from recognizing intersecting sometimes competing oppressor/oppressed identities (i.e. white and female), from recognizing socio-political and theo-political or ecclesial "othering" and from naming and then using place(s) of personal and corporate privilege to counter discrimination and oppression of those "othered" by the hegemony.

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[4] James W. Perkinson, *White Theology Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1.

The hegemony, according to David Forgacs, comes to mean cultural, moral and ideological leadership over allied and subordinate groups.[5] Hegemonic groups have the wherewithal to enforce their prejudicial opinions. Thus, they are able to maintain privilege, power and control, initially acquired by coercion, but later maintained through subaltern consent. Depending upon the oppression, the hegemonic group differs. For example, for racial/ethnic minorities in the U.S., whites are the hegemony; for women, men are the hegemony; for LGBTQ persons, heterosexuals are the hegemony; for immigrants and undocumented workers; U.S. citizens are the hegemony; for low-income and working-class people, the rich are the hegemony; for Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, agnostics and other non-Christians, Christians are the hegemony. It is possible, therefore, for someone to be both hegemonic (dominant) and subaltern (oppressed).

The aforementioned tendencies are problematic, moreover, in that they exhibit a lack of understanding about the ways Christianity has and continues to create and to support an "us versus them" identity formation, socialization and enculturation. Modernity's racial imagination, for example, has its genesis in the theological problem of Christianity's quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots.[6] According to K. Cameron Carter,

> This severance was carried out in two distinct, but integrated steps. First, Jews were cast as a racial group in contrast to Western Christians who were subtly cast as a race group. In this way, Western culture began to articulate itself as Christian culture through the medium of a racial imagination. Second, having racialized Jews as a people of the Orient and thus Judaism as a religion of the East, Jews were then deemed inferior to Christians of the Occident or the West. Hence, the

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[5] David Forgacs, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader* (New York: New York Press, 2000), 423.

[6] J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

racial imagination proved as well to be a racist imagination of white supremacy. Within the gulf enacted between Christianity and the Jews, the racial, which proves to be a racist imagination, was forged.[7]

For James Carroll, "Ideas of racial purity as a component of social identity influenced religious identity, leading to a notion of Christianity stripped of all Semitic influence."[8] In other words by equating Christianity with Western (i.e. European-American) culture, and by claiming Christianity superior to Judaism and all other religions, Christianity made European-American culture superior to all ethnic/cultural identities. In fact, according to James Perkinson, a white professor of religious studies and philosophy, Christian supremacy is what gave birth to white supremacy.[9]

Generally speaking, these tendencies are life-negating as they prevent Christian believers from learning and living out the faith in life-affirming ways toward all of humanity. More specifically, these tendencies are even more problematic in ordained and lay leaders charged with preaching the good news of the Christian message and teaching believers to live the faith, not only in the church, but in the community and in the public square. While our faith may be personal, it is not private because we live our religious convictions in the public sphere. Our faith-based convictions are reflected in how we treat ourselves, how we treat our family, how we treat our neighbor and how we treat the stranger. In other words, our profession of faith includes not only claims of our love for God, but Christian faith includes consequential expressions of love for our fellow man or woman as well. As such, our faith-based convictions are on display in how we treat the

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[7] Carter, 4.

[8] James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword. The Church and the Jews A History* (Boston: A Mariner Book, 2001), 72.

[9] Perkinson, 2.

persons who are not related to us, who are not like us, and for the purposes of this dissertation, how we treat or respond to particular events involving black people specifically, whose perceived theological anthropology has made them disposable.

Even a cursory look at history reveals how religion has intersected with government and culture yielding tragic circumstances for many who were oppressed in the name of Jesus. It was, after all, the Christian European missionaries who cooperated with the colonial administrators in raping lands of their resources and of raping people of their humanity.[10] Religious reflection and theological analysis, therefore, must not be seen as separate domains with their own practices, immune from the global processes of economic restructuring and social and cultural formation.[11] Religion and other forms of cultural practice are embedded in political-economic power relations and far from being reducible to them, actually reflect, express, resist or even constitute those relationships.[12] Of necessity, therefore, religious reflection and theological analysis must be seen and engaged as intersecting, interrelated and interdependent with the socio-political, cultural and economic realities of the people past and present that have coalesced to shape the faith, to form us within the faith, to build upon the foundation of faith handed down to us and also to lay a new foundation for followers yet to come.

To address the problematic tendencies I've highlighted, I offer herein a model of Christian Education that encourages attention to and engagement with intersecting realities of blacks and other ethnic minorities and distinguishing and divisive factors,

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[10] J. Deotis Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 29.

[11] Kwok Pui-lan, "Feminist theology as intercultural discourse." In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24.

[12] Richard A. Horsley, *Religion and Empire People, Power, and the Life of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 127.

namely race, religion, economics, politics and power. The proposed model is based upon the Underground Railroad (UGRR) whose participants took personal responsibility and accountability for their faith-based beliefs and praxis, named and used their places of privilege(s) and engaged in counter hegemonic practices.

These participants, who risked life and livelihood, like myself, believe in the love of God, the saving power of Jesus, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to work in and through the people-of-God to be change agents in the land. Moreover, I believe in the *Imago Dei* of all humankind irrespective of race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, religion, class, age, and physical/mental ability – in other words, irrespective of all of the ways we as humans tend not only to differentiate ourselves from one another, but also the ways we tend to discriminate, to dehumanize, to other, and to exclude each other from full participation in civic society and from full participation in the life of the church, and also to justify white privilege and black disposability. I believe in assuming personal authority/autonomy/agency for one's faith-based beliefs and practices and in challenging discriminatory practices of all types. Moreover, I believe in using one's places of privilege(s) to the benefit of those without the resources, the language and/or the platform to advocate for themselves. As such, I find the UGRR a perfect model for emulation as the participants exhibited a similar faith in the Trinity, a disdain for discrimination and compassion for the oppressed as I hold today.

The Underground Railroad was a network of multi-racial, multi-generational abolitionists, including Native Americans, free whites,[13] and formerly enslaved blacks who worked collaboratively to undermine and to subvert a state-sponsored system of

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[13] I use the term free whites to distinguish them from white indentured servants at the time.

enslavement and inequality at a time when oppression of and discrimination against black bodies were socially accepted, theologically sanctioned, scientifically rationalized, economically profitable, politically supported and constitutionally upheld. "Apart from sporadic slave rebellions, only the Underground Railroad physically resisted the repressive laws that held slaves in bondage."[14]

There were above ground, overtly operating abolitionists like the formerly enslaved Frederick Douglass and Quaker William Lloyd Garrison, who from different perspectives both openly condemned slavery and publicly advocated for black emancipation. There were also underground, covertly operating abolitionists who moved about in the shadows and behind the scenes such as the fugitive Harriet Tubman, who travelled into slaveholding states, leading those who would dare to board freedom's train north to Canaan, and Thomas Garrett, a white Quaker, who financed many of Tubman's trips to the south and back and who also opened his home as a hideaway for fugitives. Their overt-covert, cross-cultural/cross-class/counter-hegemonic subversive acts of civil disobedience offers a paradigm of liberatory engagement by which we can address the various discriminatory –isms of our time that leave people oppressed and disenfranchised socially, politically, economically and theologically with their humanity in question, and their *Imago Dei* in doubt in what bell hooks has called "a political system of imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy."[15]

Participants in the UGRR were many and varied. For example, according to Fergus Bordewich, there were slaves who themselves never fled but who provided

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[14] Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan. The Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America's First Civil Rights Movement* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 5.

[15] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), xiv.

information regarding escape routes to those who did.[16] Other more engaged or more active participants in the UGRR operated from three primary roles: *a conductor*, who travelled into slaveholding states to lead others to places of freedom, *a station keeper or agent*, who provided whatever resources they had (i.e. shelter, food, transportation, money, legal advice, clothes, etc.) to those who would dare to escape the bondage of perpetual servitude, and the *freedom seeker/fugitive*, who determined in his/her heart to escape slavery's grip by any means necessary. All participated at great risk to themselves and possibly to others. If caught, they or their families could be enslaved/re-enslaved, beaten, imprisoned, fined, maimed or killed, and some were. Despite such risks, thousands participated in orchestrated acts of civil disobedience and moral challenge.

"In an era when emancipation seemed subversive and outlandish to most Americans, the men and women of the underground defied society's standards on a daily basis, inspired by a sense of spiritual imperative, moral conviction, and especially on the part of African American activists, a fierce visceral passion for freedom."[17] Their combined efforts freed thousands from slavery's grip, and clearly demonstrate what can happen when people have an awareness of the dynamics of race, religion economics, politics and power operative in this country; and these same people have a passion for justice, understand the Christian faith as liberatory for all, and then choose to live out life-affirming theological convictions in the public square by working to help the least of these by challenging the various socio-political and theological othering that yields injustices of any type, toward anyone.

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[16] Bordewich, 5.

[17] Bordewich, 4.

The proposed educational paradigm is, therefore, designed to promote and to provoke critical engagement between faith and practice that yields personal agency/autonomy/authority, that does not deny the role race and racism has in American society, and in Christian theological understanding and praxis, and that notes the ways Christianity can undergird othering and exclusion.  In addition, the model offers a way to re-vision (envision) the teaching-learning exchange as  escape from unhealthy ideologies and as journeying with our students from one place of understanding, consciousness (or awareness) to another. This model offers an alternative to presuming to fill empty minds with indoctrinating propaganda that religiously justifies oppression of or injustice against entire people groups, that leaves students without an explanation for their suffering and that leaves students unaware of their privilege, and therefore, unchallenged to use that privilege for the greater good of all humanity.

In chapter 1, I further elaborate on the problem as noted above and discuss the theological implications and socio-political and economic consequences of not acknowledging the impact of race, religion, economics, politics and power upon inhabitants of the nation. In chapter 2, I discuss the socio-political and theological development of race and racism that has yielded a theological anthropology that today still garners either white privilege or black disposability. I include a discussion on Critical Race Theory (CRT), a methodology for analyzing race/power dynamics, its insights and its evolving role in living with, resisting and challenging racism in our time and how it might be and why it must be incorporated into Christian religious education in the church and in the academy. I conclude with a brief discussion of "white normativity" in Christian education. In Chapter 3, I discuss the critical/emancipatory pedagogy proposed

by Paulo Freire, *pedagogy of the oppressed*, its contributions and challenges to education. In chapter 4, I discuss the call of religious education and the response of critical/emancipatory pedagogies as proposed by black religious education scholars, Grant Shockley, Anne Wimberly and Yolanda Smith. In chapter 5, I discuss the Underground Railroad, which of necessity includes a discussion of the peculiar institution (U.S. chattel slavery), narratives of fugitives, conductors and station keepers. Finally in Chapter 6, I lay out my proposed model, including how to envision the learning exchange, what aspects of the UGRR are most applicable, the benefits of a model based upon the UGRR, a discussion of its similarities with other models of Christian education proposed in whole or in part from other aspects of the African-American experience, namely models proposed by Shockley, Smith, and Wimberly. In the afterword, I demonstrate the implications of this model on Christian education, define how it addresses the problems I have identified, and how it advances the field of Christian religious education. In addition, I look at next steps in exploring the field of Christian education in light of the model.

Stories are important in the model that I will propose, as in life. Therefore, I share stories of public figures as reported in the media, biographies or autobiographies, of personal friends (who have given me permission to share) and of experiences that I have witnessed or have experienced to demonstrate the violence toward and assaults upon the personhood (i.e. *Imago Dei*) of people of African descent to demonstrate that the legacy of U.S. chattel slavery lives on and continues to adversely impact black lives nearly 150 years after the passage of the 13th Amendment outlawing slavery in America. This dissertation also uses historical and theoretical analysis as well as auto-ethnography.

Please note, except where citing direct quotes, I have been intentional in referring to enslaved blacks, as enslaved blacks or as enslaved persons rather than as slaves, since both they and I resist the notion of slave as being core to their self-identity as opposed to being descriptive of their socio-political condition or life experience. Black resistance via folklore, song, the invisible institution and the UGRR suggest that enslaved blacks resisted "slavery" by whatever means available to them. Herein I focus my discussion primarily upon race. However, future work with this educational paradigm should include application to other forms of –isms plaguing U.S. society and also should include ethnographic research. I also must be clear that racism herein refers only to white supremacist attitudes towards ethnic minorities as racism is not just ethnocentrism or prejudicial attitudes towards other ethnic groups, but ethnocentrism and prejudicial attitudes with the political and economic means to enforce, which only whites have had in this country.

**Chapter One**

**Christians, We Have a Problem**

**Hear Ye, Hear Ye**

As noted previously in the *Introduction,* my middle-aged white female classmate's inability to express her position about the physically enfleshed and embodied Jesus who had a geo-political identity among the colonized people in his Roman occupied Palestinian homeland, as well as her failure to articulate the rationale informing her historically unsupported position of a non-differentiated or non-raced Jesus illustrates at least two problematic tendencies in the Church that Christian educators in the church and in the academy can and should address. These are:

1. The lack of consciousness about the role race and racism had and continues to have in contemporary U.S. society, in theological discourse, particularly theological anthropology and ecclesial practices, and

2. The inability of Christians to articulate what they believe and why they believe it.

These tendencies are problematic because they prevent persons of the faith from understanding the impact race and racism has upon Christian identity formation – meaning how one sees one's self and how one sees others, particularly how whites see black people. These tendencies are problematic also because they prevent persons of faith from understanding how racial identification informs self-understanding/self-worth and praxis of faith – meaning how one exercises faith-based beliefs and behaviors when engaging or interacting with others, particularly when whites are interacting with black

people, engaging in micro-aggression[18] or justifying racist statements and behaviors. "Racism," as noted by Karen Teel, "pervades both society and religion, including Christian churches."[19] Again, these tendencies are problematic because they prevent people of faith from taking responsibility for faith-based beliefs and practices both inside and outside of the church – meaning being autonomous thinkers, taking ownership for what they believe, no longer relying on the faith assertions of an authority figure (i.e. pastor, parent or tradition). Finally, these tendencies are problematic because they prevent persons of faith from recognizing socio-political and theo-political or ecclesial "othering" and then from naming and then using place(s) of personal and corporate privilege to counter discrimination and oppression of those "othered" people groups – meaning acknowledging and admitting that oppression is not only individual, but institutionalized. Individual and institutional oppression is embedded in society and in the church, go unnoticed by many, is considered normal, and require open hearts and receptive minds to challenge and to change individuals and structures and to recognize that we have the power to bring about this change.

These tendencies are problematic, moreover, in that they exhibit a lack of understanding about the ways some expressions of Christianity have created and continue to create and to support an "us versus them" identity formation, socialization and enculturation. As noted previously, Christian supremacy is what gave birth to white supremacy.[20] Moreover, according to Teel, a white female scholar,

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[18] Encounters with racism experienced by people-of-color, presumed to go unnoticed by whites.

[19] Karen Teel, *Racism and the Image of God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.

[20] James W. Perkinson, *White Theology Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 2.

To this day, many European Americans, including Christians, remain profoundly disrespectful of the humanity of people of color. Yet many of us fail to realize this because our disrespect manifests in ways we do not recognize as problematic, such as our belief in stereotypes that we have been socialized to think are real – for example that African Americans are lazy, violent, or have high sex drives.[21]

These two tendencies – the lack of consciousness about the role of race and racism had and continues to have in contemporary society, theological discourse particularly theological anthropology and ecclesial practices, and the inability of Christians to articulate what we believe and why we believe – are damaging as a Christian witness because they are life-negating, and prevent believers and would-be believers from learning about and living out the tenets of the faith in life-affirming ways in our homes, in the church, in the wider community and toward all of humanity.

Christian educators in the church and in the academy are uniquely positioned to address these tendencies because we have ongoing close contact via weekly bible study and Sunday school classes and curriculum development, which allows for questioning, revising, and quick follow up to inquiries not afforded pastoral or missionary ministries that operate somewhat distantly with less frequent contact and in less intimate relationship. In other words, we have the proximity, we have the intimacy, and we have the responsibility. According to presiding elder of the East Tennessee Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Kenneth Hill, one of the tasks of Christian education is revision.[22] It is through education that disciples challenge the culture of domination/status quo in an effort to transform, empower, restore and resist in order to

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[21] Teel, 32.

[22] Kenneth H. Hill, *Religious Education in the African American Tradition A Comprehensive Introduction* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 6.

bring about liberation and healing.[23] The people impacted by the tendencies noted herein as problematic cry out for deliverance. Christian educators must respond with a liberating pedagogy.

**See No Evil**

Race is not a biological fact, but it is a social construct, with theological and political implications and material consequences. The theological implications regard who is considered human and worthy of human rights (e.g. quality education and healthcare). The political implications regard who is considered human and worthy of civil rights (e.g. right to vote). The material consequences regard who is granted privilege and given easy access to education, employment, housing, etc., the presumption of good-will and good-intent versus who is considered disposable and is deprived of equal or comparable access to education, employment, housing and has instead, the presumption of ill-will or ill-intent, racially profiled, "justifiably" shot while unarmed, and placed in the school-to-prison pipeline.

In the U.S., race marks boundaries that grant or limit access to opportunities and resources, and that allow for the presumption of goodwill or ill-intent. In fact, in the U.S. an obsession with race is deeply embedded in the concept of being human.[24] Therefore, any lack of consciousness about the role race and racism has and continues to have upon contemporary society, identity formation, theological discourse and ecclesial practices reflects either willful ignorance or outright denial of how race was constructed and how race functions in this country. A less generous explanation for this lack of race

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[23] Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Juan Floyd-Thomas, Carol B. Duncan, Stephen G. Ray, Jr., and Nancy Lynne Westfield, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 153.

[24] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 118.

consciousness/race awareness in U.S. society is that it reflects a position of white supremacy or internalized racism where such acknowledgement or admission of the differing attitudes, access, and opportunities between socially constructed racial identities is deemed normative or unnecessary or irrelevant to contemporary events, or more specifically, irrelevant to theological inquiry, specifically theological anthropology.

Within systematic theology the study of what it means to be human, created in the image and likeness of God falls under the heading of theological anthropology. [25] Attention to and understanding of theological anthropology has implications for our relationship with our Creator and with one another. Race, according to Hopkins, seeps in and out of the doctrine of theological anthropology.[26] Attitudes toward race and racism cannot help but inform understanding of theological anthropology, and our theological anthropology informs how we can hear of countless shooting deaths of unarmed black males and yet repeatedly defend white shooters, or watch a video of the use of an illegal choke hold and yet find the white police officer not guilty of any wrongdoing in the death of yet another unarmed black male.

**The Twilight Zone**

A common misconception, particularly among many whites, is that in light of the civil rights legislations of the 1960s intended to right the wrongs of 300+ years of racial imbalance and the legally sanctioned white-over-black social ordering claimed to be ordained by God, we have moved beyond the racist ideology of the past that justified the enslavement of black bodies and legally supported racial segregation and discrimination

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[25] Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Created in God's Image. An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007), xv.

[26] Hopkins, *Being Human*, 118.

in housing, employment, education, etc., and have become instead a colorblind society, where race isn't seen. The term itself, colorblind, seems oxymoronic attributing a blindness to someone who can see everything, but the color of one's skin. To be racially colorblind is to ignore what one has already noticed.[27] According to law professor, Neil Gotanda, "The claim that race is not recognized is an attempt to deny the reality of internally recognized social conflicts of race."[28] Moreover, Gotanda adds, "The technique of nonrecognition [sic] ultimately supports the supremacy of white interests."[29]

Now with the election of the nation's first black president, Barack Hussein Obama, some would have us to believe that the nation has moved from colorblind to post-racial, where race doesn't matter. Nothing could be further from the truth. White male, Tim Wise agrees, saying, "The larger systemic and institutional realities of life in America suggest the ongoing salience of a deep-seated cultural malady – racism – which has been neither eradicated nor even substantially diminished by Obama's victory."[30] At least the rhetoric allows us to see race again, but still asks us to ignore contemporary racist practices. For example, we are repeatedly reminded that the president is black and that the election of this black man is proof that the nation is no longer a racist state when, in fact, his election as Wise notes, proves no such thing.

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[27] Neil Gotanda, "A Critique of Our Constitution is Color-Blind." In *Critical Race Theory. The Cutting Edge* Third Edition ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 36.

[28] Gotanda, 37.

[29] Gotanda, 36.

[30] Tim Wise, *Between Barack and a Hard Place. Racism and White Denial in the Age of Obama* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009), 8.

According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, professor of sociology, after racial stratification is established (as it was at the founding of this nation with whites placing themselves on top), race becomes an independent criterion for vertical hierarchy in society.[31] Moreover, Bonilla-Silva says that different races experience positions of subordination and superordination in society and develop different interests.[32] On one hand his observations is obviously true, but on the other hand it must be nuanced. For example, from the perspective of the superordination, it's quite simple, maintain white hegemonic interests, but from the perspective of subordination, the oppressed and the oppression differed and therefore so does their interests. The oppression of the African/black, Native American, Latino/Latina, and Asian has manifested differently: as U.S. chattel slavery, as the displacement/confinement onto reservations, as the war on drugs, war on poverty, as anti-immigration laws, as Japanese internment camps, as model minority, as colorblind and post-racial rhetoric, as coded language, as mis-education. So yes, for the enslaved black, emancipation was important, and now for the undocumented worker, immigration reform is important. In this sense, our different positions of subordination have yielded different interests. However, for generations, both black and brown people have been targeted by the police, thus we also have a common interest in regards to racial profiling. So while racial/ethnic identities of people-of-color differ and the corresponding oppression also differs, the source of that oppression has remained unchanged – white supremacist thought and behavior. Thus, subordinated persons-of-color do, in fact, have a bottom line common interest that must be addressed. Dominant

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[31] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Racism and New Racism: The contours of racial dynamics in contemporary America." In *Critical Pedagogy and Race* ed. Zeus Leonardo (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 2.

[32] Bonilla-Silva, 21.

white culture, according to Gloria Anzaldúa, is killing us slowly with its ignorance that splits people and creates prejudices.[33] In fact, Anzaldúa says that whites in power want people of color to barricade themselves behind separate tribal walls, which would allow people of color to be picked off one at a time with the hidden weapons of whitewashed stories and distorted histories.[34] As such, rather than fighting among ourselves over the crumbs the hegemony would divide among us, ethnic minorities would do better to join forces to defeat a common foe – racism and white supremacy.

We live in a society where three centuries of racial prerogatives are institutionalized in pejorative attitudes and behavior long since considered natural and normative."[35] The racist ideologies of the past are deeply ingrained in contemporary U.S. society and appear normal to many. "In general, members of every minority group continue to be measured largely by the degree of our assimilation – how closely speech patterns, dress, or demeanor conform to the dominant white culture – and the more that a minority strays from these external markings, the more he or she is subject to negative assumptions."[36] Though some may deny this truth, we live in a society where race is still seen and race still matters.

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[33] G. Anzaldúa, "La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness." In *Feminist Theory Reader. Local and Global Perspectives* ed. Carole Mccann and Seung-kyung Kim (New York: Routledge, 2010), 260.

[34] Anzaldúa, 260.

[35] Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion and the Continuing American Dilemma* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), xxv.

[36] Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope. Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 279.

Although slavery and segregation are now illegal in the U.S., their effects are still deeply and pervasively felt.[37] However, rather than being overtly apparent by federal, state or local legislation permitting race-based exclusion or by white preachers proclaiming or condoning from the pulpit unequal treatment toward the nation's citizens of color is ordained by God,  contemporary racism is practiced in more covert, more subtle, but no less damaging and dehumanizing ways. Bonilla-Silva calls the post-civil rights racism of the mid-20th century, a "new racism" created to maintain the imbalanced status quo established at the founding of the nation. In the new racism, racist ideology and white hegemonic domination still prevail, and white interests remain central. For him, despite the profound changes that occurred in the 1960s, a new racial structure, which he calls the New Racism, has emerged and is operating, which accounts for the persistence of racial inequality.[38]

According to Bonilla-Silva, the (white) common-sense view on racial matters is that racists are few and far between, that racial discrimination has all but disappeared since the 1960s and that most whites are color-blind.[39]  This white common-sense view of race relations in America suggests that any racism experienced now is an individual act, rather than institutionally established and enforced. However, this very narrow view of racism as individual rather than institutional ignores the fact that racism is built into the very fabric of this nation, continually repackaged, perpetuated via neutral ideology (i.e. colorblind, post-racial), pejorative imagery (i.e. scary black man) and coded

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[37] Karen Teel, *Racism and the Image of God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 15.

[38] Bonilla-Silva, 18.

[39] Bonilla-Silva, 17.

language (i.e. welfare queen, inner city, thug). In fact, for Seattle Seahawks player, Richard Sherman, "It seems like [thug] is the accepted way of calling somebody the N-word nowadays."[40]

Although Bonilla-Silva notes that this new common sense is based in part on the fact that the traditional forms of racial discrimination and exclusion have been outlawed, he nonetheless concludes that the white common-sense view on racial matters is ultimately false.[41] For Bonilla-Silva, the new racism that has emerged is more sophisticated and subtle than the Jim Crow racism of the past, yet it is as effective as the old racism in maintaining the contemporary racial status quo.[42] In other words, while the visible Jim Crow signage designating where colored bodies can eat, sleep, drink, work, relieve themselves, or be buried have been physically removed from view, barriers yet remain that dictate the proper place for black bodies. The following story suggests the reality of the new racism and its similarity to the blatant racism of the past generations.

A middle-aged black male high school friend of mine[43] pulls away from his home in the Chicago Gold Coast only to realize that he may have left his sunglasses atop his black BMW. He parks his car, and with a downward gaze, walks the path of his short ride from home. Not finding his sunglasses along the recently driven route, he shifts to walking in the middle of the street looking under cars in the event that his $400 sunglasses had blown or rolled underneath one of them. In a matter of minutes, he is

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[40] Richard Sherman, *NFL News Conference*, Renton, WA, January 22, 2014.

[41] Bonilla-Silva, 17.

[42] Bonilla-Silva, 18.

[43] This event actually occurred to a long-time friend of mine, Michael O. Brady, who is a graduate of Northwestern University's Business School and former long-term employee of IBM, not someone typically associated with the criminal element.

surrounded by four Chicago police officers, two with hands on guns, and asked to show I.D. When he questioned why he was being approached, the officer said they had received a call saying, "*There's someone in the neighborhood who looks like he doesn't belong.*" This 50-something year old male is dressed casually, but he is not wearing the sagging pant look of today's youth. He actually lives two blocks away, technically in the same neighborhood, yet he was both **identified** by the caller and **recognized** by the police as someone "who looked like he didn't belong."

For race-aware people, it is clear that what caused him to be both labeled and recognized as one "who does not belong" was simply the color of his skin. In particular, most blacks believe an incident of this type would never have occurred to a white man similarly dressed, driving a luxury car, and walking down the street appearing to look for something on the ground in an upscale neighborhood of a major metropolitan city. For us, this story is not a subtle reminder of the new racism, but the all too familiar story we heard from or about our fathers and grandfathers from the south. For my black female friends with sons, husbands, brothers and still living fathers, it is our fear. For race-aware people, this encounter is a blatant, overt act of racism directed toward a black male, and is not an uncommon experience among black people of all socio-economic classes. Fortunately, unlike countless other encounters of this type (black male/white officer), it did not end with the shooting of another unarmed black male.

By contrast, the (white) common-sense view on racial matters tends to see an incident of this type as having no racial motivation. In fact, to many whites, the aforementioned encounter would be considered normal, routine, with nothing out of the ordinary because of the frequent portrayal of black men as a threatening presence, a

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menace to society. The new racism, as Bonilla-Silva calls it, allows the same white supremacist hegemonic perspective to operate and to dictate where black bodies belong and what black people should do. This incident, moreover, proves to some and should suggest to others that blacks in the 21ˢᵗ century still live with the stereotypes created to justify the enslavement of black bodies, where blacks were both child-like and criminal, needing to be cared for and beast-like needing to be feared and contained by whites. My friend, or rather, the mythologized scary black man did not belong in the neighborhood where he lives and pays property taxes. Instead, by virtue of his skin color, he was feared and needed to be contained or at least required to give account of his presence in the area much like 17-year-old black male Trayvon Martin was required to do in a gated community in Sanford, FL. Again, for the race-aware people, incidents of this type suggest the "new racism," may sound differently, may even be implemented differently, more covertly, yet with the same intent and outcome – the humiliation, dehumanization, "othering," of black people, an act of violent, psychological assault on the self-worth and *Imago Dei* of another black person, and the assigned,  proper place for a black presence, as defined by some white person.

**Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil**

White pastors and theologians have largely remained silent on the question of race and racism, thereby suggesting that race and racism are not appropriate considerations for Christian theology or at least, not one they wish to engage.[44]  This silence is due in part to the historical presumption of white objectivity, white universal speak and the perception that only nonwhites are raced. According to Perkinson, "whites/whiteness exists in this

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[44] Elaine A. Robinson, *Race and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 8.

country today as a color-blind fiction of innocence, publicly posturing itself as the neutral pursuit of the Dream, wishing well on all sides, intending equality, sorry for poverty, certain of the uprightness of its own vision of ascent into the gated bliss of sole proprietorship."[45]

"The overwhelming majority of European American men rarely confess their racial identity in religious scholarship, yet that color trait determines their approaches to theological anthropology."[46] By contrast, black liberation, black feminist, and womanist pastors and scholars, who advocate for the concerns of black men and black women, readily admit a racial impact upon their experiences in society and upon their experiences of the sacred, and thus, the racial importance to their theological inquiry. Communities of color more easily recognize and more readily admit that every theology is a product and reflection of its social environment.[47] Context shapes the theological questions as well as the theological response.[48] In other words, our theological inquiries address issues that concern us. Since race/racism/racial identification shape our existence in the world, race then undergirds all theological discourse, whether explicitly or implicitly acknowledged and is therefore crucial to any theological analysis, theological inquiry, specifically theological anthropology and theological education in the Christian faith.

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[45] Perkinson, 14.

[46] Hopkins, 119.

[47] James H. Cone, *For My People. Black Theology and the Black Church. Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 172.

[48] J. Deotis Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 15.

**How Can They Teach Except They Be Sent**

The inability of Christians to articulate what they believe and why they believe it demonstrates both a lack of understanding of the faith and/or an immature faith. Both positions (ignorance or immaturity) can be dangerous as they can cause one to make religious claims that cannot be substantiated under critical analysis, and also enable otherwise critically thinking people to abdicate responsibility and accountability for faith-based beliefs and praxis, which in the course of human history has led to claims of Christian-sanctioned/god-ordained oppression of countless people (i.e. Blacks, Jews, Japanese, Native Americans, immigrants, women, differently-abled, LGBTQ, etc.).

In fact, according to process theologian and United Methodist minister, John Cobb Jr., there is little serious talk about what faith is and what lay Christians really do believe.[49]  Cobb attributes this lack of understanding about Christianity to the professionalization of theology set apart from the church body and also to the mass surrender of personal responsibility to these professionals (i.e. pastors, theologians, ethicists, biblical scholars). Cobb's observation, moreover, suggests that many of us rely too heavily upon the assertions advanced by those we esteem – whether professional, personal, ecclesial, social or political. For him, both church leadership and congregants share blame for this lack of critical engagement and personal accountability. Cobb says, "Those with institutional responsibility want harmony rather than controversy . . . Sometimes, it seems that church leaders prefer the church die in superficial harmony than live in vigorous debate."[50]  He adds,

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[49] John B. Cobb Jr., *Becoming a Thinking Christian* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 12.

[50] Cobb, 14.

The main problem is that in the old line Protestant denominations, most of us are very diffident about these beliefs . . . We are not sure what the doctrines to which we acquiesce mean, and when the teachings are explained, we are often still less sure that we really believe them.[51]

Not only are many of us unsure of the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith and unsure also as to what we believe about/within the tradition, but what we claim to believe is frequently assumed from someone else – someone we esteem (or fear), usually an authority figure (i.e. pastor, parent or spouse) in our lives. Sharon Parks, religious researcher and educator, calls knowing of this type that is oriented outside of one's self, *authority-bound/dualistic knowing*. According to Parks, within this particular form of knowing, what a person ultimately trusts, knows, and believes is based upon some authority such as a parent, teacher or religious leader.[52] In fact, she says, "In this form of knowing, even the inner self is primarily composed by others."[53]

Believers in the authority bound/dualistic phase of faith development are so attached to sources of authority outside of themselves that they may or may not be able to articulate what they believe. They cannot, however, articulate the rationale for their belief. Parks adds, "When people compose their sense of truth in this form, they may assert deeply felt and strong opinion; but if asked the basis for their knowing, they reveal their assumed, unexamined trust in sources of authority located outside the self."[54]

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[51] Cobb, 18.

[52] Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams. Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 54.

[53] Parks, 54.

[54] Parks, 54.

In regards to the historical/enfleshed Jesus, my middle-aged white female classmate was able to express a heart-felt belief about the socio-political (raced/classed) identity of Jesus (or the lack thereof). She was not, however, able to articulate a rationale for her belief; nor could she provide a counter-argument to those who challenged her Christological position. When authority bound/dualistic knowing prevails, people cannot stand outside of their own perspective, or reflect upon their own thought.[55]

In this first phase of Park's four-part faith development theory, authority functions in an all-powerful manner such that ambiguity cannot be tolerated resulting in dualistic, either/or thinking. While authority-bound knowing is to be expected among children and adolescents as they grow in the faith, it is not uncommon in adults. In fact, Parks says that authority-bound/dualistic forms of knowing are not just characteristic of children and adolescents, but also of some people throughout the whole of their biological adulthood.[56]

Authority-bound/dualistic forms of knowing are particularly problematic in those ordained and lay leaders of the church charged with teaching others about the Christian faith. If my seminary trained classmate has no understanding of the socio-political context of the Jesus of history, how can she then teach about the Christ of faith, since Jesus and the Christ are not separate beings? How does one preach the good tidings of great joy of a man whose embodied existence and historical context, which informed his message of hope to an oppressed people, is ignored, set aside, dismissed and disregarded as irrelevant to the kingdom of God on earth then or now? How can that message speak to the oppressed people today if it is stripped of the socio-political context in which it was

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[55] Parks, 54.

[56] Parks, 56.

birthed, in which it initially progressed, in which made it revolutionary, counter-cultural and subversive for its time? Erasing the socio-political identity and disregarding theo-political/ecclesial othering of Jesus by seeing him as a non-raced being as a socio-political statement in his occupied Palestinian homeland is comparable to claiming to be colorblind or post-racial in the U.S. in the 21st century. Citing Richard Horsley, Joerg Rieger points out,

> Trying to understand Jesus' speech and action without knowing how Roman imperialism determined the conditions of life in Galilee and Jerusalem would be like trying to understand Martin Luther King without knowing how slavery, reconstruction, and segregation determined the lives of African Americans in the United States.[57]

Knowing of the type exemplified by my middle-age classmate, external to self, is typically left unexamined, but if examined, then still left unchallenged, particularly if our ruminations lead us to disagree with the classic, orthodox positions translated – dominant hegemonic perspective. Believers in the authority bound/dualistic phase of faith development are unable (or unwilling) to question the various authorities within the Christian faith – whether people, polity or practices of the church. This failure to understand the faith and to own our faith-based beliefs and praxis has led to both conscious and unconscious disenfranchisement of countless "others" – socially, politically, and ecclesiastically. Even a cursory review of the history of humanity reveals numerous examples of humanity's inhumanity to humanity (i.e. the Spanish Inquisition, the enslavement of Africans, the Jewish Holocaust, Salem witch hunts, invasion of sovereign nations looking for weapons of mass destruction, etc.) – all condoned, and in some instances promoted by, ecclesial authorities and religious doctrines. Such failure

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[57] Joerg Rieger, *Christ & Empire From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 24.

today can lead to complicity in perpetuating life-negating beliefs and behaviors to theologically justify the various forms of discrimination (i.e. racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-immigration, religion [e.g. anti-Semitic, Islamophobia], able-ness, ageism) plaguing the inhabitants of U.S. society. Authority bound/dualistic knowing may be necessary as a start in the faith, but can be dangerous if we remain too long accepting without assessing the perspective of others. We must enable Christians to mature in the faith.

Eventually, some people do come to recognize that one's perception is really only contextual. For these persons, knowledge then becomes relative. Persons in this realm of knowing that Parks calls *unqualified relativism,* realize that all knowledge is shaped by and is thus relative to the context and the relationships within which said knowledge is composed.[58] In fact, as stated earlier, this has been the argument of liberation scholars who have challenged traditional or classical biblical and theological discourse by noting repeatedly that context shapes the questions as well as the theological response.[59] For Parks, any shift in thinking in this way of knowing may occur gradually or abruptly – whenever one undergoes an experience that does not fit the assumptions of one's conventional, assumed world.[60]

In the next phase of knowing that Parks calls *commitment in relativism* persons begin to take responsibility for their own thinking and knowing. According to Parks, they

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[58] Parks, 57.

[59] Roberts, 15

[60] Parks, 57.

look for a place to stand in an uncertain world.[61] They are still aware of the relative nature of all opinions. This awareness reflects the great shift that makes intellectual reflection possible and thus serves as the threshold into the life of the mind."[62] So, while remaining cognizant of the finite nature of all judgments, they yet begin to consider what is adequate, what is worthy, and what is valuable.[63]

The final form of knowing that Parks identifies is *convictional commitment*, which she likens to wisdom and a deep conviction of a truth.[64] Here one has examined their beliefs and can articulate those beliefs; and in this place, one can hear other opinions and yet hold onto a fundamental belief, not in the way that an authority-bound person does, but in a mature way that is not threatened by the different perspective and that may consider the merits of the opposing remark. Parks says, "Without abandoning the centered authority of the self and a disciplined fidelity to truth, this way of thinking represents a deepened capacity to hear the truth of another, or even of many others."[65] Moreover, not only can a person with convictional commitment hear an opinion other than his/her own, but this person can also embrace paradox.

Embracing paradox is particularly important for Christians since tension is where many of us live in relation to our faith. For example, liberation scholars argue that God is on the side of the oppressed, but the oppressed are still underrepresented in the job

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[61] Parks, 59.

[62] Parks, 59.

[63] Parks, 59.

[64] Parks, 60.

[65] Parks, 60.

market, while remaining overrepresented in prisons. Or as James Cone, father and founder of black liberation theology says, "If God is liberating the black poor from oppression, as black theologians say, where is the liberation event that can serve as evidence of that fact?"[66]

A more personal example involves a close friend and former co-worker saying, "My life is not going very good, but God is good. I was diagnosed with stage 3a lung cancer." Paradox, tension, contradictions – indeed this is where many "Christians" dwell. Work is good, but my marriage is in difficulty. Health is fine, just lost a job. Children are doing well, but dad just died. It is at times such as these that we, as believers, need to know what we believe. It is at times such as these that we, ordained clergy and lay leaders, most definitely need to know what we believe, why we believe it and be able to articulate it and articulate it well to someone in need of a hopeful, encouraging word in the time of distress.

**Ride 'Wit' Me**

Theology, as Cobb asserts, is controversial.[67] Yet Christian theological discourse warrants intentional, critical engagement by all those who profess a hope in the cornerstone of the faith – Jesus the Christ of Nazareth. Cobb, therefore, calls upon all Christians to take responsibility for our faith-based beliefs, which by extension encompasses our faith-informed practices as well. To do so, however, requires not only instruction in the content (i.e. bible), doctrines (i.e. ecclesiology), and evolution (i.e. history) of the faith, but also requires instruction in engaging the hermeneutical process –

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[66] Cone, 76.

[67] Cobb, 14.

the process of contextualizing the claims of faith (past and present), of questioning authority (living or dead), of inspiring personal and communal conviction to reinterpret life-negating aspects of the tradition (i.e. historical and contemporary exclusion of whole people groups from the salvation story), of acknowledging impact and importance of race and racism upon Christian identity formation, particularly as it relates to our understanding of theological anthropology of self and others and also of identifying and employing strategies for challenging the ecclesial, socio-political, hegemonic status quo that yields oppression in any way based upon race, and also upon gender, religion, citizenship status, class, ability and/or sexuality. To do as Cobb suggests, especially paying particular attention to the discriminatory –isms that divide us as the people of God, requires an awareness of our race, class, sexuality, citizenship, physical/mental ability, religious privilege and sensitivity to and compassion for theologies of exclusion toward those who do not share our same or similar social location. We must be cognizant too of when we move between our varied and sometime competing identities to ensure that we "the oppressed" by virtue of race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, religion, class, physical/mental ability do not become the hegemonic "oppressor" by virtue of race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, religion, class and physical/mental ability.

The model of Christian education to be proposed herein is intended to address the issues identified as problematic tendencies for those in the academy preparing for ordained ministry and for those in the church holding leadership position charged with standing before the people of God proclaiming the word of God. As such the model proposed herein will address the lack of racial awareness in Christian thought and praxis historically and presently, and will raise racial-awareness/racial-consciousness

particularly as it relates to the theological anthropology (i.e. humanity) of black people. The model, moreover, is intended to engage the socio-political circumstances past and present, to teach critical assessment techniques of the tradition, to encourage student autonomy and also to address the lack of understanding of the origin and evolution of the Christian faith and its role in perpetuating a human divide.

<center>**Chapter Two**</center>

<center>**The Problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – The Color Line**</center>

**The Revolution Will Not Be Televised**

Despite the 1950s Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the passage of  civil rights legislation in the 1960s ending government-sanctioned racial discrimination and ushering in what some have called the colorblind society where race isn't seen, and despite the election and re-election of this nation's first black president ushering in what some have called the post-racial state where race doesn't matter, vestiges of our racially segregated and overtly racist  past (when oppression of and discrimination against black bodies were socially accepted, theologically sanctioned/justified, scientifically rationalized, economically profitable, politically supported and constitutionally upheld) remain operative throughout the country. Or more simply stated – the racist, white supremacist ideology and hegemonic domination that made U.S. chattel slavery both possible and palatable still permeates all aspects of American society. In fact, by every social indicator, racism continues to blight the lives of people of color, including holders of high-echelon jobs.[68]

For many Americans,  particularly for many white Americans, the various racialized/race-based/racist assertions created long ago to justify the economically profitable enslavement and trade of black bodies and exploitation of black labor, still inform contemporary beliefs about and interactions with blacks, and have become almost invisible, even normative. This blind spot maintains the racially unequal status quo and yields the dangerous, political rhetoric of the color-blind society and the post-racial

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[68]Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction.* Second Edition (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 11.

statesman (or stateswoman) who would have us believe that racism, particularly anti-black racism, has come to an end, racial justice has been achieved, and the ever vigilant fight for racial equality is no longer needed. Who can forget this controversial December 1, 2013 tweet from the Republican National Committee (RNC), *"Today we remember Rosa Parks"[69] bold stand and her role in ending racism"*?

Conservative, Tea Party "take-my-county-back" rhetoric suggests that this GOP assessment is shared by many, but this tweet is simply not a true statement. Mrs. Parks' single, defiant, counter-hegemonic act of civil disobedience in refusing to give up her seat in the colored section of the bus to a white man according to the law of the land in the south in 1955 did not end 300+ years of racist beliefs and practices. It did, however, spark a revolution in the nation and placed on the international stage what sociologist W.E.B. DuBois called the problem of the twentieth century – the problem of the color-line.[70]

That revolution was successful in securing desegregation in public facilities, anti-discrimination policies in education, employment and housing, and black voting rights. It did not, however, change long held racist assertions about black people. Nor did it instantaneously end institutionalized racism that was America. Rather, pre-civil rights racism (i.e. Jim Crow) became post-civil rights racism (i.e. color-blind, post-racial). Thus, the problem of the twenty-first century remained the problem of the color-line.[71]

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[69] Rosa Parks was the black seamstress who, on December 1, 1955, refused to give up her seat in the colored section of the bus to a white male. Her refusal led to her arrest and to the Montgomery Bus Boycott that lasted a little over a year and ended with the Supreme Court declaring segregation in public accommodations was unconstitutional.

[70] W. E. B. DuBois, *On Sociology and the Black Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 281.

[71] Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books A Division of Random House, Inc., 2001), xiv.

Moreover, the statistically significant disparities between blacks and whites in health, wealth, mortality, incarceration, education, employment, racial profiling, police brutality and micro-aggression experiences of blacks demonstrate, reveal, show that race is seen and that race does matter. Race, however, need not become the problem of the twenty-second century.

Race is not declining as a structuring principle in U.S. society.[72] In fact, race still casts a long, formidable, and intricate shadow on U.S. society.[73] To illuminate the current racial reality in this country, in this chapter, I discuss the socio-political and theological development of race and racism that has yielded a theological anthropology that today still garners either white privilege or black disposability. I include a discussion on Critical Race Theory (CRT), a methodology for analyzing race/power dynamics, its insights and its evolving role in living with, resisting and challenging racism in our time and how it might be and why it must be incorporated into Christian religious education in the church and in the academy. Throughout, I share stories of micro-aggressions (i.e. implicit and explicit expressions of racism) and offer some theological implications of the much needed conversation between race and religion. I conclude with a brief discussion of "white normativity" in Christian education and also a brief history of Christian education to demonstrate that there have been major movements within the discipline and to suggest that it is time for another movement with Christian Education that is reflective of the insights of CRT.

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[72] Zeus Leonardo, *Race Frameworks A Multidimensional Theory of Racism and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 148.

[73] James A. Banks, "Series Forward." In *Race Frameworks A Multidimensional Theory of Racism and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), ix.

**From People to Property**

According to university history professor, Winthrop Jordan, the initial contact between the Europeans and the Africans did not immediately generate a racial prejudice nor immediately result in a colonial state. With regard to the English, in particular, Jordan says, "Initially English contact with Africans did not take place primarily in a context which prejudged the Negro as a slave."[74] At that time (around 1550 A.D.), however, the English had no immediate need for slave labor.

Of course the color of the African did not go unnoticed by the English. In fact, Jordan says, "For Englishmen, the most arresting characteristic of the newly discovered African was his skin color."[75] Jordan admits, "From the first, Englishmen tended to set Africans over against themselves, to stress what they conceived to be radically contrasting qualities of color, religion, and style of life, as well as animality and a peculiarly potent sexuality."[76] By comparison to English life and culture, "Negroes seemed the very picture of perverse negation."[77] Africans, thereby, became their (English) polar opposite – black, heathenistic, uncivilized, inhuman, animalistic, without law and without sexual restraint.

The English compared the Africans to apes and thereby assumed them to be more beast-like than human. Some suggested, "Negroes had sprung from the generation of ape-

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[74] Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden. Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 4.

[75] Jordan, 4.

[76] Jordan, 25.

[77] Jordan, 7.

kind or that apes were themselves the offspring of Negroes."[78] While others, "frequently described the Africans as brutish, bestial or beastly."[79] The result of these comparisons – the justified enslavement of Africans who were treated more like animals rather than like human beings. The Africans, now collectively renamed Negroes, were handled in the same manner as men in England handled beasts – by herding, examining and buying them as they did any other animal.[80] In other words, people formerly with tribal and familial affiliations, customs and traditions were captured, held for up to three months before being put aboard a ship as cargo bound for the Americas, where they lay chained to their fellow man or woman, laying also in their own and possibly another's bodily waste, and some months later got off the ship cleaned up/greased up, placed on an auction block, inspected, purchased, renamed individually Mary, Sally, George or John, for example, and thereafter to be known as someone's property.

**Race Is, Race Isn't**

Somehow, race has come to be seen as the natural biological grouping of human beings.[81] Race is, thus, defined by a group of individuals who share a common gene pool and who display certain biological traits (i.e. skin color, eye shape, hair texture). [82] The aforementioned explanations offer a social definition or social description of race. Black liberation theologian, Dwight Hopkins, however, offers several other theories of race, summarized as follows:

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[78] Jordan, 16.

[79] Jordan, 14.

[80] Jordan, 5.

[81] Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 63.

[82] Jordan, xi.

- The *rational* theory of race assumes that all human beings inherently harbor an intellectual faculty capable of sorting out differences via reason,

- The *psychological* theory of race says that whites create a world reflective of their inner fantasies of themselves and of others in order to meet their psychic needs,

- The *political* theory of race assumes that whites are best suited to govern and thus creates a racial contract of sorts that ensures their political power,

- The *economic* theory of race notes the connection between the monopolization of wealth and the disproportionate possession of income on the part of white citizens,

- The *geographical* theory suggests that racial differences, namely the melanin quotient, reflect the climate of the particular geography (i.e. whites come from cold climates, blacks from warmer climates),

- The *biblical* theory uses the so-called curse of Ham to justify ill treatment and enslavement of blacks.[83]

In addition, Hopkins notes one other theory of race, which is this – there is but one race – human. In other words, mankind is a single biological species.[84] In fact, modern science has proven that there is but one race of people – the human race. There is substantial evidence stemming from the research of archaeologists, geneticists,

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[83] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human. Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 120-123.

[84] Jordan, xi.

anthropologists, biologists, geologists, philologists and paleontologists to suggest that this one race of humans *(homo sapiens)* actually originated in Africa.[85]

Despite the scientific evidence suggesting that there is but one race (human), the modern concept of race as biological, and as inherently reflective of abilities, attitudes, aesthetics and humanity/human worth, and more specifically, as reflective of white superiority/black inferiority still prevail in the U.S. According to attorney and criminal justice advocate, Jacqueline Battalora, the term race suggests biology because it is derived from a breeding line or stock of animals whose qualities are inheritable genetically.[86] During U.S. chattel slavery black bodies were traded, bred, bought and sold just as livestock was traded, bred, bought and sold. Battalora's observation, therefore, suggests that white hegemonic elites may have borrowed a concept from the breeding of livestock to justify the claim that racial differences are inherent.

**Because I Said So**

"The legal definition of race," according to attorney Cheryl Harris, "was the objective test propounded by racist theorists of the day who described race to be immutable, scientific, biologically determined – an unsullied fact of the blood rather than a volatile and violently imposed regime of racial hierarchy."[87] Racial theorists from the eighteenth-century defended the notion that racial differences were inherent and

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[85] Hopkins, 123.

[86] Jacqueline Battalora, *Birth of a White Nation The Invention of White People and Its Relevance Today* (Houston: Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co., 2013), xix.

[87] Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property." In *Critical Race Theory. The Key Writings that Formed the Movement* ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas (New York: The New Press, 1995), 284.

unchangeable.[88] Therefore, to justify the trading and enslavement of black bodies, white men began to assert innate white superiority/black inferiority across a broad spectrum of abilities, attitudes, aesthetics and human worth. "Enlightened" philosophers and theologians from other parts of Europe and the developing U.S. began to make unscientific statements supporting the pejorative claims of the English.

Philosopher David Hume (1711-1776), for example, unashamedly declared in his essay, "*Of National Characters*, "I am apt to suspect that Negroes and all other species of men to be naturally inferior to whites." Similarly, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), political philosopher and third president of the U.S. asserts black intellectual inferiority to whites claiming, "In memory they [Negroes] are equal to whites; in reason much inferior…and in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous."[89] Jefferson adds, "But never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture."[90] For German philosopher Georg Hegel (1770-1831), the Negro exhibited the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state.[91] "Blacks were pronounced less beautiful than whites."[92] Physiologist, Johann Freidrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), first introduced the term Caucasian, and hailed Caucasians as the most beautiful race of all time for no other

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[88] Eddie Glaude Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 128.

[89] Jordan, 171.

[90] T. Jefferson, "Laws, from Notes on the State of Virginia." In *Race and the Enlightenment. A Reader* ed. E. C. Eze (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 99.

[91] Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1991), 93.

[92] Jordan, 181.

reason than by their color, hair, face and skull.[93] Moreover, not only was the Negro made to be intellectually inferior, says Jordan, but the Negro was made to be ugly also by reason of his color and also his horrid Curles [sic] and disfigured lips and nose.[94]

According to Franz Fanon, Afro-French psychiatrist, "All forms of exploitation seek the source of their necessity in some edict of a Biblical nature."[95] Proponents of U.S. chattel slavery, of course, did the same. White ministers preached that blacks were born to serve others because we were the descendants of Ham, the youngest son of Noah, who looked upon Noah's drunken nakedness after the great flood and was consequently cursed to serve his brothers, Shem (the presumed progenitor of Europeans) and Japheth (the presumed progenitor of the Asiatic people) (Genesis 9:20-27). In fact, enslaved blacks were taught that service to whites was mandated by God, such indoctrination came through catechisms that taught God and the white man were the same.[96] However, the Genesis text to which they appeal does not curse Ham, but rather reads, "Cursed be Canaan" (Genesis 9:25). Canaan was a son of Ham. Canaan's descendants, the Canaanites, were the inhabitants of the land the Israelites would claim God promised to them. Biblically, this particular story served to justify a righteous land grab from the "pagan" or "othered" persons of scripture, but in the antebellum South, this Genesis text served to theologically justify the enslavement and trade of black bodies as god-ordained.

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[93] Hopkins, 145.

[94] Jordan, 6.

[95] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 88.

[96] Jacquelyn Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood." In *A Troubling in My Soul. Womanist Perspectives On Evil and Suffering* ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 211.

**Colored and Othered**

On sight, the people of the Dark Continent were "colored" and "othered." They, who once called themselves Asante, Akan, Aku, Ewe, Fula, Mandingo, Yoruba, or any number of the tribes of the continent and who once called themselves mother, father, son, daughter, sister, brother, sister-of-my-father, brother-of-my-mother, were now called inhuman, apes, ape-like, heathen, uncivilized, wench, cursed, sexually unrestrained, Negroes, Niggers, and slaves. Moreover, these tribal people who had a language, a culture, a social structure, religious beliefs and practices, dietary habits, educational customs, rites of passage, a family unit, etc. when encountered by the English were no longer human, but were now property, branded, inspected, bought, traded, sold, reproduced, and bred for capitalistic gain like any farm animal.

Where once the Akan or the Ebu walked where they chose, came and went as they pleased; they now had their place determined for them. Now some white man or some white woman determine where this "Negro" would be placed, in the house or in the field, much like they would determine the placement of a vase, a chair, a picture or a glass of sweet tea. These people of African descent with familial affiliations, tribal identities and customs that had served them well for generations were now a means to an end, a means of wealth building both for individual slave-holding families, and a means of wealth building of the nation for a capitalistic economy, and thus a means of colonial expansion and eventual world domination. In fact, according to James and Lois Horton,

> At least twelve generations of black people created wealth for slaveholders . . .The slave trade and the products created by the slaves' labor particularly cotton, provided the basis for America's wealth as a nation, underwriting the country's

industrial revolution and enabling it to project its power into the rest of the world.[97]

Blacks were capital, bought, sold, and traded. Black women became reproducers of capital. In fact, slaveholders preferred to breed black women with white men because mulattoes frequently brought a higher price on the market and were easier to sell.[98] In other words, blacks were no longer people, but product, at least from the hegemonic perspective.

Thus, in the white imagination, since blacks were not human, they could not reflect the *Imago Dei* of Genesis 1:26-28. For the oppressors, the term human being refers only to their white selves, other people are things.[99] For whites then, only black bodies existed, only black capital existed, only black unpaid laborers existed, only black animals existed, only black apes and ape-like creatures existed, only god-ordained servants existed. Oddly, white men had no problem having sexual intercourse with these so-called ape-like black creatures, and yet they were never charged with the sin of bestiality, which suggests to me, they did understand blacks to be human. If, in fact, there was no difference in their minds between cattle and black bodies, then why not engage in sexual relations with their real cattle to increase their cow livestock. This "othering" was merely a ruse to dehumanize black bodies for capitalistic gain.

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[97] James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and the Making of America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

[98] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, *Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 40.

[99] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 57.

**Got Good Religion+**

The imperialistically minded had decided that dark skin was an unquestionable mark of inferiority.[100] However, those with a darker hue were not necessarily of the same opinion as the imperialistically minded. The sons and daughters of Africa resisted this imperialistic doctrine by whatever means they could – through folklore, through song, through work slowdowns, through most notably what became known as the invisible institution, where black people exercised a different theological conviction, one where they were not inferior, nor unintelligent, nor born to be a slave.

According to professor of history of Christianity, Larry Murphy, "imported Africans retained significant aspects of their traditional religious life."[101] Therefore, down in hush harbors, down by the riverside away from the prying eye of rich white owners and poor white overseers, in what has become known as the invisible institution, the enslaved people of African descent gathered to worship and to pray and to praise their God in ways they could not do when the white master/overseer stood watch. In these secret gatherings, enslaved black people interpreted Christianity according to their experience, applying the stories and symbols of the Bible to make sense out of their own lives.[102] For example, Exodus for them proved that slavery was against God's will.[103] Moreover, in the invisible institution, enslaved black people affirmed their own black

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[100] Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ (*Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 10.

[101] Larry Murphy, "Piety and Liberation: A Historical Exploration of African American Religion and Social Justice." In *Blow the Trumpet in Zion. Global Vision and Action for the 21st-Century Black Church* ed. Iva E. Carruthers, Frederick D. Haynes III and Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 35.

[102] Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land – A Religious History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford Press, 2001), 43.

[103] Raboteau, 44.

personhood in resistance to, and in defiance of the catechism they had been forced to say where slavery was their lot in this life and where God and the white man were one. In fact, according to Albert Raboteau, Princeton University Professor of Religion,

> The slaves created services that resembled the spirit-empowered ceremonies of their African ancestors . . . The emotional ecstasy of the slaves' worship services conveyed their belief that the whole person – body as well as spirit – made God present and so the human person became an image of God. By encouraging them to believe the biblical doctrine that everyone was created in the image of God, worship helped Christian slaves to fight off slavery's terrible power to depersonalize its victims.[104]

Here then, contrary to the white man's hubris, black people did not believe that they were created to be a slave, a servant of whites all the days of their lives. Instead, they believed that they were created to reflect the *Imago Dei* of their invisible God, to worship and to praise this God who strengthened them in body and in mind enabling them to endure the harsh brutality of slave life. They believed in this God who gave them a spirit of resistance, and this God who gave them hope for liberation from bondage someday, if not for themselves, then for their children, or for their children's children. Although religion had made them the sons of Ham, cursed to be hewers of wood and drawers of water in perpetual expiation of an alleged ancestral indiscretion, it was also religion that gave them the stamina to survive and occasionally to resist, and the will to pursue their liberation.[105]

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[104] Raboteau, 45.

[105] C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion and the Continuing American Dilemma.* Revised Edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), xxiv-xxv.

**For Whites Only**

"Slave traders and owners invented race to justify slavery."[106] Therefore, white/whiteness as a racial identity was built upon the idea of the wealthy, free, Christian Englishman. In fact, the category was reserved for English landowners; and even then, only to English Protestants.[107] Of necessity, in the years following a poor people's uprising, a shift occurred in who was designated white, with all the theo-political rights and socio-economic privileges thereof. Eventually being white encompassed formerly excluded persons of European descent, meaning the poor and the landless.

Bacon's Rebellion, led by white male, Nathaniel Bacon (1647-1676), occurred in Virginia in 1676. In this uprising of poor people, European and African laborers both bond and free united in a fight against unpaid labor, the plantation elite and those who were governing the colony.[108] The rebels expressed disdain for the way they were being ruled and for the way elites grew their wealth. In addition, the rebels called for a redistribution of some of the ill-gotten wealth in the colony.[109]

Bacon's Rebellion posed a threat to hegemonic economic interests as it represented the unification of persons from the same class, poor people from African and from European descent who were either slave or free, both of whom were oppressed and disenfranchised from the U.S. economic and political process united in purpose to usurp a capitalist structure from which they did not benefit, and from which they both were exploited. The British hegemony feared this combined force of poor persons working

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[106] Karen Teel, *Racism and the Image of God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 17.

[107] Rosemary R. Ruether, Ed. *Gender, Ethnicity and Religion. Views from the Other Side* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), xi.

[108] Battalora, 18.

[109] Battalora, 18-19.

together. However, the elite white planters were torn between the need to secure their unstable labor force and the need to appease non-land owning non-colored men with guns, upon whom they depended for military strength, tax revenues and the maintenance of social order.[110] Recognizing the dangers of an alliance between all poor people, British elites eventually extended the racial designation "white" to poor people of European descent, which provided a buffer group that to this day still protects the interests of the wealthy white elites of this nation often sacrificing their own best interest, and without a doubt sacrificing the best interest of poor people-of-color.

The "white" identification became the birthright of Anglos, and set them apart from African bond laborers as well as enlisted Europeans across class lines as active or passive supporters of capitalist agriculture based on chattel bond labor.[111] This label "white" became a characteristic attribute of a free person, a shield from the exclusion of civil liberties, and a rallying point for solidarity against anything black. Whereas Negro or black racial identity marked who was subject to enslavement, white racial identity marked who was free. Whiteness then became the quintessential property of personhood.[112]

Whiteness as a property right was derived from the white supremacist thinking that gave rise to group identity predicated upon the racial subordination of the Other.[113] That "other," of course, was blackness. Moreover, because the system of slavery was

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[110] Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs. Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Williamsburg: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 185.

[111] Battalora, 20.

[112] Harris, 281.

[113] Harris, 288.

contingent upon and conflated with racial identity, it became crucial to be white, to be identified as white and to have the property of being white; whiteness then was the character, the attribute, the property of free human beings.[114] As such, whites need blacks in order to be white, to be superior, and to be human.

This newly extended and newly embraced label did not change the financial status of the poor, rebelling whites. However, in the absence of any other material possession, the designation "white" became a property right that, according to Cheryl Harris, conferred tangible and economically valuable benefits to those who met the strict standard of proof.[115] The designation, therefore, created a false alliance between the rich and the poor of European descent that amounted to nothing more at the time than the European-manufactured concern over a black presence in the land, a European-shared authority over black bodies, and an enhanced self-worth found in not being black. Moreover, to be determined as white was reflective of those who were considered deserving of theo-political rights and socio-economic privileges denied to those determined to be nonwhite or colored. That false alliance, sense of comradery and kinship between poor whites and rich whites continues to this day as evidence by poor whites' allegiance to a political party whose platform is not supportive of the needs and interests of the poor – black or white. Father and founder of Critical Race Theory and the first tenured black professor at Harvard Law School, Derrick Bell, says:

> Shocking! Conservative Politicians are able to gain and hold even the highest office despite their failure to address seriously any of these issues (i.e. widening income gap, mediocre education, inadequate housing, inaccessible healthcare, environmental pollution). They rely instead on the time-tested formula of getting needy whites to identify on the basis of their shared skin color, and suggest with little or no subtlety that

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[114] Harris, 279.

[115] Harris, 280.

white people must stand together against the Willie Hortons, or against racial quotas, or against affirmative action. The code words differ. The message is the same. Whites rally on the basis of racial pride and patriotism to accept their often lowly lot in life and are encouraged to vent their frustration by opposing any serious advancement by blacks. Crucial to this situation is the unstated understanding by the mass of whites that they will accept large disparities in economic opportunity in respect to other whites as long as they have priority over blacks and other people of color.[116]

Low-income whites then and now have little in common with white hegemonic elites other than being of European descent, having white skin and enjoying the mental and material benefits white skin privilege brings such as the implied Social Contract that is by/for/between/about whites only, higher ranking in the social order, the presumption of goodwill and good intent, easier access to housing, education and employment, a theological anthropology such that loss of white life is a tragedy. This new human category nonetheless became the mechanism by which low-income Europeans, some of them former indentured servants were made relatable to British elites, both now identifying as "white" and both now having shared authority over enslaved black bodies. White rendered inclusion within a privileged group to an element of phenotype (i.e. skin color) that was easily recognizable and easily distinguishable from darker skin tones.

Rights were for those who had the capacity to exercise them and that capacity was denoted by white racial identity.[117] Theologically speaking, rights were for those whose theological anthropology designated them as human. Those called "Negro" were not included in that human designation then, nor does it seem blacks are included in that number even today. The legacy of U.S. chattel slavery, namely the racial mythology (white humanity/black inhuman), continues still. According to Bell, the cost of racial

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[116] Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 9.

[117] Harris, 286.

discrimination is levied against us all, but blacks feel the burden and strive to remove it whereas too many whites have felt that it was in their interests to resist those freedom efforts."[118]

**Makes Me Wanna Holler**

The unsubstantiated racialized/race-based/racist claims of the slave holding past continue to inform contemporary U.S. in that these claims continue to provide positive life-affirming stereotyping of white cultural identity as privileged, as materially substantive, as of good character and good will, as somehow better than all others, a standard bearer, and worthy of emulation by nonwhites. In the 21st century, whites are imaged as more intelligent, more beautiful, human, and humane, of good unbiased objective non-prejudicial character and the divinely ordained keepers of the social order. Whites become offended, even outraged when they are not perceived as self-mythologized. Remember the following?

In July 2009, Harvard professor and black male, Henry Louis Gates Jr. was arrested at his own home by a white police officer who was responding to a call of a break-in. When asked to comment on this event, President Obama admitted that Gates was a friend, that he may be a little biased, and that he was not there, so could not be certain. Obama also commented on the long history of racial profiling in this country. Finally, he said, "Cambridge police *acted stupidly* in arresting somebody when there was already proof that they were in their own home."[119] The comment sparked white outrage and the white-controlled media fanned the flames, misreporting the president's statement

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[118] Derrick A. Bell, Jr., "Property Rights in Whiteness." In *Critical Race Theory the Cutting Edge* Third Edition ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 69.

[119] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/07/22/obama-on-skip-gates-arres_n_243250.html

as calling the cop stupid and prompting then White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs to say, "The president was not calling the officer stupid."[120] Even though the president referred specifically to the cop's behavior, "acted stupidly," white America, it would seem by the press secretary's response, did not hear the president's remarks as distinguishing between the cop's behavior and the cop as person. Rather, given the outrage, they heard the black president's words as assassinating the character, the personhood, the intelligence, the integrity, the authority of the white police officer, and more importantly, questioning/challenging/threatening the mythology of whites and whiteness as intelligent, not stupid, and as perfect, as always right, as keepers of the peace, as self-appointed maintainers of the social order.

Blacks, on the other hand, are imaged as the perverse as opposite of whites. As such, blacks are routinely portrayed in pejorative stereotypical life-negating ways. Blacks are still presumed to be unintelligent, unattractive, inhuman (or superhuman), criminal, sexually promiscuous, and still the god-ordained servants of all. As recently as September 18, 2014, for example, a New York Times writer described the 49-year-old Oscar Nominee, Viola Davis, the black actor who plays lawyer and professor Annalise Keating on the ABC hit drama *How to Get Away with Murder,* "as sexual and even sexy, in a slightly menacing way. . .the actress doesn't look at all like the typical star of a network drama [she] is older, darker-skinned and less classically beautiful."[121] Alessandra Stanley, the writer of this New York Times article manages to hit nearly every stereotypic reference to black female bodies, less classically beautiful (i.e. ugly),

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[120] http://www.cbsnews.com/news/cambridge-cops-panel-to-review-gates-case/

[121]     http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/arts/television/viola-davis-plays-shonda-rhimess-latest-tough-heroine.html?_r=0

darker-skinned (i.e. nonwhite), sexual, sexy in a menacing way (i.e. threatening, sexual temptress). This description should cause the racially-aware person to question why Stanley feels comfortable making reference to Davis' body and speaking about her in sexual language rather than speaking to her acting skills. One wonders too if she would have mentioned the skin-color of a white actor or made sexually suggestive comments of a white female Oscar nominee in a new TV show. This review is a reminder that blacks are still viewed much as we were during the time of U.S. chattel slavery, as something other than people reflecting the *Imago Dei*.

Oddly, there is reward and punishment associated with this system of institutionalized racism. Consider the following. Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, Mo'Nique, Hattie McDaniel and Octavia Spencer are just a few black actors who have won Oscars. But they won Hollywood's highest honor for portraying a corrupt cop/slave, a chauffeur, a welfare queen, mammy and a maid, respectively. In other words, they have won Oscars for playing stereotypic black roles. This is not a critique of their acting skills, but an observation of the racism institutionalized in Hollywood and in the media.

Black people and black cultural artifacts are ghettoized, made scary and unacceptable in polite society, suggesting a need to assimilate and/or to engage in the politics of respectability, translated – be more like white folk or at the very least don't make white folk uncomfortable. The politics of respectability, for example, emphasized black personal restraint, self-improvement and the 'protestant work ethic.'[122] The intent of this racial uplift strategy was to improve race relations with whites in this country through a change in black behavior, particularly in public places, intended to make whites

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[122] The protestant work ethic is a product of the Protestant Reformation that claimed hard work leads to success, not to salvation as had been claimed previously by Catholicism.

feel comfortable or more at ease in the presence of blacks. Advocates of this political strategy asked blacks to embrace temperance, to work hard, and to assume a general sense of self-regulation and self-improvement.[123] According to Evelyn Higginbotham, "This politic stressed the reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations."[124] Black church women, adds Higginbotham, "perceived respectability to be the first step in their communication with white America."[125]

At the other extreme, black people and black cultural artifacts are coopted for financial gain by the likes of white rappers Vanilla Ice, Eminem and Iggy Azalea.[126] This type of cultural borrowing allows non-black folk to try on black culture without the consequences of being black in a society conditioned to devalue and to dismiss blackness.[127]

These media portrayals and characterizations of whites and blacks are intentional, inform white supremacist thought and justify white supremacist behavior. In fact, according to black feminist scholar and cultural critic, bell hooks, there is a direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of

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[123] Glaude, 118.

[124] Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 187.

[125] Higginbotham, 196.

[126] Vanilla Ice, Eminem and Iggy Azalea are white rap artists. Rap/Hip-Hop is a genre of musical expression created by black artists, born of black pain and giving political and social commentary on black life in America.

[127] http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/14/white-people-declared-bae-over-black-people-can-use-it?CMP=share_btn_fb

race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation and overall domination of all black people.[128]   In fact, she says that white supremacists, from slavery on, have recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination.[129] Sadly, she also notes that for blacks, there has been little change in the area of representation.[130] The aforementioned stories buttress her claims. However, hooks challenges us to open any magazine or book, turn on any television set, watch any film or look at photographs in public spaces and see therein images of black people that reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy.[131]

Of course to do so is to find truth in her assessment not only of black images that reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy, but also images of white people that reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy. I yet maintain it was the white racial mythology that felt challenged by the president in 2009 in regards to the Louis Gates matter. Still hooks' observation bears up under even a cursory examination of historical and contemporary media imaging and personal experiences of black people. Historical imaging of blacks exaggerated the size of our lips and our hips and frequently juxtaposed blacks alongside apes and ape-like images and/or alongside coded language. Contemporary imaging continues this offensive practice. Consider the following incident that I experienced just last year, 2014.

A former high school classmate, a friend, a preacher's daughter, and a white female reposted a Twitter picture of LeBron James being helped off the court during

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[128] bell hooks, *Black Looks*. *Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 2.

[129] hooks, *Black Looks*, 2.

[130] hooks, *Black Looks*, 3.

[131] hooks, *Black Looks*. 1.

Game 1 of the 2014 NBA Championship Finals. Next to his photo was a picture of a white man in a military uniform, a soldier who had been shot in the neck. I no longer have access to the exact wording of the caption under the photo, but I recall reference to the word "worth" because my initial response to her posting was, "do you have a problem with Peyton Manning's salary?" She responded, "This is not about race; you know I'm not racist, this is about money." It is noteworthy that she read my question about Manning's salary as commenting on race. Still it provided me an opportunity to say, "If it were just about money, then why not choose someone who makes a lot more money than LeBron James like a higher paid athlete (i.e. Peyton Manning) or some Hollywood mogul (Clint Eastwood) or a CEO of a major corporation (Rupert Murdoch/Donald Trump) or radio/TV personality (Rush Limbaugh/Sean Hannity), who make far more money than James to make a point about the financial disparity between military personnel, those soldiers who serve and protect the country and the rich who enjoy that military protection. I then went on to explain to her that the underlying meaning conveyed by that picture and corresponding caption was that the white man on the right has more worth and value than the black man on the left. I then reminded her of a picture she once posted of Michelle Obama and a baboon wearing the same dress that also had racist implications. To which she said, "I just repost things I find on other sites. I deleted it once you pointed that out to me." Apparently my final remark to her was, "are you honestly telling me that I had to point out the racist nature of having a baboon juxtaposed to a black first lady both wearing the same dress for you to notice the racist nature of that photo?" Her response was to unfriend me as a Facebook friend.

It would seem that black representation has changed little since the English first arrived on the African shore. Blacks are still characterized as ape-like creatures as the photo that my white high school classmate and former friend posted on Facebook and black males are still characterized as an intimidating or a threatening presence, which has justified the fatal shooting of countless unarmed black males young and old.[132]

According to multiple news agencies including *Salon*, Darren Wilson, the Ferguson, MO police officer who shot and killed unarmed 18-year-old black male, Michael Brown, said in his grand jury testimony, "I felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan."[133] Wilson is reportedly 6'4" 210 pounds; Michael Brown was 6'4" and 290 pounds.[134] Leah Gunning-Francis, Associate Dean of Contextual Education and Assistant Professor of Christian Education at Eden Seminary in St. Louis, MO questions Wilson's characterization saying, "At best, it is an odd description for a 6'4" policeman to make about another 6'4" person. "At worst, it is the resurgence of the 'magical negro' or 'giant Negro' stereotype that has pervaded the imaging of black men since the antebellum era."[135] Gunning-Francis cites a recent study that explored some of the ways in which the

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[132] In 1955, 14 year old Emmet Till was kidnapped, beaten and shot in rural Mississippi. In 1999, an unarmed West African immigrant, Amadou Diallo, was shot 41 times by NY police.  In 2013, Trayvon Martin, an unarmed FL youth, was admittedly followed and shot by neighborhood watch commander George Zimmerman. All shooters were acquitted. White Ferguson police officer admittedly shot and killed an unarmed teenager, 18 year old Michael Brown, the grand jury does not issue an indictment for his arrest despite testimony saying the teenager lifted his arm in position of surrender. A police officer in New York City uses an illegal choke hold, again on an unarmed black male, and the grand jury does votes to NOT indict.

[133] Joanna Rothkopf, *Darren Wilson's Testimony Released: "I felt like a 5-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan."* www.salon.com. November 25, 2014.

[134] Piers Morgan, This farce in Ferguson: Darren Wilson is the 1st 6ft 4in, 210lb five-year-old in history. Mailonline. November 25, 2014.

[135]http://wabashcenter.typepad.com/antiracism_pedagogy/2014/12/a-boy-a-wrestler-and-the-racialized-imagination.html

stereotype of the physically superhuman black male is still alive and well today.  She

reports that in *A Superhumanization Bias in Whites' Perceptions of Blacks*, the authors

relay their findings of white peoples' attribution of superhuman mental (not intellectual)

and physical qualities to black people, which is important because it reinforces the

narrative that black men, in particular, have superhuman strength and a very high

tolerance for pain.[136] This perception of black people is presumably what justifies stop

and frisk, excessive force, outright police brutality when dealing with black males and no

grand jury indictment when white police encounters result in the death of unarmed black

men. Even our black children are not allowed to be children, to play kid games, to make

immature and ill-advised teenage decisions, to flex adolescent muscles and to learn

thereby. Instead, they are gunned down for playing with a toy gun (12-year old Tamir

Rice, Cleveland, OH), for playing loud music (17-year old Jordan Davis, Jacksonville,

FL), and for not giving account of themselves to just anyone who asks, (17-year old,

Trayvon Martin, Sanford, FL). Yet when white college-aged males behave badly, they

make horrible mistakes and ask our forgiveness as was the case of some members of

Oklahoma University Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity who were caught on camera

chanting "There will never be a ni**** SAE. You can hang him from a tree, but he can

never sign with me. There will never be a ni****SAE."[137] White males, moreover, make

up 30% of the U.S. population, but 70% of mass shooters.[138] Yet it is the black male who

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[136]http://wabashcenter.typepad.com/antiracism_pedagogy/2014/12/a-boy-a-wrestler-and-the-racialized-imagination.html

[137]http://thescoopblog.dallasnews.com/2015/03/jesuit-dallas-president-says-graduate-appears-to-be-leading-racist-chant-in-ou-sae-video.html/

[138] Chauncey DeVega, *White Privilege Kills: Pennsylvania Mass Shooter Rockne Is a White Male Domestic Terrorist.* AlterNet, August 7, 2013.

is racially profiled, frequently stopped, even killed merely for driving, walking, sitting, standing or breathing/not breathing while being arrested while black.

**The Black Woman's Burden**

Black females also have frequent racist/micro-aggression experiences, but we have micro-aggression experiences with sexism to contend with as well. We fair no better than our black brothers where race is concerned, but must bear the burden of physical rape, sexist assaults on our personhood, physical appearance, looks, body, character, intelligence, integrity, *Imago Dei* as well. Rape was a common method of torture used by white slavers to subdue recalcitrant black women.[139] Black women continue to be violated in very public ways for the same ill intent.

In 2009, the following statement appeared on the freerepublic.com website about then *11-year* old Malia Obama: "looks like a typical street whore;" and "wonder when she will have her first abortion."[140] Supporters of this author's comment and/or his right to post something so disrespectful and so distasteful claim protection under the First Amendment. However, the First Amendment says that congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech or freedom of the press. The Amendment does not grant the right to say anything you please, anyway you please, about anyone you please.

More recently, the following was written about both Obama presidential daughters:

> Dear Sasha and Malia, I get you're both in those awful teen years, but you're a part of the First Family, try showing a little class. At least respect the part you play. Then again your mother and father don't respect their positions very much, or the nation for that matter, so I'm guessing you're coming up a little short in the

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[139] hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 18.

[140] http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news

'good role model' department. Nevertheless, stretch yourself. Rise to the occasion. Act like being in the White House matters to you. Dress like you deserve respect, not a spot at a bar. And certainly don't make faces during televised public events.[141]

The above was written on Facebook in 2014 by a white female, Elizabeth Lauten, then Communications Director for U.S. Congressional Representative Stephen Fincher (R). She has deleted the post, issued an apology for her tasteless and tactless remarks, and has resigned (or been forced to resign) from her position, but has left a question unanswered – what compelled this adult white woman to speak about two young black girls and their Harvard educated, high-profile black parents in such a disrespectful and public way? My speculation is – internalized white supremacy, racialized/race-based/racist beliefs and presumptions have given her the theo-political right, the socio-economic privilege, the sense of entitlement by virtue of her white skin color whereby she can determine who belongs where, what they should wear, and how they should behave while there. In the company of my "sistahs," Lauten would jokingly be referred to as Miss Ann.[142]

Mellody Hobson, a black female, is the President of Ariel Investments, an investment firm with $10 billion in assets. She is the wife of George Lucas of Star Wars fame. In 2006, when she and then Democratic Tennessee congressman Harold Ford arrived for a fundraising event, they announced their arrival to the receptionist who, in turn, ushered them into a back room and then asked them, "Where are your uniforms?"[143]

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[141] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/01/elizabeth-lauten-resigns_n_6247892.html

[142] Miss Ann looks for a cook, in Dudley Randall's poem, Booker T. and W.E.B., a fictional debate between black scholars Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois over the merits of higher education for black people.

[143] http://blog.ted.com/2014/03/20/be-color-brave-not-color-blind-mellody-hobson-at-ted2014/

These two people, of considerable wealth, fame and political stature were assumed to be the hired help, the kitchen staff, the servers at the lunchtime event rather than participants, invited guests and/or keynote speakers. That presumption was informed, no doubt, by their black skin. That receptionist looked at them through a particular lens, a white supremacist lens, and saw them in a particular place (i.e. beneath her), and in the position of servers.

According to womanist ethicist, Emilie Townes, five fictitious figures or characterizations are routinely ascribed to black women. These are: Aunt Jemima/Mammy (the overweight, asexual black woman who cares for the white children), Sapphire (the angry emasculating black woman), the Tragic Mulatta (self-hating light skinned black woman who passes), the Welfare Queen (single black mother who alone has destroyed the black family) and Topsy (the carefree, childlike, happy darky). For Townes, these images of Black women and girls rest solidly in the imagination of U.S. culture and must be deconstructed and understood for the awful impact they have on how a stereotype is shaped into truth in memory and in history.[144]

Each of these figures is a mythical creation of the white imagination and serve to devalue and to dehumanize black women, to delegitimize black female experiences with racism and with sexism, to silence black female cries for justice, and to put black women in what whites long ago determined to be their "proper place," where they can be ignored, sexualized, or exploited for the reproduction of capital.

By comparison, white women emerged from the slaveholding era as all that is beautiful, good, holy and kind. The plantation legend crafted before and after slavery

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[144] Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 3.

enveloped white mistresses in an aura of light and vulnerability, goodness and agreeableness.[145]   She has been portrayed as what every black man wants and what every black woman wants to be. Despite the sexism that white feminist decry, white females have been protected nevertheless by white males, at least against the insatiable lust of black men and against the jealous rage of black women, even if not from other white males. For example, no sexual immorality is attributed to the white female, who was protected or punished by anti-miscegenation laws that prohibited freeborn white women from marrying an enslaved black male. However, white women's violence contradicted prevailing conceptions of white womanhood – and still does.[146] Violence on the part of white women was integral to the making of slavery, and was crucial to shaping black and white women's understanding of what it means to be female.[147] In fact, to uphold their racial superiority and to forbid legalized relations between the races, particularly white men and black women, white women were also instrumental in perpetuating the degrading stereotypes about black womanhood, describing black women as lewd, immoral, sexually licentious and lacking in intelligence.[148] Despite these historical facts, white women emerged from the slaveholding era as paragons of virtue, placed on a pedestal and extolled, according to hooks as the "the nobler half of humanity."[149] In fact, white women became desexualized bearers of white purity, and thus were constructed as

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[145] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

[146] Glymph, 5.

[147] Glymph, 5.

[148] bell hooks. *Teaching to Transgress Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 97.

[149] hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 31.

virtuous vessels upon which the purity of whiteness depended.[150]  No one, however, defended the honor and integrity of black women, who according to hooks, was not protected either by law or public opinion.[151] Given the micro-aggressions experienced by black women of all socio-economic classes and the very public disrespect shown toward educated, successful, high profile black women and young girls (i.e. Davis, Hobson, the Obamas) by white women, the practice continues.

**From Captivity to Critical Race Theory**

Black people, according to black liberation scholar, Dwight Hopkins, are born into a priori circumstances of a male-centered, wealth-driven, and white-skin-privileged universe.[152]  For nearly 400 years, this circumstance of birth has necessitated that we find ways to survive – even to thrive – in the midst of gender, class, and racial inequality and injustice. Moreover, as the need of hegemonic white society has changed, so too has the racial rhetoric and black resistance to it.

Wealthy white males began their hegemonic domination over black bodies in this nation with U.S. chattel slavery, that peculiar institution, a racist socio-political/economic system informed by white supremacist ideology in which blacks were property, bred, bought and sold for the economic gain of white families and for the colonial expansion and wealth building of this capitalist nation. Since that time, with every real or imagined civil rights' advancement for people-of-color in this country, white hegemonic elites have countered with overt and covert attempts designed to maintain the unequal socio-political and economic advantage where their interests remain central, often at the expense of non-

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[150] Battalora, 43.

[151] hooks, *Ain't I a Woman, 43.*

[152] Dwight N. Hopkins,  *Being Human. Race, Culture, and Religion*  (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 8.

whites both here and around the world. Yet just as the hegemony has repeatedly invented ways to legitimize white supremacy and white hegemonic dominion over black bodies, blacks too have repeatedly found ways to resist white supremacist thought and hegemonic domination, and to affirm black personhood as equally reflective of the *Imago Dei* even in a male-centered, wealth-driven, white-skin-privileged universe.

After a united poor people's uprising, hegemonic elites allowed low-income people of European descent to be called "white," with all the theo-political rights and socio-economic privileges thereof. With the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment that abolished black enslavement, elite whites: created sharecropping, an economic system that kept blacks laboring in the field, poor and indebted for generations; established the Klu Klux Klan (KKK), a domestic terrorist organization whose purpose was to intimidate blacks – to keep them in their proper white-designated place socially and politically disenfranchised; and instituted Jim Crow segregation laws that dictated where black bodies could sit, eat, drink, work, swim, relieve themselves and be buried. In the 1960s, with the passage of civil rights legislation intended as a redress for former and existent race-based laws that restricted equal access and equal opportunities for blacks in employment, education and housing, whites created the colorblind ideology where race is not seen, where persons are treated equally "without regard to their race."[153] Now with the election of this nation's first black president, whites claim that the U.S. has become a post-racial state, where race does not matter.

Blacks have responded creatively to the continuously morphing white supremacist ideologies and hegemonic domination. We have resisted with the following

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[153] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory An Introduction* Second Edition (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 158.

methodologies, all birthed via black pain and with a conviction of black self-worth and value (*or Imago Dei*):

- folktales where the trickster (i.e. Brer/Bruh rabbit) always outwits the white master,

- the invisible institution and hush harbors, secret prayer meetings where Jesus affirmed black humanity and denounced unquestioned black obedience and submission to "divine" white rule,

- the Underground Railroad (UGRR) whereby coordinated acts of civil disobedience enabled thousands to escape slavery's grip,

- songs (i.e. the Negro Spirituals, soul, rhythm and blues and even rap-hip/hop) that give a theological, social and/or political assessment of and eschatological hope for black life in America,

- the black church that has provided sanctuary, strength and respite for weary black sojourners in this land, sacred space in which to be affirmed as children of God, safe space to develop leadership skills and a meeting place for social justice strategizing,

- civil rights activism that secured voting rights and non-discrimination policies,

- black liberation theology that tells us Jesus is black and on the side of the oppressed,

- womanist theology that gives voice to the concerns and contributions of black women in church, in the civil rights movement and in society, and

- Critical race theory (CRT), an interdisciplinary methodology for examining, challenging and countering the race-power dynamic operative in this country whereby whites reinscribe white supremacist ideology and hegemonic domination in order to maintain economic and political control.

CRT challenges white hegemonic ideology, particularly the notion of a color-blind society and the post-racial state that suggest racial parity has been achieved, in order to demonstrate that both ideologies are false, untrue, myths, just another attempt in this present age to maintain the white-over-black social ordering established at the founding of this nation. CRT analysis demonstrates that in the 21st century, as in all the previous centuries in this country, race is seen and race does matter.

CR theorists endeavor to speak truth to power and to give voice to those whose stories might not otherwise be told, and more importantly, heard. There is no canonical set of doctrines to which all CRT scholars subscribe.[154] There is, however, one fundamental presumption undergirding all CRT discourse that is: racism is neither aberrant nor rare, but is a normal fact of daily life in U.S. society.[155] In fact, CRT asserts that racism is such an ingrained feature within the U.S. landscape that it looks ordinary and natural to many people within the culture.[156] As such, racism looks ordinary, *as* the natural order of things to the people who perpetrate and who benefit from racist

[154] Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, ed. Critical *Race Theory. The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1995), xiii.

[155] Edward Taylor, "The Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education: An Introduction." In *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education*, ed. Edward Taylor, David Gillborn, and Gloria Ladson-Billings (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 4.

[156] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, ed. *Critical Race Theory The Cutting Edge* Third Edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 3.

ideologies, and racism is ordinary, *is* the natural order of things for the people who daily experience discrimination and racist assaults on their black personhood.

Racial discrimination places a heavy burden on all black people in this country.[157] As noted earlier, we continue to live with the pejorative stereotypes produced to justify enslavement of our stolen ancestors from the continent of Africa. As such, we live today with people still questioning our intelligence, our looks, our innate criminality, our lasciviousness, even our humanity. For black people, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, much like the post-Civil War Reconstruction Era, was expected to liberate black people from civic exclusion and place us squarely on a "level playing field," finally granting us equal access to *certain inalienable rights – life, liberty and pursuit of happiness* proclaimed in the 1776 U. S. Declaration of Independence from British Imperial rule, a right fought for by blacks as well as whites. Yet once again, black expectation was thwarted. Our ancestors wore chains and were beaten, yet we still carry the scars and the burden of that peculiar institution. Perhaps the heaviest burden of all is what Bell calls *racial reality*, defined as follows:

> Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary peaks of progress, short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance.[158]

CRT then is but another methodology employed by blacks and other ethnic minorities that both recognizes and resists white racist ideology and hegemonic

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[157] Derrick A. Bell, Jr., "Property Rights in Whiteness Their Legal Legacy, Their Economic Costs." In *Critical Race Theory The Cutting Edge* Third Edition, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 63.

[158] Derrick Bell, Jr. *Faces at the Bottom of the Well. The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 12.

domination. CRT exhibits the same spirit of resistance embodied in the Brer/Bruh rabbit folktales, the invisible institution, the UGRR, black music, the black church, the civil rights movements and black liberation theologies. As such, CRT allows us to acknowledge and to defy the racial realities operative in this country in a way that keeps us sane and still diligently resisting hegemonic white dominion.

According to pioneering voices in the discipline, there is no singular approach for using CRT to interrogate race-power dynamics in this country. There are, however, some fundamental tenets, goals and resources when employing CRT. Foundational to CRT is the assertion that racism is not the problem of a bygone era, when race divisions were clearly marked and legally enforced, but rather that racism is endemic to U.S. society. For CR theorists Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, racism is ordinary, not aberrational, the usual way society does business.[159] Given the fundamental point of CRT, the goal then is not to eradicate racism, but rather is to raise awareness about its existence, both individually and institutionally, and to challenge the people, policies and structures that perpetuate it. "The task of *Critical Race Theory* is to remind its readers how deeply issues of racial ideology and power continue to matter in American life."[160] For legal CRT scholars, in particular, the desire is not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power, but to change it.[161] For CRT scholars in education, the goal is to identify race-based assumptions undergirding curriculum, academic achievement, funding, etc. "Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means

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[159] Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 7.

[160] Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Garry Peller and Kendall Thomas. *Critical Race Theory. The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1995), xxxii.

[161] Crenshaw, et al, xii.

that we will have to expose racism in education and propose radical solutions for addressing it."[162] CRT has yet to spread to religious studies, but it has relevance to the discipline as well. CRT can help to address the lack of consciousness about the role race and racism had and continues to have in contemporary U.S. society, theological discourse, particularly theological anthropology and ecclesial practices, and how race/racism manifests as white privilege or black disposability.

CR theorists reject the notion of a neutral or objective research position and admit, like liberation scholars, that social location, specifically race, informs perception of experience, and in fact, actually shapes/creates experience. CR theorists use many of the same sources (black experience) and techniques (narrative) as black liberationists. However, unlike black liberation scholars who challenged racists/racism of clearly bigoted white people and white supremacist ideology, CRT advocates direct their comments to liberal whites, who otherwise consider themselves "down with the cause" of righting the wrongs of the past, whites who claim racial parity has been achieved and/or who claim a race-neutral, colorblind, or post-racial position. Of course, CRT scholars, on some level, do seek to eradicate racist ideology and behavior, but more realistically, acknowledge the racist ideology is embedded in the society and therefore work to raise awareness about the racist/race-based assumptions informing seemingly race-neutral beliefs and practices.

Christian educators must do the same, sounding the alarm, raising awareness around issues of race in the faith. Therefore the church cannot continue to ignore the racial inequalities operative in the U.S. or more specifically operating in the name of the

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[162] Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Just What is Critical Race Theory and What's it Doing in a Nice Field like Education? In *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education* ed. Edward Taylor, David Gillborn, and Gloria Ladson-Billings (New York: Routledge, 2009), 33.

faith. To keep silent on this matter is to continue to give theological, political and social credence to these misguided norms. Instead, the church must become a catalyst, much like Mrs. Parks, to ignite a revolution within their sphere of influence leading to genuine racial integration, not mere desegregation, the full humanization of black people and the much needed dismantling of the racist socio-political structure embedded in U.S. society and of the theo-political structure embedded in theological discourse. Failing to understand our racially constructed identities and to address the corresponding material consequences of white privilege and black disposability might very well make the problem of the twenty-second century the problem of the color-line.

**White Normativity in Christian Education**

As a reminder, it was J. Deotis Roberts who said that the Christian European missionaries carried the pride of race and culture, and cooperated with the colonial administrators in raping lands of their resources and of raping people of their humanity, and were so confident that God had smiled upon the West, and would give them victory and an abundant harvest as the Christian colonizers of the non-Western world.[163] The result of this unholy alliance – Eurocentric Christianity became wedded to the economic interest and the politics of the nation necessitating a theology undergirding colonial interests, hegemonic domination, and white supremacist ideology. Euro-American theologians and pastors, much like the Enlightenment Era philosophers and pastors before them, obliged by creating pseudo-scientific materials and methods of indoctrination in support of racist ideology. In particular, Euro-American pastors, bible

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[163] J. Deotis Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 29.

scholars and theologians have reinforced prevailing political, social and economic structures that historically have been devastating to communities of color.[164]

Christian education, like other disciplines within religious studies, has been equally complicit in perpetuating an educational process and in developing educational materials that support the white hegemonic interests. Christian education, like historical or traditional biblical scholarship and theological interpretation, has long been written from a Eurocentric-U.S. male perspective. That perspective has tended to uphold hegemonic Euro-American male interests and racist white supremacist ideologies. According to womanist scholar Jacqueline Grant, for example, these particular white male theologies of the West, have been used to represent the ruling classes and to legitimate the established order.[165] In fact, Grant says that during most of U.S. history, there has been an infusion of theological teachings with an unjust political and social agenda of oppressors.[166]  That agenda has been reflected in Christian education classrooms and materials. Thus, Christian religious education has been used to perpetuate prejudices to the benefit of persons, systems and institutions with power, dominance and authority, namely U.S. whites and males.

Using books, tracts and papers, the American Sunday School Union formed in 1824, for example, became the major vehicle in the evangelical drive for conquest of the

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[164] Miguel A. De La Torre and Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, "Introduction," in *Beyond the Pale Reading Theology from the Margins* ed. Miguel A. De La Torre and Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2011), xxv.

[165] Jaqueline Grant, "Black Theology and the Black Woman." In *Black Theology. A Documentary, Volume One: 1966-1979* ed.  James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 323.

[166] Jacquelyn Grant. "The Sin of Servanthood." In *A Troubling in My Soul. Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering* ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 211.

United States.[167]  Reading and writing were by-products of the Sunday school movement;

the true business was incubating the young for conversion.[168] Part of this true business

presumably included white supremacy and manifest destiny ideologies as well. The

stories and songs bore the mark of revivalism/evangelicalism, which established much of

the agenda of religious education in the twentieth century.[169] For Grant Shockley, an

African-American Christian educator and former Garrett professor, the Sunday School

Movement, never effectively related itself to black people nor came to terms with its

white racism.[170]

Fearing that Sunday schools would become vehicles of mechanical teaching that

passed religion on as a lifeless tradition rather than as a quickening reality, according to

Mary Boys, the 19th century theologian, Unitarian pastor and Harvard professor William

Channing, wrote:

> The great end in religious instruction, whether in the Sunday school or in family,
> is not to stamp our minds irresistibly on the young, but to stir up their own; not to
> make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own .
> . . not to burden the memory, but to quicken and strengthen the power of thought;
> not to bind them by ineradicable prejudices to our particular sect or particular
> notions, but to prepare them for impartial, conscientious judging of whatever
> notions subjects may, in the course of Providence, be offered to their decision; not
> to impose religion upon them in the form of arbitrary rules, which rest on no
> foundation but our own word and will, but to awaken the conscience, the moral
> discernment, so that they may discern and approve for themselves what is
> everlastingly good and right; not to tell them that God is good, but to help them

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[167] Mary C. Boys, *Educating in Faith. Maps and Visions* (Lima: Academic Renewal Press, 1989), 30.

[168] Boys, 31.

[169] Boys, 13.

[170] Charles Foster and Fred Smith, *Black Religious Experience. Conversations on Double Consciousness and the Work of Grant Shockley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 38.

see and feel him live in all that he does within and around them . . . and to enkindle aspirations after a kindred virtue.[171]

Clearly a hermeneutical teaching method has been advocated within the guild whereby teaching is not just a matter of communicating the contents of the Christian faith without question or challenge, but even encouraging an examination of the contents of the faith with the expressed intent of personal analysis and application rather than blind acceptance of inherited interpretations. By default, the teacher's role during the religious education movement became one of creating safe space and of designing activities conducive for adults to so engage.

Proponents of the aforementioned religious education movement, however, were perceived by some as having given too much attention to world religions, to psychology and to the sociology of religion at the expense of theology, and thus was seen as turning away from the essentials of Christianity.[172] In response, concerned persons formed the third major movement – the Christian education movement, where teachers, like their Sunday School Movement predecessors, once again became indoctrinators – the educational goal was quite clearly oriented toward the formation of faithful followers of Jesus Christ.[173]

German American theologian Paul Tillich has suggested that a theological system is the methodical interpretation of the contents of the Christian faith and is to satisfy two basic needs: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of

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[171] Boys, 39.

[172] Boys, 74.

[173] Boys, 75.

this truth for every new generation.[174] Tillich's assertion implies a static and a dynamic dimension of the interpretive act suggesting that hermeneutics have to balance both a continuity with and quite possibly a radical departure from previous generations of inherited theological interpretation and of inherited interpretive methodology.

Renowned Christian educator, Maria Harris, author of the foundational Christian Education text, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, combines the best intentions of the three aforementioned religious education movements into a coherent focus for contemporary Christian educators and concludes similarly to Tillich that (1) there is a body of knowledge and behaviors that is to be taught and (2) there is a set of processes through which this body of knowledge/behaviors is to be communicated.[175]

Unlike earlier advocate of religious and Christian education whose perspective was distinctively American and generally white, middle-class[176] and whose agenda though influenced by cultural interests was much less apparent, Harris admits to the political nature to our Christian teaching. In fact, she too admits that teaching is a political act and that the political dimension of teaching should impel us toward learning in the context of the entire planet.[177]

Of course, to heed the call to engage the doctrines and rituals of the Christian church in this manner once again reiterates and undergirds the need for Christian educators to engage tools of analysis and to employ a method for teaching and learning

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[174] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Volume One (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 3.

[175] Harris, Maria, *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 111.

[176] Boys, 58.

[177] Harris, 112.

the traditions of the church that is mindful of the influences upon the development, engagement and practice of the tradition and praxis of the faith. Critical race theory is one such tool of analysis that religious educators in the academy and in the church should employ when teaching various aspects of the faith, particularly when teaching about race, religion, economics, politics and power, which are all inter-related aspects of the evolution of Christian thought and praxis in the U.S. As noted previously, according to Kwok Pui-lan, religious reflection and theological analysis are not separate domains with their own practices immune from the global processes of economic restructuring and social and cultural formation.[178] As such, Christians should be mindful of the inter-related nature of faith, and socio-political and economic power and Christian educators should be mindful of their calling to share a more holistic and inter-related approach to studying and applying the faith. CRT offers a framework for assessing race, racism and power in the U.S. and can be an equally useful within general religious studies and within practical theology as a tool for assessing the intersection of faith/religion, race/racism, economics and socio-political and theo-political power shaping Christian though and praxis in the U.S.

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[178] Kwok Pui-lan, "Feminist theology as intercultural discourse." In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24.

**Chapter Three**

**Critical Pedagogies:**

**Casualties of War**

To the victor belong the spoils. This idiom expresses the rights assumed by conquest, which extend far beyond the short-term command of the material resources of any conquered people or land in the immediate aftermath of war. The winners of war become the writers of history, the controllers of images, the disseminators of information and the long-term purveyors of ideologies that are supportive of the beliefs, causes, and interests of the invader over the indigenous people and culture now "othered" by defeat.

The ideologies of the conquerors are presented as objective, as scientific, as bias-free and as universally applicable to all, irrespective of social location. Conqueror culture and ideologies become dominant, the standard all must learn, to which all must acquiesce, and against which all are judged. In colonial Africa, for example, Christian missions often became centers that disseminated a Eurocentric worldview and that motivated locals to yearn for and to strive to accept their superior values.[179] In the U.S., the politics of respectability, a racial uplift ideology, expected black women to conform to "the dominant society's norms of manners and morals."[180] As it relates to theological discourse in the U.S., the conventions, the standards, the procedures, and the assumptions of biblical scholarship, like those of nearly every field of study, have been set and fixed

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[179] Musa W. Dube, "Postcoloniality, Feminist Spaces and Religion." In *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse* ed. Laura E. Donaldson & Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 109.

[180] Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent. The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 187.

by white, male European academics over the past several centuries.[181]  The result of this Eurocentric approach has been the exaltation of one cultural world view over all others.[182]

Christian education, like other areas within biblical scholarship in U.S. academies and churches, had for many years been written primarily by Euro-North American males. Thus, it too has been complicit in exalting a particular worldview, undergirding the dominant cultural ideology in the U.S. and perpetuating prejudices to the benefit of persons, systems and institutions with power, dominance and authority, namely European-U.S.-born males.  Such mis-education occurred via the materials developed and via the pedagogy employed by many, namely *banking* that assumes students are empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge by the all-knowing teacher, or more accurately, awaiting indoctrination by instruments of the state or of the church.

The banking concept of education serves the interests of the oppressor.[183] An alternative teaching methodology, known as *critical pedagogy*, as *emancipatory pedagogy* and as *engaged pedagogy* recognizes that students are not empty vessels, but enter the learning environment with knowledge and life experiences relevant to course content and relevant to the task of learning.  Scholars and educators operating from this school of thought are aware that socio-political and economic factors and hegemonic interests impact the materials developed and the educational process employed. They, therefore, encourage students to think critically about, to engage course content from, and

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[181] Cain H. Felder, ed. "Introduction." *Stony the Road We Trod. African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 6.

[182] William H. Myers, "The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African American Biblical Student." In *Stony the Road We Trod. African American Biblical Interpretation* ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 41.

[183] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 2006), 77.

to be mindful of the socio-political and economic contexts and agenda of the student, the teacher and the author/scholar's work being studied. As religious education is implicitly and explicitly impacted by these same contexts and interests, Christian educators should employ a critical/emancipatory pedagogy, which is superior to and more relevant than teaching/learning via the memorization and rote repetition of data employed in the banking model of teaching. In this chapter, I discuss an example of critical/emancipatory pedagogy – *the pedagogy of the oppressed* as articulated by Paulo Freire (1921-1997).

**Engaging the Elements**

All education participates within the historical process of shaping or maintaining social existence.[184] In this way, education not only informs, but also forms. Education, therefore, never was, nor ever can be neutral or indifferent in regard to the production of dominant ideology or the interrogation of it.[185] Critical/emancipatory pedagogy interrogates, having as its goal the intellectual and material liberation of students from oppressive ideology. Critical/emancipatory educators are, therefore, committed to the critical consciousness and to the autonomy of the student for this liberatory purpose. They move from forming to challenging and transforming the worlds even in which they are constructed.

Numerous factors undergird and inform a critical/emancipatory pedagogy including, but not limited to attention to:

- curriculum (i.e. whose body of work is considered worthy of study),

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[184] J. L. Seymour and D. E. Miller, ed. *Theological Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 17.

[185] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom. Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 91.

- measurement or evidence of learning (memorization/regurgitation on a test versus life application),

- the learning process (i.e. pure lecture versus engaged dialogue), and

- the learning environment (i.e. classroom set-up and safe space).

Proponents of critical/emancipatory pedagogy understand that every dimension of schooling and every form of educational practice are politically-contested spaces, shaped by history and challenged by a wide range of interest groups, including a plethora of invisible forces, and can operate even in the name of democracy and justice to be totalitarian and oppressive.[186]

Critical/emancipatory pedagogy critically examines and interrogates authorities, whether individuals or institutions, which leads to naming and then challenging oppressive forces (visible and invisible). As such, critical/emancipatory pedagogy is directly applicable to religious education in the academy and in the church. In fact, renowned Christian educator, Maria Harris, author of the foundational Christian Education text, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, says:

> Teaching is the act of reinterpreting, questioning, analyzing, and even at times rejecting and resisting . . . Teaching includes naming those places where the tradition is found wanting and where even the Bible must be called into account . . . Teaching religiously today also includes the study of religions and religious insights other than those in our own tradition . . . Teaching is the work of instructing others to ask, why is this so, who says so, and on what grounds.[187]

Harris' mandate to teachers and professors demands a practical, interactive, liberatory pedagogy. Of necessity then, Christian educators must employ a critical/emancipatory pedagogy not only to teach the history and traditions of the faith,

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[186] Joe L. Kincheloe, *Critical Pedagogy*. Second Edition. (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 2.

[187] Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 116.

drawing parallels between the experiences and faith of an ancient people as recorded in the sacred text of Christianity and the experiences and hope of contemporary believers, but also to challenge the imposition of an ancient text written by male elites onto a contemporary society where those who have been rendered silent, or excluded and passed-over for thousands of years now demand to be heard, to be included, and to take a more active role, holding positions of leadership in parish ministry and in religious education departments in the academy. Employing a critical/emancipatory pedagogy within Christian education will allow the overlooked and devalued concerns of women, persons-of-color, immigrants, LGBTQ and differently-abled persons to be addressed in the context of the faith, faith-formation and faith-development.

Teaching religiously is not only about knowing and understanding the Christ of the Gospels, but is also about making this Christ story part of us by examining its implications for our own lives.[188] Therefore, employing a critical/emancipatory pedagogy to teach the evolving beliefs and traditions of Christianity enables believers to ascertain the implications of the faith for their lives by inspiring personal agency/authority (i.e. taking responsibility for beliefs and praxis), by allowing for and encouraging the naming and challenging of the long-standing Eurocentric male interpretations of scripture and established traditions (e.g. non-ordination of women and LGBTQ persons), and by enabling a reinterpretation of scripture that is life-affirming (i.e. reclaiming *Imago Dei*) for those historically "othered" by church and by society.

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[188] Harris, 112.

**Nature of Oppression**

Critical pedagogy theorist, Henry Giroux, heralds *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire as the classic text of the discipline.[189] "In this book, Freire shares his experience with and observation of exploited laborers from which he proposed what he termed the *pedagogy of the oppressed*. While many applaud, embrace and engage Freire's model of education, according to Joe Kincheloe Research Chair in Critical Pedagogy at McGill University, at the time of its publication, wealthy landowners and the Brazilian military, viewed it as dangerous and as subversive.[190]

The pedagogy, as proposed by Freire, required the oppressed to see their reality as a limiting situation that can be transformed, rather than a closed world from which there is no exit.[191] Pedagogy of the oppressed makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed themselves.[192] The results of that reflection should inspire oppressed persons to engage in a struggle for liberation not only for themselves, but for their oppressors as well.

Pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument of liberation that can be forged *with*, but not *for* the oppressed.[193]  In fact, according to Freire, the oppressor can only be in solidary with the oppressed when he sees the oppressed as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor.[194]  For

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[189] Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2001), 152.

[190] Kincheloe, 70.

[191] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 49.

[192] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 48.*

[193] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 48.

[194] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50.

Freire, only the oppressed can liberate themselves and by so doing, liberate their oppressors as well, and for humanity's sake, they must.

According to Tunisian-Jewish essayist Albert Memmi (1920 - ), "The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model [the colonizer] and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him."[195] Similarly, Freire says that their (the oppressed) ideal is to be men; but for them to be men is to be oppressors, which have been their model of humanity."[196] In other words, for the oppressed, to *be* is to be like the oppressor.

For the oppressor, however, to be is to have. In fact, for the oppressor, having is an inalienable right, a right acquired through their own effort with their courage to take risks . . . if others do not have, it is because they are incompetent and lazy.[197] The oppressor transforms everything into an object of domination – the earth, property, production, people, time, etc. – everything is reduced to the status of an object at the oppressor's disposal and/or is transformed into objects for their purchasing power.[198] The oppressed, as objects, as things, have no purpose except that which their oppressors prescribe for them.[199]

This hegemonic tendency of categorizing and of naming people and things in terms of uses and material usefulness to them is dehumanizing not only to the oppressed, but to the oppressor as well. According to Freire, as oppressors dehumanize others and

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[195] Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 120.

[196] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45.

[197] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 59.

[198] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 58.

[199] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 60.

violate their rights, they also become dehumanized.[200] This hegemonic dehumanization thus requires a revolution that, for Freire, only the dehumanized themselves can lead. "The oppressed," he says, "have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women."[201]

What prohibits or hinders this much needed revolution is a particular problem of the oppressed – they are, according to Freire, contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete situation of oppression and violence.[202] For Freire, the oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being such that they are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized.[203] In other words, oppressed people have internalized the oppressor's dehumanization of them and have learned to see themselves through the eyes of their dehumanizer. For example, so often do the oppressed hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything – that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness.[204]

This oppressor self-perception is problematic for a number of reasons, but is particularly problematic for Freire as it relates to education because the oppress call themselves ignorant and say the "professor" is the one who has the knowledge and to

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[200] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 56.*

[201] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 68.

[202] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 55.

[203] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 48.

[204] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 68.

whom they should listen; almost never do they realize that they too know things.[205] Almost never do the oppressed realize that the teacher is an instrument of the state or of the church, instructing the non-dominant people (i.e. women, persons-of-color, and immigrants) in ways that benefit the hegemony (i.e. wealthy, straight, white, or male), indoctrinating them in ways that support continued oppression and that help to maintain an unequal status quo (i.e. non-ordination of women or LGBTQ persons). In fact, Freire says that it would be extremely naïve to expect the dominant classes (i.e. winners of war, writers of history, controllers of images, disseminators of information and purveyors of ideologies) to develop a type of education that would enable the subordinate or oppressed classes to critically perceive social injustices.[206]

**Tearing Down the Master's House**

According to Audre Lorde, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."[207] Freire would seem to agree. For him, propaganda and manipulation, which have been the oppressor's tools of domination and indoctrination, cannot now become the oppressed revolutionary's instruments of liberation and rehumanization. Rather, he encourages the oppressed to reclaim their humanity and the humanity of their oppressor by utilizing a humanizing pedagogy.

In a humanizing pedagogy the methodology ceases to be an instrument by which the teacher promotes hegemonic interests and interpretations of reality upon students as

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[205] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 63.

[206] Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education Culture, Power, and Liberation* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1985), 102.

[207] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." In *The Essential Feminist Reader* ed. Estelle B. Freedman (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 334.

objects, and indoctrinates unsuspecting students with hegemonic propaganda. Instead, teachers and students, both co-intent on reality are both subjects, not only in the task of unveiling reality and coming to know it critically, but also in the task of recreating knowledge.[208] That knowledge, moreover, is continuously refined and redefined as students and teachers reflect upon the content and process of education toward achieving critical consciousness, intellectual and material liberation, and student autonomy. This act of refining and redefining or reflecting is praxis. Education, for Freire, is constantly remade in praxis.[209] In fact, for Freire, liberation is praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.[210]

Critical/emancipatory pedagogy also assumes that students learn from teachers and that teachers learn from students. In fact, in a humanizing pedagogy, according to Freire, both student and teacher become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow and where arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom.[211] In other words, authority because it's always been that way – or because the hegemonic elite have the money or military power or ecclesial position or political clout or public opinion polling to enforce prejudice – is no longer acceptable reasoning for maintaining oppression and perpetuating injustice. Rather, any appeal to authority or operation from the place of authority or privilege must be done with the intent of uplifting the downtrodden, and of setting the captives free.

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[208] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 69.

[209] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 84.

[210] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

[211] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 80.

**Freedom and Justice for All**

Educating for Freire, of course, requires educators to have a general competence of the subject matter.[212] However, educating for him also requires educators to teach what he calls correct thinking. Correct thinking is not a rigid set of beliefs, but is a curiosity that leads students to reflect upon course content in light of their lived reality. The teacher who thinks correctly transmits to the students the beauty of our ways of existing in the world as historical beings, capable of intervening in and knowing this world.[213] To teach correct thinking is to inspire a curiosity that causes one to reflect critically upon the relationship between course content and upon one's day-to-day existence. In this way, a humanizing pedagogy becomes liberating.

A critical/emancipatory pedagogy enables the oppressed to examine the circumstances of their existence, name the oppression and its sources, and as a result, take intervening action against the oppressive forces to address/challenge/counter/defeat the oppression and humanize the oppressor. For those who have been silent or living in the shadows, a humanizing pedagogy gives language and opportunity to express that which has been felt or experienced, but perhaps not formally or forcefully articulated in a way that ushers in a positive, life-affirming change for the oppressed and for the oppressor.

A humanizing pedagogy, moreover, is a problem-posing education for Freire, responding to the essence of consciousness, having also the task of demythologizing the oppressor's interpretation of reality. Problem-posing education involves the constant

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[212] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 67.

[213] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 35.

unveiling of reality with the intent of the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality.[214] For Freire, problem-posing education epitomizes the special characteristic of consciousness: being conscious of, not only as intent on objects, but as turned upon itself in a Jasperian split – consciousness as consciousness of consciousness.[215] In other words, in problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world.[216]

The intent of problem-posing educators is to assist students in becoming critical thinkers and advocates for justice. In fact, the role of the problem-posing educator is to create conditions under which students become invested in the learning process, where they become contributors to the educational endeavor, analyzing, questioning, challenging course content and scholars/theories under study, and also offering alternative interpretations of the data presented and/or suggesting other avenues, more relevant to student's day-to-day existence to demonstrate learning of course materials. For Freire, true learning means that the learners will be engaged in a continuous transformation through which they become authentic subjects of the construction and reconstruction of what is being taught, side by side with the teacher, who is equally subject to the same process.[217] The impact of their ruminations and continuous observations may lead to other relevant insights and may necessitate adjustments in the oppressed person's approach to countering the injustice. For example, as we have seen in

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[214] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 81.

[215] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

[216] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 83.

[217] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 33.

the U.S. over the years, just as white supremacy has morphed in manifestation, so too has black resistance to it.

The problem-posing educator, moreover, constantly re-forms his or her reflections in the reflection of their students, as students are no longer docile listeners; they are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher.[218]  In fact, Freire says, "The correct method lies in dialogue."[219] As such, both students and teachers are encouraged to express their insights, to share experiences and observations, to evaluate theories under study for unstated biases, to evaluate the efficacy of applied theories, to assess the impact of liberation advocacy efforts upon the oppression and upon the oppressor's attitude and behavior toward the oppressed in light of such advocacy so that new insights can be incorporated and any necessary course corrections made in order to achieve the full humanization of all. This co-teaching/co-learning occurs in open, honest, critically constructive dialogue, which is absolutely essential to critical/emancipatory pedagogy.

Dialogue, according to Freire, is the encounter among humanity to name the world, and is a fundamental precondition for their true humanization.[220]  Dialogue, for Jack Mezirow, approximates the ideal conditions of critical discourse of free, full participation by all because the situation allows learners to become separated from their assumptions.[221]  It is through dialogue that we attempt to understand what is valid in the

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[218] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 81.

[219] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 67.

[220] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 137.

[221] Jack Mezirow and Associates, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990), 367-368.

assertion made by others and to attempt validation of the assertions that we make.[222]  Of course this ability to validate assumes the ability to hear opinions other than your own and to not feel threatened, and to hear another's assertions and to find merit, or in Parks' language of faith development, to exhibit a convictional commitment. Adult learning, in fact, is best achieved in dialogue.[223]  "Dialogue constitutes an educational strategy that centers on the development of critical social consciousness."[224] A humanizing and critically engaging pedagogy should, therefore, establish and maintain a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed as it becomes an extremely effective mechanism for learning, for unlearning, for humanizing and for liberating. In fact, for Freire, teachers and leaders must maintain communication with the oppressed if education is to have the intended liberatory and humanizing effect upon society.

**Teaching by Another Name**

A humanizing, problem-posing pedagogy as advocated by Freire stands in stark contrast to the banking pedagogy that is constructed without input from the oppressed, and with the intent of dominating and domesticating the unsuspecting masses to the benefit of the hegemony. "Education for domestication is an act of transferring knowledge whereas education for freedom is an act of knowledge."[225]

According to Freire, one of the myths of oppressor ideology is the assumption of the absolute ignorance of the people, but not of the dominant or oppressor class. He says,

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[222] Mezirow, 354.

[223] Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen – Learning to Teach The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 3.

[224] Antonia Darder, Marta Baltodano and Rodolfo D. Torres, "Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction." In *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* ed. Antonia Darder, Marta Baltodano and Rodolfo D. Torres (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2003), 15.

[225] Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education,* 102.

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"The one who is doing the decreeing defines himself and the class to which he belongs as those who know or were born to know, others are alien entities. The words of his own class are true words, which he imposes or attempts to impose on the others."[226]

Whereas revolutionary leaders think *with* the people in order to liberate, dominant elites, according to Freire, think *about* the people in order to know them better and to dominate them more efficiently.[227]  Any dialogue between elites and the masses is really the depositing of communiqués whose contents are intended to exercise a domesticating influence.[228] Pedagogy of the oppressed is dialogic; whereas banking is more monologue. Pedagogy of the oppressed, students and teachers are mutual learners and instructors, whereas the banking pedagogy occurs in only one direction, from know-it-all to know-nothing. Moreover, for Freire, banking displays the following somewhat haughty attitudes and practices:

- The teacher teaches and the students are taught;

- The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;

- The teacher thinks and the students are thought about;

- The teacher talks and the students listen – meekly;

- The teacher disciplines the students and the students are disciplined;

- The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;

- The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the actions of the teacher;

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[226] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 135.

[227] *Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 131.*

[228] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 131.

- The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;

- The teacher confuses authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students; and

- The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.[229]

The banking methodology of educating is problematic for a number of reasons. For example, the banking pedagogy is intellectually insulting. It assumes that students know nothing unless and until told by a professor who knows everything. This perspective dismisses, disregards, and disrespects the knowledge and experiences of the people relevant to course content and relevant to the task of learning. Adults, according to professor Jane Vella, have enough life experience to be in dialogue with any teacher about any subject and will thereby learn new knowledge, attitudes, or skills best in relation to that life experience.[230]

Banking also treats students as objects rather than subjects of their own learning. Students, therefore, are not in partnership with the teacher in the learning process beyond remembering and repeating the material learned as required to demonstrate mastery of the course content. In banking, moreover, students have no incentive to retain course content beyond the demonstration of mastery or even to apply course content outside of the

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[229] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 73.

[230] Vella, 3.

classroom.  In fact, since students are not engaged in partnership or in dialogue, they can assume that they have no power, except to obey.[231]

Banking is limiting. It stifles student innovation and creativity, and hinders critical thinking as it only requires students to memorize and to regurgitate on a test what has been told to them by the teacher. Banking, in many respects, is not grounded in reality. According to Freire, implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world not with the world or others; the individual is a spectator, not a re-creator. [232]  In reality, quite the opposite is true. We are communal beings impacted by past generations – their insights, their inventions, their ideologies, impacting living generations as well as generations of people yet to be born with our insights, inventions, and ideologies.

Humankind is not abstract, isolated, independent and unattached to the world.[233] Freire, therefore, encourages teaching and learning that gives space to the realities of our physical communal existence in a global economy in order to transform injustice toward anyone into justice for everyone. For Freire, true, genuine education is to educate for a liberatory purpose – it is educating as the practice of freedom. In fact, he says:

> Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world.[234]

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[231] Jane Vella. *Learning to Listen – Learning to Teach The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*. Revised Edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 25.

[232] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75.

[233] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 81.

[234] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

**An Enduring Legacy**

Freire's body of work has been well-received in various academic disciplines and is highly-esteemed by educators committed to an engaging, liberatory pedagogy and to critical consciousness, student autonomy and empowerment. In fact, according to Giroux:

> The work of Paulo Freire continues to exercise a strong influence on a variety of liberal and radical educators. In some quarters his name has become synonymous with the very concept and practice of critical pedagogy. Freire has become the standard reference for engaging in what is often referred to as teaching for critical thinking, dialogical pedagogy or critical literacy.[235]

More specifically, in regards to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Giroux says:

> Paulo Freire occupies a hallowed position among the founders of critical pedagogy. The legacy of his work stands as a testimonial to a pedagogical project to which he devoted both his passion and his principles to help students develop a consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, connect knowledge to power and agency, and learn to read both the word and the world as part of a broader struggle for justice.[236]

Zeus Leonardo, associate professor of education, says, "Since Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* appeared on the intellectual scene a generation of scholars found a compelling theory for understanding the nature of oppression in education. It gave them the language they were looking for."[237]

Critical pedagogy as we understand it emerges with Freire.[238] It was Freire who pointed out that schooling was often used by dominant interests to validate their own privilege, while certifying the inferiority of students marginalized by social and economic factors.[239] According to Freire, in a class society, the power elites determine what

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[235] Henry A. Giroux, *The Giroux Reader* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 285.

[236] Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 152.

[237] Zeus Leonardo, *Race Frameworks A Multidimensional Theory of Racism and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 23.

[238] Kincheloe, 69.

[239] Kincheloe, 71.

education is and its objectives, which never oppose their own interests.[240] Teaching, from this perspective, becomes a means of indoctrination supporting the hegemonic agenda. For Kincheloe, the process of learning as inseparable from individual empowerment and social change is Freire's most enduring legacy. In fact, Kincheloe says, "Undoubtedly one of the most important dimensions of Freire's pedagogy involved the cultivation of a critical consciousness."[241] Toward that end, equally important, therefore, was Freire naming teaching a political act and teachers as unavoidable political operatives who should embrace this dimension of their work.[242]

The aforementioned observations of Giroux, Kincheloe and Leonardo suggest that Freire's body of work in general, and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in particular, has had a tremendous, long-lasting, positive influence upon pedagogical practices in the U.S. across a wide range of disciplines. Freire's work has revolutionized/redefined what it means to educate (doing) and what it means to be an educator (being). It has, of course, been challenged as well. For example, it has been suggested that pedagogy of the oppressed has limited applicability in the U.S., particularly to matters of race.[243] To be fair, with pedagogy of the oppressed, Freire was addressing disparities and dehumanization based upon class, not upon race. However, as Bacon's Rebellion has demonstrated, class-based inequalities in the U.S. are disregarded in favor of a race-based alliance rooted in white supremacy that yielded little more than comparable control over black bodies, a higher rank in the social order than a black person and the visual

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[240] Freire, *The Politics of Education*, 130.

[241] Kincheloe, 72

[242] Kincheloe, 70.

[243] Allen, 54.

presumption of having white skin with all the theo-political rights and socio-economic privileges thereof.

## On the Other Hand

Ricky Lee Allen, Assistant Professor of Educational Thought and Sociocultural Studies, concurs with Giroux, Kincheloe, and Leonardo's assessment of Freire's body of work. For example, he too credits Paulo Freire as the founder of critical pedagogy and he too notes that *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has significantly shaped the normative, moral and political philosophy of critical pedagogy.[244] However, he also notes two influences that may have had a limiting impact upon Freire's pedagogy. Allen says that Freire was influenced by Frantz Fanon (a black male born in Martinique, a French Caribbean colony) for whom white supremacy was key to understanding colonization, and by Gilberto Freyre, a famous white Brazilian sociologist who promoted the idea of Brazil as a racial utopia, which enabled white Brazilians to deny the existence of white domination in their own country.[245]

For Allen, the influence of Fanon and Freyre suggests that white identity politics played more of a defining role in the pedagogy of the oppressed than is perhaps widely acknowledged. In fact, according to Allen, white identity politics structured critical pedagogy from its inception regardless of its anti-colonial intentions.[246]    Allen, who self-identifies as a white-middle-class man, therefore, questions the universal applicability of Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, specifically to matters of race and to

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[244] Ricky Lee Allen, "Whiteness and Critical Pedagogy," in *Critical Pedagogy and Race* ed. Zeus Leonardo (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 55.

[245] Allen, 66.

[246] Allen, 66.

people of color. For Allen, in order for whites to be truly in solidarity with race-radical people of color, it is essential that whites unlearn the marks of their origins, which include a belief in the myths of colorblindness, racial meritocracy and white supremacy.[247] Consequently, Allen recommends that critical pedagogy become more serious about race-radical philosophies of people-of-color around the world and move away from the comforts and constrictions of Marxist Eurocentrism in order to become anti-racist.[248]

Marxism was birthed on the continent of Europe by Communist theorists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who in short argue that from the dawn of time there has been only one great and lasting warfare between all the people of the world. They say,

> Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.[249]

At that time in European history, according to Marx and Engels, the contending classes within each country were the Bourgeoisie (the capital holders, owners/controllers of the means of production, the ruling class, the haves) and the Proletariat (laborers, working class, the have nots). Since there were no racial distinctions among people of European descent at that time, race was not foundational to the Marxist framework of societal analysis. Now, however, Marxists claim race analysis as ancillary to class

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[247] Allen, 62.

[248] Allen, 54.

[249] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Radford: Wilder Publications, LLC, 2007), 8.

analysis. "Its (Marxism) primary focus is capitalism as an overarching social system that gives rise to secondary features, like race."[250]

For subsequent generations who have seen capital remain primarily under white control, race is and always will be the primary contributor for oppressive conditions. Even success in genres typically associated with blackness are still judged by whites. For example, any black musical art form becomes mainstream when Whites consume it, and despite control over music production, mainstream Black artists' success is bound up with White's expectations of acceptable Blackness.[251] With this level of white control in U.S. society, race will always trump class in the minds of many, particularly in the minds of people-of-color impacted by white hegemonic decisions and decision-making.

As Bacon's Rebellion and U.S. voting history has demonstrated time and time again, poor whites will choose racial alliance over class alliance even to their own hurt. Moreover as Ladson-Billings recently observed, "The power of racial coding allows the poorest White in the society to define the most credentialed, wealthy African American to be referred to as a nigger."[252] We see this racial coding time and again, as with my former high school classmate's Facebook postings of our black first lady pictured next to a baboon wearing the same dress or with her posting of a injured black NBA player juxtaposed to an injured white soldier with a caption that conveys the message that the middle-income white male soldier has more worth and value than the wealthy black NBA player. Both the pictures and the caption exemplifies the power of racial coding Ladson-

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[250] Leonardo, *Race Frameworks*, 44.

[251] Leonardo, *Race Frameworks*, 53.

[252] Ladson-Billings, "I Know Why This Doesn't Feel Empowering. A Critical Race Analysis of Critical Pedagogy." In *Mentoring the Mentor. A Critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire* ed. Paulo Freire, James W. Fraser, Donaldo Macedo, Tanya McKinnon, and William T. Stokes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 132.

Billings suggests that at the very least implicitly allows a poor white to define a wealthy African American as a nigger.

In regard to white identity politics embedded in pedagogy of the oppressed, Allen's observation is of course true, in that Freire, was a white male in his Brazilian homeland. Freire's participants in Recife, Brazil were predominantly Black, but Freire's text, does not contain an overtly racial analysis, giving the nod to a universalist theory of oppression."[253] Brazil had been one of the biggest markets for the import of African slaves in the western hemisphere.[254] For a white male to conduct his research using a predominantly illiterate black population in a former slave colony and to minimize or to deny the linkage between the historical and the contemporary oppression does suggest a lack of universal applicability despite its anti-colonialist intent.

Gloria Ladson-Billings has suggested that even many marginalized scholars have failed to look carefully at the ways in which critical theory/pedagogy (as it was being advocated and written about) contributed to that marginalization.[255] Thus, for Ladson-Billings, one problematic and enduring aspect of critical theory/pedagogy is its failure to address adequately the question of race.[256] As an alternative, she recommends using critical race theory as a more culturally relevant means of analysis and teaching. The benefit of culturally relevant teaching as a critical pedagogy is that a critical race perspective always foregrounds race as an explanatory tool for the persistence of

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[253] Leonardo, *Race Frameworks*, 23.

[254] Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic. An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 180.

[255] Ladson-Billings, 127.

[256] Ladson-Billings, 127.

inequality.[257] For her, CRT allows for the confrontation, Freire would say naming, needed for healing, humanizing and empowering. In fact, she says that until we wrestle with race and its pernicious and pervasive effects, we will continue to disenfranchise and alienate students; and they will never know what it means to experience education as an empowering force.[258]

**Can I Get a Witness?**

The positive impact of Freire's body of work in general and of pedagogy of the oppressed in particular cannot be denied. However, pedagogy of the oppressed has some similarities with the assertions of black scholars who came before Freire, and who have been overlooked in the annals of liberatory education. For example, with regard to the duality of existence, Freire says as previously noted, that the oppressed are contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete situation of oppression and violence.[259] Moreover, they are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized.[260] In other words, the self-perception, self-identity, self-understanding and self-worth of the oppressed are shaped by what their oppressors have said to them and have said about them. Freire is speaking, arguably, about a society where oppression is based upon class.

Speaking in 1903 about U.S. society, where oppression was without a doubt framed by white supremacy, which provided material benefits to whites and life-negating and potentially life-threatening consequences to blacks, black sociologist W.E.B. DuBois

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[257] Ladson-Billings, 132.

[258] Ladson-Billings, 138.

[259] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 55.

[260] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 48.

(1868-1963) observed the same in an oppressed-oppressor relationship based upon race. He says of the black oppressed group:

> The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only let him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - An American, A Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[261]

Of course, the Negro wants nothing more than to be one self and even to contribute to the world, but is denied. Still as a divided warring self, the Negro knows that he has a something of value to give to the world. According to DuBois,

> He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his [white] fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face . . . to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to husband and to use his best powers and his latent genius.[262]

For Kincheloe, it was Freire who pointed out that schooling was often used by dominant interests to validate their own privilege, while certifying the inferiority of students marginalized by social and economic factors.[263]  Previously, Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), renowned historian and educator, said of an oppressed racial/ethnic minority, "Negroes have no control over their education."[264] In fact, he pointed out that the education of the Negroes has been entirely in the hands of those who have enslaved

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[261] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks (*New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1994), 2.

[262] DuBois, 3.

[263] Kincheloe, 71.

[264] Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of The Negro* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., Tenth Printing, 1998), 22.

them and now segregates them.[265] As noted previously, in a class society, according to Freire, the power elites determine what education is and its objectives, which never oppose their own interests.[266] Apparently the same is true in a race-based society. The Negro, according to Woodson, has never been educated; rather he has been informed about things that he has not been permitted to do.[267]

In his now famous book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*," Woodson argues that the descendants of African slaves in the U.S. have been taught to see themselves negatively, to think of themselves as inferior to whites, to engage in behavior that would seem to substantiate such claims to the benefit of the oppressor, thereby prohibiting progress of the race. He says, "Negroes are taught to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton and to despise the African."[268] To counter this adverse and adversarial tutelage, Woodson proposes that the Negro study himself and then develop educational methods that will teach the Negro to think and to do for himself. He says, "The program for the uplift of the Negro in this country must be based upon a scientific study of the Negro from within to develop in him the power to do for himself . . . to elevate him to the level of others."[269]

As discussed earlier in this chapter, in his book, *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed*," Paulo Freire outlines an educational methodology to liberate the oppressed from the type of self-depreciation Woodson describes, to alleviate their emotional and financial

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[265] Woodson, 22.

[266] Freire, *The Politics of Education*, 130.

[267] Woodson, 144.

[268] Woodson, 1.

[269] Woodson, 144.

dependency upon the oppressor and ultimately to ameliorate their marginalization within the broader community. Such liberation is achieved, according to Freire, through praxis, the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.[270] Praxis is mediated through dialogue and through problem-posing education, whereby persons perceive critically the way they exist in the world.[271]

The similarities of their two educational proposals are noteworthy. For example, both used personal observation to make their claims and recommendations rather than any abstract theoretical approach not grounded in the reality of the people. There are also great similarities in their observations, which seem to mirror each other across geographies (North v South America), and across generations (1933 v 1970). Both men also note that the oppressed internalized the opinion of the oppressor.[272] This internalized self-perception must be negated before true liberation can occur. Both educators agree, moreover, that the mere imparting of information is not education.[273]

Whereas Freire suggests that the oppressed should become their own example in the struggle for their redemption,[274] Woodson encourages Negroes to become educated in the fundamentals of English, the principles of composition, and the leading facts of literature and history while also directing their attention to the folklore and proverbs of Africa.[275]

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[270] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

[271] Freire, 83.

[272] Freire, 63.

[273] Woodson, x.

[274] Freire, 54.

[275] Woodson, 150.

I draw these comparisons, not to suggest plagiarism, but to highlight the similarities between a class-based and a race-based oppressor-oppressed relationship and also to highlight a fundamental problem of applying Freire's model to race matters, which is, as Allen notes, whites seem incapable of trusting the leadership of people-of-color.[276] Moreover, according to Allen, there is a racial/ethnic bias in pedagogy of the oppressed or as he says, "white identity politics structured critical pedagogy from its inception regardless of its anti-colonial intentions.[277] There is also an identity politics, it would seem, in receptivity to its founding father(s). Allen's point is made clear when one considers that what blacks said years earlier was seemingly ignored, but when Freire, a white male, says the same, his words are readily embraced and hailed as revolutionizing education.

Using the Freirean model of education requires the oppressed to name their oppression and its source, and then to engage in a humanizing pedagogy to bring about change in the status quo and to liberate both oppressed and oppressor. In the U.S., even though the oppression has manifested differently as previously noted, the source of oppressed people-of-color has always been white supremacist thought and action. Oppressed people-of-color can and have named the source, and can and have offered observations and a humanizing pedagogy, but have not been successful in bringing about the lasting changed needed and hoped for. Other barriers to their humanizing efforts, according to Allen, have been that:

- whites do not have what it takes to facilitate projects of humanization because they are more likely to have disdain or pity, but certainly not love for people-of-color;

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[276] Allen, 56-57.

[277] Allen, 66.

- whites fear people-of-color; whites defend the myth that they are the model humans;
- whites blame people-of-color for their own victimization under white supremacy;
- whites have projected all sorts of negative attributes onto people-of-color and all sorts of unfounded positive attributes onto themselves as a way of diverting attention from white culpability and white terrorism;
- whites have depicted people-of-color as non-human, savage, child-like, dangerous, genetically inferior, ugly, stupid, lazy, depraved, deprived, merely different, angry, outsiders, violators of the social contract, inept; and
- Whites reject people-of-color who openly question white privilege.[278]

Whites may reject people-of-color who openly question white privilege, but they cannot deny it. Whites take every opportunity to cling to the very privilege they also claim to deny, which is evident by the many morphing implementations of white supremacy as noted in the previous chapter with all the theo-political rights and socio-economic benefits thereof – from U.S. chattel slavery, to sharecropping, to Jim Crow segregation, to the colorblind and now to post-racial rhetoric of today. Readily embracing the Marxist analytical framework offered by a white male Latino (Freire) while ignoring the insights rooted in a race-based analysis of black male citizens (DuBois, Woodson) who said the same is further proof of the racism embedded in U.S. society and in education and of white privilege as evidence by the ability to choose who to hear and who to hail (Freire), who to ignore and who to render silent (DuBois, Woodson).

**A Way Forward**

As advances in civil rights advocacy suggest, it is difficult, but not impossible to change the laws of the land, and more importantly, to change the hearts and minds of the people of this country. This change, however, comes slowly; it comes through exposure to persons who differ from you in race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, citizenship,

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[278] Allen, 57-60.

mental/physical ability; and it comes through more appropriate, more accurate, more enlightened educational practices, more creative, more integrative, more life applicable, more life affirming education both in the public schools and in the educational programs offered through the church for members and non-members. According to Woodson:

> When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary. The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples.[279]

Whether or not we adopt Freire's model, wholeheartedly or with the hermeneutic of suspicion, it does give us particular practices to adopt as we seek to be liberatory educators. Disposing of the banking system of education in order to develop critical thinkers will advance both the field of education and empower students to consider race and racism irrespective of the socio-politically accepted colorblind and post-racial rhetoric, and also enable them to see the *Imago Dei* in us all irrespective of our differences.

Educators, particularly educators-of-color and white educators committed to the cause of liberation from oppressive ideology, must unlearn and un-do the mis-education that mis-informs peers, parishioners, and students about race and other –isms plaguing the nation. Fortunately, there are a number of scholars, particularly black scholars, and more specifically, black scholars in religious education who have continued the legacy of liberation begun so long ago in the invisible institution. Therefore, in the next chapter, I

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[279] Woodson, xiii.

look at the contributions of three black religious education scholars committed to critical/emancipatory pedagogy.

**Chapter Four**

**Religious Education: The Call**

## Black Lives Matter

Public Enemy, a former U.S. rap group, recorded the song, "*Fight the Power*" for a 1989 Spike Lee film, "*Do the Right Thing*." One storyline in the movie tackled racial tension from multiple racial/ethnic perspectives (i.e. Black, white/Italian, Latino/a, Asian) and from multiple perspectives of power (i.e. female, male, white, store owner, police). Select lyrics, or more specifically, the hook of the song, reflected the title of the movie, and reflect the essence of educating as the practice of freedom, the purpose of critical/emancipatory education and the intent of liberatory educators:

> We got to pump the stuff to make us tough from the heart; it's a start, a work of art to revolutionize make a change nothin's strange people, people we are the same, no we're not the same 'cause we don't know the game; What we need is awareness, we can't get careless . . . My beloved let's get down to business: mental self-defensive fitness . . . power to the people no delay, to make everybody see, in order to fight the powers that be . . .

A key element from this soundtrack and what resonates with pedagogy of the oppressed is this: "no we're not the same 'cause we don't know the game, what we need is awareness, we can't get careless, power to the people, no delay, to make everybody see, in order to fight the powers that be." This call to fight is, of course, not a call into physical battle. It is not a call to harm anyone. Nor is it a call for violence in the streets. This is not a call to arms for military action against the haves by the have nots. This is a battle cry for the mind, for mindfulness, for an awakening of the masses, a call to critical consciousness of the people or as Public Enemy says, "mental self-defensive fitness, what we need is awareness, an awareness that we are the same" (i.e. we are all human), "but no we're not the same" (i.e. we're not viewed as equals, as equally human and equally

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deserving of the same right and privileges enjoyed by some, yet denied to others), "because we, the masses, don't know the game," (i.e. the maneuvering and manipulation hegemonic elites play with our lives to maintain their dominance and to preserve their self-interest often at the expense of the ill-informed who have been intentionally mis-informed, misled and mis-educated). No, there is no intent by this summons "to fight the powers that be" for any violent confrontation between the oppressed and the oppressor, though admittedly blood has been shed and lives have been lost in any quests for change in the socio-political status quo.[280]  This is a call, however, to overthrow the established order, as discussed herein, to overthrow white disposal of black lives.

This is the clarion call of a UMC theologian and minister saying take responsibility for your faith-based beliefs and praxis. This is the call of a tired black seamstress and countless other black bus riders in Montgomery, AL refusing any longer to ride segregated buses; this is the call of the Friendship Nine[281] in South Carolina and countless other black youth sitting at white-only lunch counters all across the south, choosing to serve time in jail rather than to pay money for bail; this is the call of four little girls (Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, Addie Mae Collins and Denise McNair) killed in  the bombing of a black church in Birmingham, AL; this is the call of three civil rights workers (James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner) killed in Mississippi while trying to register black citizens to vote; this is the call of Viola Liuzzo and John Reeb, two white people whose only crime was to support black people's right to

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[280] During the black civil rights movement in the U.S. in the 1960s, police beat black protestors, turned water hoses on them, sic dogs on them, a church was bombed killing four little girls, Medgar Evers and three civil rights workers were killed in MS for encouraging black citizens to register to vote.

[281] Nine black students who refused to pay bail for the charge of trespassing for sitting at a white-only lunch counter, choosing instead to serve 30 days at a prison form. Their courage led to leaders of the Civil Rights Movement to adopt the Jail, No Bail strategy.

march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL; and it is the call of countless unarmed black children who lay dead in our streets, while their white shooters are not indicted or are found not guilty of shedding innocent blood.

Educators who respond to this call must be committed to enabling any student to become an autonomous, critical thinker, cognizant of the socio-economic, socio-political and theo-political factors "othering" black people, assaulting black personhood, draining life-affirming energy, implicitly and explicitly influencing thought processes and the day-to-day realities that serve to suggest that black is not beautiful, not smart, but is innately criminal, sexually immoral and disposable. Educators from all walks of life who say yes to this call need to build multi-cultural, multi-generational, multi-privileged coalitions to bring about much needed change in the nation. For religious educators, our response to this call, irrespective of racial/ethnic identity, includes teaching students to resist any theo-political "othering" that denies the *Imago Dei* of anyone because of their race, gender, class, citizenship, sexuality, mental/physical ability and/or religion. We must insist that the Christian faith affirm life, not negate it. Religious educators from the dominant white culture in the U.S. must be mindful of the long history of hegemonic domination that continues the unequal status quo, and not deny their privilege, but use it to influence, persuade, and teach equality. For religious educators of African descent who still live with the disrespect and dehumanization that stripped our ancestors of their humanity, treated them as chattel and produced a slave, recapturing a sense of human worth, value, dignity, respect as beings created in the image of God is a particularly important task. Many in the discipline have taken seriously this task over the years, considered it their calling, their vocation, their life's work. For these scholars and

religious educators, their work and their commitment to education and to the people of God are to be celebrated, engaged and built upon. In this chapter, I discuss the work of three models of Christian education proposed by three black religious educators committed to the cause of justice: Grant Shockley, Anne Wimberly and Yolanda Smith who, in the spirit of the African ancestors in the hush harbors of the invisible institution, proclaim to the world that black lives matter.

<p style="text-align:center"><strong>African American Pedagogues: The Response</strong></p>

**Grant Shockley – Black Church Systemic Intentional-Engagement Model**

Grant Shockley, an academic leader in Christian education, a pastor and professor, administrator with the Methodist Church and professor with Garrett, ITC, Philander-Smith, Duke, and Emory defined Christian education as that process which teaches concepts, attitudes and skills that facilitate meaningful learning in relation to the black experience and the church's implicit task of humanization and liberation.[282] Although much of his career was spent in leadership roles in predominantly white ecclesial and academic institutions, he gradually moved toward an increasingly Africentric orientation in his understanding of that educational experience.[283] As a result of this shift, Shockley advocated for and sought to develop a Christian education paradigm that was rooted in and responsive to the religious experiences of blacks in this country.

According to Fred Smith, Shockley spent much of his life trying to systematize the black experience so that it could be a general resource for the education of all

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[282] Grant Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church," in *Black Religious Experience. Conversations on Double Consciousness and the Work of Grant Shockley* by Charles R. Foster and Fred Smith (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 66.

[283] Charles R. Foster and Fred Smith, *Black Religious Experience,* 10.

Christians and more specifically, so that it could be a wellspring for the life of faith in the black church.[284] Charles Foster notes that from Shockley's earliest writings, he directed his attention to developing a model of Christian education for the black church that would at the same time illumine and influence conversations in the church and in academic worlds on the religious education of all Christians.[285] Shockley does actually develop two models of teaching, one for use in the seminary and one for use in the black church. Both models are based upon the black experience and upon the wisdom of the pioneers in black theology and other emerging liberation pedagogies of his day. In fact, Shockley acknowledges that his educational model is grounded conceptually in: (1) A Black Theology of Liberation, (2) Paulo Freire's liberation praxis theory and (3) Gayraud Wilmore's missional new black church style.[286] Here, I only discuss Shockley's Black Church Systemic Intentional-Engagement Model, examine its insights, limitations, and implications, including its basis in black liberation theology of the time.

**Changing Times**

For many, the image of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. standing before the Lincoln Memorial delivering his now famous "I have a Dream Speech," is what comes to mind when the topic of 20th century civil rights comes up. Few remember, or even know that the March was for Jobs and Freedom and because the full speech is rarely aired, few remember or even know that King also said:

> Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand signed the Emancipation Proclamation…But one hundred years later, the Negro

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[284] Foster and Smith, 76.

[285] Foster and Smith, 77.

[286] Grant Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation to Consummation: A Black Perspective," in *Black Religious Experience,* 85.

still is not free; one hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination; one hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity; one hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. So we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition . . . When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir…It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check; a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation . . .[287]

Similarly, few remember or even know that Betty Friedan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, kicked off the second wave of the white feminist movement in the U.S., which would of course not leave the religious studies untouched by feminist sensibilities. Nor few but black liberation and womanist scholars would think of black clergy publishing a full-page statement in the July 31, 1966 edition of the New York Times as kicking off what would later become known as black liberation and womanist theologies. At the time, this theological manifesto or Christian declaration was the first attempt in U.S. history in which black clergy formally related the Gospel of Jesus to the black community's need for civic power and self-determination.

Prior to these rumblings challenging the status quo "political system of imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy,"[288] Euro-American males held most, if not all of the leaderships positions in government, in the academy, at major corporations and in the church. In fact, many if not all, churches within mainline

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[287] Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream." In *A Testament of Hope. The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.* ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986), 217.

[288] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory From Margins to Center* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), xiv.

denominations operated from treatises and doctrines that had been written primarily by Euro-American males. Classical or traditional theological and biblical discourse in U.S. academies has tended to be Western-oriented and written from a Eurocentric perspective.[289] Historically silenced voices (i.e. women and people-of-color) in the church began to reflect upon these long standing doctrines and practices of the faith and came to articulate different interpretations of biblical texts and traditions giving birth to a theological genre known as liberation theology or theologies of liberation. Black theology is one such theology of liberation, articulated formally as black pastors and theologians engaged in the struggle to be both black and Christian amidst the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.[290]

Black theology, as a formal discipline of inquiry, began as a theological response to a crisis precipitated by the black revolution of the 1960s. According to Shockley, the Civil Rights Movement, anti-civil rights intransigence, sexism and white church reluctance to move beyond rhetoric and the safe confines of pious liberal pronouncements to basic reform, forced black people to reconstruct their worldview and religious faith.[291] In some respects, it was not so much a restructuring as a renaming. Black folklore, the invisible institution, the Negro Spirituals suggest that blacks have long resisted white anti-black civil rights intransigence. Neither white intransigence, nor black resistance to it was new. There was just a renewed fight within the heart and mind of the black youth of

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[289] V. Fabella & R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed. *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), xxi.

[290] James Cone, *For My People. Black Theology and the Black Church. Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 19960, 148.

[291] Grant Shockley, "Black Theology and Religious Education," in *Black Religious Experience. Conversations on Double Consciousness and the Work of Grant Shockley* by Charles R. Foster and Fred Smith (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 71.

that day. Stokely Carmichael, a leader in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) called it Black Power. Black Power, according to Shockley, came to signify a new understanding of one's blackness, worth, dignity, and heritage.[292]

Persons who self-identify as black liberation scholars or black liberation theologians are generally male and tend to highlight issues of race with the intent of challenging established Eurocentric tradition and of suggesting universally applicable principles based upon the particularity of the black male experience. For Shockley, black theology is the theology that articulates the significance of the black presence in a hostile white world.[293] Therefore, he seized upon the affirmations of black life emerging from the black theological discourse of that time and proposed a model of Christian education to teach persons to minister in and through a church that is open to changing demands, sensitive to emerging issues, and resilient to shock and reversals.[294] His model intentionally engaged their historical reality and life-experiences.

**The Model**

As noted previously, the Sunday School Movement, as far as Shockley was concerned, never effectively related itself to black people nor came to terms with its white racism.[295] According to Shockley, the early efforts toward the Christian education of blacks grew out of the mission impulse and assumed black intellectual inferiority.[296] "The black power movement made clear to the traditional black church that its energies,

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[292] Shockley, "Black Theology and Religious Education," 68

[293] Shockley, "Black Theology and Religious Education," 70.

[294] Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation to Consummation: A Black Perspective," 84.

[295] Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church: A Contextual Approach," 38.

[296] Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Church: A Contextual Approach," 41.

resources, and educational efforts in the future must be used more generously and more effectively in the struggle for equality, justice and peace both in the black community and in the nation.[297] To meet this objective, Shockley proposed a model of Christian education that taught the following:

1. Self-Awareness whereby blacks develop an authentic awareness of self-identity, self-determination and self-direction and are taught to regard themselves as subjects rather than objects,

2. Social Awareness whereby blacks develop the capacity through focused preaching, social liturgies, discussions and experientially guided projects relevant and responsive to the real needs of blacks in church and community to perceive the social, political, economic and political conditions that oppress them,

3. Social Analysis whereby persons develop a critical sense and develop the ability to objectify or to transcend specific situations. According to Shockley, it is only from a position of objectivity that one could view the world with a critical eye,

4. Transformation whereby blacks cultivate the capacity for self-awareness, social consciousness and critical judgment in order to do transformative things with their lives. Here Shockley emphasizes the need for black role models from the churches communities and elsewhere to exemplify liberation and to practice liberation with a sense of responsibility,

5. Praxis whereby the congregation engages in liberation activities through a learning process of action/reflection/action, and

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[297] Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation to Consummation: A Black Perspective," 83

6. Role of community whereby the community itself becomes the curriculum planning guide for all aspects of the church, including worship, fellowship, teaching, outreach, and social action.[298]

**The Assumptions**

The challenges and changes taking place for blacks both politically and socially as a result of the civil rights advances of the 1950s and 60s necessitated a religious education in kind. For Shockley, that meant religious education in the black church had to teach its members to live in and through a changing social and political climate. Black theology, for him, thus, provided the basis for an educational design of the new black church that:

1. Educates for change, even being proactive in relation to change, shaping it for responsible engagement with an open future,

2. Is prophetic, thereby being aware of the black church's responsibility to resist being co-opted and exploited as the conservator of the status quo and obligated to challenge current values and conventional wisdom,

3. Educates for liberation, by humanizing the dehumanized,

4. Is mission or unit rather than institutionally oriented, no longer preoccupied with status and image, but seizes the opportunity to formulate an agenda that will bring the black community into its destiny, and

5. Redefines its mission and ministry such that the black church remains relevant to and meeting the needs of the black community (e.g. survival, protest, conscious-raising, reform or revolution).[299]

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[298] Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation to Consummation:  A Black perspective," 86.

**The Rationale**

Black theology draws from and reflects upon the historical and contemporary experiences of black people in North America, and required black preachers to develop a theology that was distinctly black and accountable to black faith.[300] Since Shockley believed that the quality and character of the Congregational ministry depended heavily upon the quality and character of its education, he proposed an educational model that was similarly distinctively black, accountable to black faith and rooted in the black experience. His rationale for proposing black theology as a basis for Christian education was because:

1. It is congenial with and suggest a felt need to reconstruct a worldview as it concerns an entire people, and

2. It calls for the humanization of the dehumanized, the liberation of the oppressed and the empowerment of the powerless, it is been affirmed by the agenda outlined in the historic black power statement in which black pastors committed themselves to their conviction that Jesus Christ reigns in the here and now as well as in the future meaningful in the life of their respective institutions, and it raises the consciousness of black people, affirms black identity and claims liberation.[301]

**The Guidelines**

Shockley's guidelines for developing a Christian education program in black churches rooted in the emerging black theology at this time grew out of and centered

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[299] Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation to Consummation: A Black perspective," 84-85.

[300] Cone, *For My People*, 59.

[301] Shockley, "Black Theology and Christian Education," 80.

upon the experiences, relationships, and situations that black people encountered in their daily struggle for survival in a predominately white oriented society.[302] As such Shockley advocated that a Christian education program shaped by the black experience must have:

1. A theoretical and operational educational model that is conceptualized as an empowering process for the powerless,

2. A cognitive model of learning that maximizes the biblical, historical and theological sources and images of the Christian faith as authentically pro-black without being anti-white,

3. A model of learning that is holistic and that emphasizes the organic, whole nature of existence rather than the current compartmentalization of life, and

4. A model of leadership to which parents, teachers, pastors and other church leaders can see and be influenced by the development of fully functioning persons capable of impacting society.[303]

**Contributions and Challenges: Black Church Systemic Intentional-Engagement**

Shockley's black church systemic intentional-engagement model for Christian education is based primarily upon black theology thus necessitating first a brief explanation of the impacts and the implications of black theology upon black life, and second, an examination of the elements and assumptions of his model.

Slave narratives and sermons, the Negro Spirituals and other black church traditions suggest black Christians have been selective in their appropriation and/or interpretation/reinterpretations of white expressions of Christianity. In fact, according to

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[302] Shockley, "Black Theology and Christian Education," 81.

[303] Shockley, "Black Theology and Christian Education," 81.

Shockley, black people in America have historically selected from the white Christian model presented to them that which was necessary for survival as persons and rejected that which sought to destroy every vestige of their self-worth and respect.[304]

The Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20th century continued the spirit of resistance previously exercised in secret in the hush harbors and led to the systematization of the liberating black theology long articulated in the invisible institution of the black slave era in U.S. history. According to JoAnne Terrell, James Cone, father and founder of black liberation theology, seized upon the ontological implications of black power to articulate a systematic theology shaped by the existential questions of black Americans.[305] By correlating the gospel with the black experience, nascent black theology reinterpreted traditional Christianity in a way to recover from racist distortions.[306]

Black theology affirms the right of black people to live empowered lives in which their dignity, freedom and moral agency was upheld by the social, political and economic structures, thereby challenging the racist anthropological assumptions that whites used to justify white privilege.[307] Black theology failed, however, to adequately analyze the interdependency between racism, capitalism, imperialism, theology and the church.[308] Somehow black liberation theologians overlooked and/or ignored the fact that religion and other forms of cultural practice are embedded in political-economic power relations,

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[304] Shockley, "The Black Experience and Black Religions," 31.

[305] JoAnn Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood. The Cross in the African American Experience* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 93.

[306] Cone, *For My People*, 81.

[307] Terrell, 3.

[308] Cone, *For My People*, 88.

often reflecting, expressing, resisting, or even constituting those relationships.[309] Cone attributes this analytical oversight to naïveté saying that blacks based their response to white racism upon moral suasion rather than upon the tools of social analysis, believing that if the oppressor was aware of the depth of the evil of racism and its demonic consequences, then the oppressor would be morally embarrassed and stop being racist.[310]

Cone and others apparently underestimated the image of the white Christ who womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas reminds us had allowed white slaveholders to engage in black slavery with religious impunity.[311] Their failure to acknowledge the social dynamics of theology, white supremacist ideology and economics in a capitalist nation is eerily reminiscent of the response of the poor whites to Bacon's Rebellion and more likely reflects self-interests stemming from the newly opened doors of employment opportunities, particularly in seminaries and universities. In fact, Cone acknowledges that many black theologians at that time avidly promoted capitalism over socialism.[312] He says, "Although claiming to speak for the poor, we actually speak for ourselves."[313] Thus, black theology's failure to examine the links between racism, capitalism, theology and the church was more likely the result of personal interest rather than of naïveté and may be one of the contributing factors to the black church/academy divide.

Nascent black theology was written to address the white supremacist power structure, which affected both black males and black females. Cone rightly heralds the

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[309] R. A. Horsley, *Religion and Empire. People, Power and the Life of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 127.

[310] Cone, *For My People*, 88-90.

[311] Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 14.

[312] Cone, *For My People*, 94.

[313] Cone, *For My People*, 95.

black theology that emerged from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s as the most original and lasting contribution of relating creatively Christian faith and the black struggle in American society.[314] I, therefore, believe that black theology provided a reasonable and sound foundation upon which to build the black church systemic intentional-engagement model of Christian education.

Shockley's model of Christian education calls for teaching blacks self and social awareness. In these two phases, blacks develop an authentic awareness of self-identity, and in Freirean terms learn to see themselves as subjects rather than objects. Here too they are to perceive the social, political, economic and political conditions that oppress them. The answer is always the same – white supremacy is the oppression, whether it manifests as chattel slavery, sharecropping, redlining, Jim Crow, subprime lending, food deserts, racial profiling, stop and frisk, school-to-prison pipeline, colorblind or post-racial rhetoric. The civil rights movement and black power mood of the 60s yielded black pride. Black people marching, boycotting, and voting and James Brown singing, "Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud." Blacks were breaking into Hollywood, no longer restricted to maid, mammy or slave roles. Today, however, in a time of 24 hours news cycles, the advent of social media and cyber bullying, cell phones with cameras, and what I call the dreaded invention of the $9 billion hair weave industry, blacks, particularly black women, are bombarded with images and false standards of beauty, namely near-anorexic-thin, white with blue eyes, slender nose, and long blonde hair, which makes it increasingly difficult to develop an authentic self-awareness of black as beautiful.

Shockley's model includes a social analysis whereby persons objectify or transcend specific situations. Yet, black theology acknowledges that the black experience

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[314] Cone, *For My People*, 79.

is the starting point for theological reflections and that affirming black life is the intent. However, if education is either for liberation or against liberation and therefore in favor of domination as Freire suggests, then transcending one's racial/ethnic identity that has been shaped under oppressive conditions in the U.S., seems to give credence to white normativity. Sometimes just by living to see another day or living free of disease, addiction or arrest, black people transcend the socio-political and economic traps that defeat many in the black community. However, to objectify one's black racial identity is to risk believing the colorblind and post-racial rhetoric of the new racism. Moreover, there's no place of objectivity if, as liberation scholars argue, social location impacts perception. Finally, whites claim to speak objectively, unaffected by their race and therefore, universally. Why must I transcend my social location in order to speak passionately and transformatively?

The fourth aspect of Shockley's model is transformation, whereby blacks engage in transformative behavior by reason of their self-awareness, social consciousness and critical judgment. This fourth aspect assumes an operating paradigm in the black church of what James Fowler calls individuated reflective faith, whereby persons are able to examine and make critical choices about the defining elements of their identity and their faith.[315] Shockley's model assumes that persons in the black church have been encouraged, taught or otherwise prepared to deconstruct dogmas and deeply held religious beliefs and to reconstruct one's own religious beliefs in light of such critical examinations and in spite of push back from one church family. Individuated reflective faith is the fifth of seven stages of faith and human development Fowler has identified.

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[315] James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 49.

Here, according to Fowler, what were previously tacit and unexamined convictions and beliefs must now become matters of more explicit commitment and accountability.[316]

Praxis is the fifth component of Shockley's model and requires congregations to engage in the process of action/reflection/action. Indeed, praxis is an essential component of Christian education. It emphasizes the importance of evaluating critically any theology in order to identify strengths and weaknesses, of building upon the strengths and of avoiding as much as possible a repetition of the weaknesses.[317] Moreover, according to Cone, "Unless we look honestly at our past, it is unlikely that we shall know what to do in the present for shaping a creative black future."[318] Womanist ethicist Katie Cannon also encourages praxis saying, "As life-affirming moral agents, we have a responsibility to study the ideological hegemony of the past so that we do not remain doomed to the recurring cyclical patterns of hermeneutical distortions in the present."[319] Praxis, from a Freirean perspective, allows knowledge to remain fresh, relevant, and applicable and is particularly important in black church settings to help our black children to see that as much as the theo-political and socio-economic circumstances have changed for black people, they have also remained the same.

Finally, Shockley's model suggests that the community plays a role by becoming the curriculum planning guide for the various aspects of the church. This element of Shockley's model stands in stark contrast to the educational model of many churches, which pattern themselves after white educational programs to provide a more proper

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[316] Fowler, 49.

[317] Cone, *For My People*, 79.

[318] Cone, *For My People*, 1.

[319] Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie's Cannon Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 46.

religious instruction,[320] and recognizes that we are only fully persons when we are in community.[321]  Community is an essential element of Christian education because it suggests an attempt to address the concerns of the black community beyond the four walls of the church. The community aspect of Shockley's model is particularly noteworthy as it is a recognition that while meaning-making happens within particular historical, political, economic and cultural context, it is not imposed upon people, but is negotiated among people.[322] In today's context, however, where some churches are commuter churches, meaning their membership may not be the residents of the local community, the needs of the community might differ widely from the needs of the church membership. Under these circumstances, the church must be more engaged in local government and be more intentional in local outreach to ensure meeting the needs of the local community. Generically speaking, of course, given the national statistics regarding black life in the U.S., black churches can offer a number of programs to assist persons in the community including programs to:  increase literacy, high school graduation and college admissions rates, develop and enhance vocational and job search skills, provide information on parenting or anger, financial, or health management, community re-entry after imprisonment, caring for aging or ill parents, register voters, community organizing and issue-specific advocacy (i.e. protesting death of an inmate while in police custody), etc.

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[320] Yolanda Y. Smith, *Reclaiming the Spirituals. New Possibilities for African American Christian Education* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), ix.

[321] Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People. Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 29.

[322] Jack L. Seymour, Margaret Ann Crain and Joseph V. Crockett, *Educating Christians. The Intersection of Meaning, Learning and Vocation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 54.

By blending African religious concepts with colonial Christianity, black people were able to develop a religious identity of their own.[323] Nascent black theology offered a systematic and constructive methodology for examining and for affirming black life in a white racist and patriarchal society, and for encouraging blacks to resist every oppressive force by any means necessary. In fact, the rhetoric of black liberation theology demonstrates one of the creative ways blacks have responded to oppression.[324] The socio-economic conditions of many in the black community, however, justifiably call the efficacy of black liberation rhetoric into question. In fact, Anne Wimberly has suggested that the high moment of liberation theology has passed.[325] She adds that black people, particularly black youth, are asking, "Why and in whom shall we have faith?"[326] If Christian education is to have a liberating impact upon oppressed communities, then the discourse must deal with and engage the social, political and economic realities and implications of the doctrines of the church. Since the founding of this nation, the social, the political, the economical and the theological has always been impacted by race. Shockley recognized that effective Christian education must be rooted in the experiences of and be responsive to the challenges confronting any people. He responded to the Black Power mood of the time offering his "Black Church Systemic Intentional-Engagement Model" to address the changing mood of the country during the mid-20th century. Similarly, the agenda for future Christian educational inquiry and implementation in the 21st century must consider the challenges of the global village and must, according to

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[323] Cannon, *Katie's Cannon*, 115.

[324] Terrell, 96.

[325] A. E. S. Wimberly, *Nurturing Faith and Hope. Black Worship as a Model for Christian Education* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), xvii.

[326] Wimberly, *Nurturing Faith and Hope*, xvii.

Yolanda Smith, explore new models of Christian education that will affirm and celebrate the uniqueness of the African American experience, nurture the Christian faith, develop quality educational programs, promote social action within and beyond the African American community.[327]

**Anne Streaty Wimberly – Soul Stories**

Removed from the intense militant shouts for black power from the 1960s, but no less desirous than Shockley of empowering black people, Anne Streaty Wimberly, Professor Emerita of Christian Education and Director of the Youth Hope-Builders Academy at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, GA, offers a model of Christian education that is also rooted in and reflective of the black experience in the U.S. Wimberly calls her model story-linking.

Story-linking draws upon the oral tradition of enslaved Africans and encourages contemporary believers to link their everyday story to stories of faith in Scripture and to stories of faith in African American heritage. By so doing, modern day believers find strength and courage to deal with the vicissitudes of life and also to identify creative ways for ethical decision making when dealing with age-old problems (e.g. oppression, racism, dehumanization).

In story-linking, participants are invited to reflect upon positive and problematic contemporary stories, to consider how liberation and vocation are exhibited and inhibited, to identify options and to make decisions that create the potential for new and ongoing experiences of liberation and vocation in community, and to link personal stories with the Christian stories found in Scripture and with African American Christian faith heritage

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[327] Smith, 6.

stories.[328] She encourages Christian educators to employ the story-linking process as an instrument of liberation and vocation.

Five assumptions inform Wimberly's story-linking model. These are:

1. Christian education can be strengthened or extended beyond the present paradigm by reclaiming the story-linking process found in the early slave community,

2. The story-linking model is appropriately undertaken in inter-generational Christian education settings,

3. There is similarity between the issues as well as the contexts that are addressed in Scripture and the issues and the contexts African Americans address today,

4. The story-linking model can be used appropriately in traditional Christian education settings such as the church school, Bible study settings, and in combinations of age/stage groups, home and other community settings, and

5. The story-linking model holds importance for Christian education leaders, teachers, and participants alike.[329]

The intent of the model is to encourage critical reflection upon our day-to-day realities in light of the pillars of the faith who serve as models and encouragers, and also to engage a process aimed toward liberation and vocation from a Christian perspective.[330]

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[328] Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories. African American Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 21.

[329] Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 14.

[330] Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 21.

For Wimberly, vocation and liberation are interrelated. She says, "When we see purpose for our lives that is related to caring for and helping others, we are liberated to be in vocation."[331] Story-linking thus enables African American Christian educators to respond to the liberating and vocational needs of the black community by giving voice, meaning, and hope to their life stories.

Wimberly's four-phase story-linking process begins by engaging an everyday story from the following six places. Depending upon the comfort level of participants the story assessed may be a personal one shared by a participant or may be a case study.

1. Self-identity – how we answer the question who am I, which is shaped by who we perceive ourselves to be as we relate to the world around us,

2. Social contexts – related to our self-identity, people in our neighborhoods, workplace, schools or churches that are either like us or different from us,

3. Interpersonal relationships – persons past and present with whom we are in relationship, which includes family, friends, political figures, inventors, philosophers, biblical characters, etc.,

4. Life events – positive and negative events that occur to us over the course of a lifetime, events that we herald or celebrate and events that cause suffering or concern,

5. Life meanings – thoughts and feelings about our value and dignity as human beings, includes thoughts and feelings about our purpose, and

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[331] Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 26.

6. Our unfolding story plot – meaning we assign to the above components, and how we choose to respond to events in our life.[332]

In the second phase of the story-linking process, material (i.e. personal story or case study) is considered from the perspective of a Scripture reading, and five activities are suggested to guide the discussion:

1. The bible story is disclosed,

2. The participants focus on the story or text as mirror,

3. They enter into partnership with the characters of the bible story,

4. They envision God's action today, and

5. They anticipate their ongoing response to God.[333]

In the third phase of the story-linking process, the everyday story is engaged from the perspective of African American heritage. These stories serve as encouraging examples in trying times. According to Wimberly,

> African American Christian faith heritage stories convey to African Americans today how the Christian life can be lived faithfully. These stories convey to us a liberation mind-set that was at the center of the Christian life of African Americans in the past and that is worthy of emulation in the present. The stories also describe liberation and Christian vocational strategies used in the past are instructive for the present.[334]

In the fourth and final phase of the story-linking process, participants engage in Christian ethical decision making. Assessments and activities in this phase, according to Wimberly, are designed to explore options for liberative and Christian vocational actions

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[332] Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 40-42.

[333] Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 44-45.

[334] Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 45.

that have constructive outcomes for participants and others.[335] This phase is concerned with faith with works. It is understanding that liberating activity does not benefit us alone, but others as well.

For Wimberly, the story-linking process allows participants to achieve eight dimensions of liberation:

1. Knowing one's life as a gift and oneself as a valued human being rather than being shackled by how society or anyone else sees you. One sees oneself as created and valued by God,

2. Having the wherewithal by which to receive and to maintain the basic necessities of life, being assured of having what is necessary to survive with human dignity and respect,

3. Being equal participants and beneficiaries in the political, occupational, educational, residential, health care, and civic systems of the community and the nation, which is liberation from human disenfranchisement to enfranchisement,

4. Having positive human valuing or positive regard from others, free from denigration and dehumanization,

5. Seeing possibilities, being hopeful and liberated from miseducation,

6. Sharing oneself and one's story with others and recognizing the need to receive the same,

7. Allowing the story of God and the good news of Jesus Chris to direct their lives; this is liberation through religious transformation, and

8. Accepting responsibility for contributing to the liberation of others.[336]

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[335] Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 46.

**Contributions and Challenges: Story-Linking**

As stated earlier, Wimberly's story-linking process gives voice, meaning, and hope to the life stories of participants. It affirms for the storyteller that someone is listening (voice), that whatever they've experienced is helpful to someone else experiencing the same thing or helpful in preventing someone else from experiencing the same thing (meaning), that whatever wisdom gleaned or sacrificed made by the storyteller benefits the listener who can now enjoy a different standard of living or have better opportunities (hope). This type of exchange can be especially meaningful for persons who participated in the civil rights movement and for those of us who benefited from that participation. Their conviction, their participation in sit-ins and marches meant that another generation did not have to sit in the back of the bus or attend segregated schools, and can vote without having to guess the number of bubbles in a bar of soap. Their life has made a difference to untold millions, and serves as an example and source of inspiration and encouragement, and a reminder that we stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us, and that we have an obligation to the generations that shall come after us to not lose what ground has been gained and to leave a greater legacy than we inherited.

The process is rooted in the oral tradition of the African people. It, therefore, pays homage to the gifts, the skills, the beliefs, the practices, the culture of a people presumed lost, inferior, less than human. The story-linking process also lets their voices be heard and their customs be recognized.

The story-linking process encompasses most, if not all, areas of one's life in light of one's profession of faith and assists Christians in critically examining their individual

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[336] Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 24-26.

and communal existence in terms of their everyday existence, claims of faith, African American Christian heritage and history and Christian ethical decision making with the expressed intent of liberating self and others. I like and appreciate the comprehensive nature of the process.

My one concern is what seems like a restrictive use of the word "Christian" as it could be misconstrued to suggest a single monolithic Christian view. White slaveholders were Christian, and their expression of Christianity differed from that of the enslaved. Moreover, to restrict African American heritage role models to Christian alone would exclude some exemplary black role models who have overcome adversity and whose life can be and is a source of strength and encouragement for many, such as former Nation of Islam leader Malcolm X, who successfully turned his life around after a time in prison and challenged white America on its racism,  former heavy weight boxer Mohammad Ali (formerly known Cassius Clay) who lived the convictions of his faith by choosing to serve time in jail rather than to fight in the Vietnam war, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (formerly known as Lew Alcindor) who played on six NBA championship teams or O'Shea Jackson (better known as Ice Cube) a black actor, writer, producer, director who rose above the gansta rap of his youth with NWA to the multi-gifted entertainer we know and love from the Barbershop and Friday movies. These men are all Muslims and their life stories can serve as an example and source of inspiration for others. Moreover, as some of the captured Africans are believed to have been Muslim, there is reason to believe that some African Muslim traditions are a part of African cultural and black church traditions. Award-wining singer and entertainer Tina Turner, is another example of someone who is not a Christian, but whose story can be exemplary and inspirational to someone in the

African American community. Turner was unable to find strength to leave an abusive relationship with her then husband Ike Turner until she turned to Buddhism. In other words, Christianity is not the only source in which blacks have found strength, courage, hope, faith, inspiration, motivation. As a descendant of a people excluded in the name of religion, I'm hesitant to exclude anyone from being a hero or s/hero simply because they are not Christian. Ian Markham, Dean of Hartford Seminary and Professor of Theology and Ethics, reminds us, "The church should see God's hope everywhere; we need to be connected and engaged with God's grace wherever it is found." Moreover, we forget, Jesus was not a Christian.

The story-linking process is flexible. It is usable in different settings and across generations, and across cultures. It allows for use of case studies in spaces where sharing intimate details of one's life might be too uncomfortable, which is particularly important when discussing biblical stories involving acts of violence (i.e. incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters and the rape of King David's daughter Tamar by her brother Amnon) that may have happened to a parishioner. Still the process requires some level of trust among participants, that whatever is shared will be kept confidential, and that level of sharing will possibly build trust, lasting friendships and stronger communities among those who do share. Were the story-linking process to be used across cultures, one might find more similarities than differences among oppressed people, and build alliances in the struggle for racial justice and racial equality.

Shockley's model seems a bit theoretical, whereas Wimberly's model seems practical/interactive. Her model is also multi-layered and risks inappropriate identification with biblical characters. Old Testament womanist scholar Renita Weems,

for example, says that the bible has been particularly problematic for African American women. Weems says, "The Bible has been the most consistent and effective book that those in power have used to restrict and censure the behavior of African American women."[337] Weems, therefore, encourages black women not to identify with the dominant male perspective imbedded in scripture, which is usually the voice of the victor, but rather to use whatever means necessary to recover the voice of the oppressed within the biblical texts.[338]

Christian education should be a corrective to the mis-education of the public school system and the misrepresentation of blacks and blackness and of whites and whiteness in public imaging. Therefore any model of Christian education should address the theo-political nature and socio-economic consequences of our existence. Both Shockley and Wimberly examine the Bible, the Christ and the current sociological, political events and material consequences relative to black life to correct the mis-education of black people and to affirm black life. Wimberly's story-linking is a noteworthy contribution to black life, to the life of the church, and to Christian Education pedagogy.

**Yolanda Smith – Reclaiming the Spirituals**

Yolanda Smith, assistant professor of Christian Education at Yale University Divinity School in New Haven, CT, believes that a holistic Christian education program should embrace what she calls the triple-heritage of the black experience: the African, the African American and the Christian aspects of black identity formation in this country.

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[337] Renita J. Weems, "Reading Her Way through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible," in *Stony the Road We Trod. African American Biblical Interpretation* ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 63.

[338] Weems, 73.

"Teaching the triple-heritage in a positive light," she says, "can lead to a sense of pride in African American heritage and allow persons of the African Diaspora to live with confidence, self-respect, dignity, and freedom in society."[339]

According to Smith, all aspects of the triple-heritage are contained in the spirituals. In fact, it was the combination of African religious traditions, the African American experience of U.S. chattel slavery and the Christian experience of hope that gave birth to the Spirituals. Therefore, Smith advocates reclaiming the spirituals as a means of teaching the triple-heritage of the black experience. For Smith, there are four characteristics of a Christian educational model informed by the spirituals: communal, creative, critical and cooperative.[340]

The Spirituals are communal in the sense that they were sung in community. In fact, they were sung in a manner known as call-and-response, where the leader sang a question or phrase and the congregation responded with an answer or echoed the phrase. Symbolically, this back and forth represents the dialogue that takes place between educators, theologians, teachers, students, curriculum designers and curriculum users. "Because each person involved in the educational process brings something valuable to the dialogue, anyone may begin the call-and-response at any time, engaging the entire community in a dynamic exchange of ideas and experiences."[341]

The spirituals are improvisational and can be re-worded for specific-events. For example, Smith highlights how "Don' Let Nobody Turn You Aroun'" was adapted to

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[339] Smith, 1.

[340] Smith, 17.

[341] Smith, 17.

"Don' let segregation turn you aroun'" during the civil rights movement in the 1960s.[342] In other words, they are creative. Similarly, a triple-heritage model of Christian education is also always in the process of creation.[343] Drawing upon resources and current events, a Christian education program based upon this model would likewise keep abreast of current events impacting the nation, the local church, the local community, and congregants and incorporate creative ideas, strategies, programs to address these ever changing issues and concerns. The spirituals also used code words, words that could be interpreted in more than one way. "Steal away," for example, might refer to steal away to Jesus for meditation, prayer, comfort, or might refer to the intent to board freedom's train north to Canaan on the Underground Railroad.

The enslaved critiqued the hypocrisy of the slaveholding Christians and so sung, "Ev'rybody talkin' bout heav'n ain't goin' there." Likewise, a Christian education paradigm that utilizes the triple-heritage model like the Spirituals will engage participants in critique of oppressive structures. This model, according to Smith, seeks to empower African Americans to bring about liberation and social change by involving them in a liberative praxis that stimulates critical reflection and action within the community.[344] Smith also notes that while some approaches to critical engagement can be destructive and divisive, the triple-heritage model challenges African Americans to seek creative alternatives that unify and empower.[345]

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[342] Smith, 18.

[343] Smith, 18.

[344] Smith, 18.

[345] Smith, 18.

The spirituals were used to aid many in their quest for freedom from slavery's grip. As such, the Spirituals may announce secret meetings, identify gathering places, signal imminent escapes, and motivate the community for action.[346] In fact, Harriett Tubman used the spirituals to facilitate many escapes.[347] Christian education programs patterned after the triple-heritage model of the spirituals are, therefore, cooperative, united in purpose, though diverse. "The spirituals thus motivate and inspire persons toward action, allowing for unity in diversity and strength in numbers."[348]

According to Smith, there are three key insights for teaching the triple-heritage in the African American Church. These are:

1. Historical knowledge especially as it relates to people of African descent, which of necessity includes a broad understanding of African history, an understanding of slavery, racism and oppression in the U.S., evolution of Christian thought and practice in general and African American Christian thought and practice in particular,

2. Cultural sensitivity, encouraging African Americans to celebrate their unique culture and value the contributions of African and African American people and challenge the church to address both the individual and the communal needs of the congregation (i.e. economic, social, political, racial oppression/racial empowerment), and

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[346] Smith, 19.

[347] Smith, 19.

[348] Smith, 20.

3. Solidarity with persons of African descent in the struggle for liberation by promoting education for justice and liberation.[349]

**Contributions and Challenges: Triple-Heritage**

Smith's model, like that of Wimberly and Shockley, is attentive to the needs of the black community. Also, like that of the story-linking model proposed by Wimberly, it draws upon the practices and customs of our African ancestors who survived the harrowing ride across the Atlantic Ocean and who survived the brutality of nearly 150 years of slave life. Therefore, it too shows respect to the tribesmen and tribeswomen dehumanized by the slave experience and gives voice to their hope and place to their suffering for more than the wealth building of slaveholding families and for the wealth building and world domination of this capitalist nation. Moreover, the origins of Christian education in the Black Church are rooted in the intersection of Christianity, North American slavery, and the struggle for survival and liberation.[350] That intersection is captured in the spirituals. Therefore any model of Christian education based upon the spirituals does capture the three primary aspects of black identity formation in the U.S. and provides a strong and solid backdrop for a liberating pedagogy illustrating just a few attributes that enable blacks to survive – a sense of community, creativity (i.e. folklore, double-speak), the ability to critically assess the situation and the ability to cooperate (i.e. UGRR).

The Spirituals embody the dynamic faith of the enslaved community, a faith deeply rooted in the lived experience of the people, rather than in a rigid belief system

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[349] Smith, 49.

[350] Stacy-Floyd et al, *Black Church Studies*, 156.

and doctrinal positions.[351] As such, particular attention must be paid to the theology expressed, that it is sound theology, not merely feel good theology of an oppressed people as is often expressed in song. Nevertheless, a Christian education model that embraces the triple-heritage of the African American experience embodied in the spirituals would be expected to teach and to embody the communal, creative, critical and cooperative spirit of the spirituals as well, which is what made it a source of inspiration to many to be able to endure the hardness and harshness of slave life and what made it an effective tool for use in the Underground Railroad as a means of messaging.  The model Smith proposes is a significant contribution to the life and legacy of the black church and Christian education pedagogy.

**Looking Back to Move Forward**

Sankofa is a West African term that means return and get it. It is sometimes symbolized by a bird looking back over its shoulder. The Sankofa bird symbolizes the importance and wisdom of learning from the past. Both Wimberly and Smith demonstrate that importance by developing Christian education paradigms that are rooted in the past, in the culture and traditions of the West African people stripped of their dignity, their language, their home, their families, their humanity, presumed to have nothing to give but their physical labor and their genes to another generation of slave laborers in America. Instead, they have left a heritage of faith and of survival and a rich tradition worthy of emulation that reminds us of who we are in the 21st because of them.

An African proverb says, "I am because we are." And we are, in the words of Maya Angelou, the hope and the dream of the slave. As such, we too need to leave a legacy in the land that children yet to be born can look back and say in the words of

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[351] Smith, 56-57.

gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, my soul looks back and wonders, how I made it over. These black religious educators highlighted in this chapter have looked back to an African past and have answered the call of black voices crying out, saying black lives matter. Religious educators of all racial/ethnic backgrounds, likewise, need to respond to that call saying a definite yes, black lives do matter and saying a definite yes, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, here am I Lord send me. By building upon lessons from the past, as well as models set forth by these educators, those of us in Christian Education today – and in the future – can move closer to a liberatory model that joins in responding to the call to set the captives free and to lift up a mirror to show all the *Imago Dei*.

## Chapter Five

## The Underground Railroad in History and in Hope

According to legend, a white Kentucky slave owner was in hot pursuit of his fleeing property when he lost sight of this black man who was otherwise in plain view. In frustration and disappointment, the Kentuckian exclaimed, "The nigger must have gone off on an underground road."[352] Over time, the telling and retelling of this story in conjunction with the development and expansion of the railway system became the behind-the-scene account of what has come to be known as the Underground Railroad (UGRR), a secret society that enabled thousands of black people to escape a lifetime of human bondage.

## A Movement that Moved the Nation

Despite this suggestion of a hidden, underground road, the UGRR was not a hidden passageway or an intricate web of underground roads or tunnels in which runaway slaves mysteriously disappeared. Rather, the UGRR was a network of abolitionists who worked to subvert an otherwise socially, politically and religiously established and accepted system of the lifetime enslavement of and domestic terror against people of African descent. These abolitionists represented a cross-section of the North American populace of the time: black, white, Native American, free-born, formerly enslaved, wealthy, working poor, educated, illiterate, affluent, farmers, seamen, preachers, blacksmiths, lawyers, the enslaved etc., who contributed whatever resources they had (i.e. route information, shelter, legal advice, transportation, money, clothes, public platform, food, etc.) to advocate for black emancipation and/or to assist those who dared to board

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[352] Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom a Comprehensive History* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc. 2006), 45.

the northward bound train to Canaan in their quest for freedom from being some white person's property. According to Professor Wilbur Siebert,

> The abolitionists, as a class, were people whose remembrances of the ante-bellum days were deepened by the clear definition of their governing principles, the abiding sense of their religious convictions, and the extraordinary conditions, legal and social, under which their acts were performed.[353]

The primary participants in this civil rights/human rights movement, it would seem, had a different theological anthropology than many in the U.S. at that time who operated within the confines of the socio-political, theo-political, hegemonic status quo. As such, their religious convictions led them to believe and therefore to behave counter to the prevailing hegemonic, white supremacist ideology and practice of that era that condoned the trade, enslavement, dehumanization and overall ill-treatment of blacks. Their conviction and corresponding counter-hegemonic efforts enabled thousands of black people to escape slavery's grip and to take their place along the freedom trail to help other fugitives in their great escape. In fact, the UGRR was:

> The nation's first great movement of civil disobedience since the American Revolution, it engaged thousands of citizens in the active subversion of federal law and the prevailing mores of their communities, and for the first time asserted the principle of personal, active responsibility for other's human rights.[354]

Of necessity, the UGRR operated in secrecy to protect the identity of its participants who, if discovered, could be enslaved, re-enslaved, killed, fined, imprisoned, maimed, or beaten, and of course, some were. Still the UGRR was more than myth and legend with black people magically disappearing from plain view. The UGRR was a movement with far-reaching political and moral consequences that changed relations

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[353] Siebert, 12.

[354] Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan. The Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America's First Civil Rights Movement* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 5.

between the races in ways more radical than any witnessed since the America Revolution.[355] According to Fergus Bordewich, the UGRR was a direct contributing cause of the Civil War.[356]

While the causes of Civil War are debatable, the impact of the UGRR upon the lives of participants, upon the enslaved and the slave owners left on the plantations, and upon the politics, economics and social structure of this country is undeniable. In this chapter, I highlight select participants and the general operating process of the UGRR. To put the UGRR in context, I include a brief discussion of what made it necessary (i.e. U.S. chattel slavery) and what made it successful in achieving its liberating objectives.

## Birth of a Nation

Fifteenth century European exploration led to the "discovery" of what became the "Americas." However, it was sixteenth century European expansion that led to European colonization of the Americas and the need for slave labor to mass produce various crops (e.g. tobacco, cotton, rice, sugar) for export and wealth building of this capitalist nation. The indigenous inhabitants proved unsuitable for the monumental task of tilling the soil. One, Native American men believed farming to be women's work, so they often refused. Moreover, they were in their homeland, familiar with the terrain and thus able to escape and to hide among unconquered tribes across the country. Two, they often died of disease after contact with the Europeans. Catholic priest and advocate for Native Americans, Bartolomé De Las Casas, whose father sailed with Christopher Columbus, believed that Africans were better suited for the hard labor required to exploit this new land of its

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[355] Bordewich, 8.

[356] Bordewich, 6.

material resources and financial opportunities. He therefore suggested that Africans should be imported to meet the labor demand of the developing nation.

Like many Europeans, Las Casas saw Africans as more resistant to European diseases, as hardier and as more capable of strenuous physical labor than Native people.[357] Also as newcomers to this land, Africans were not familiar with the terrain and thus were less likely to run away to places unknown. Moreover, by virtue of their distinct skin color, Africans could not easily hide among Native Americans. Nor could the Africans find refuge among the Native American people either. Africans were also knowledgeable of planting and harvesting of various crops. In fact, according to Jaqueline Tobin and Raymond Dobard, plantation owners placed specific orders with slave traders to provide Africans already skilled in agriculture, specifically rice, sugar and indigo.[358]

The first Africans brought to this country for the purpose of meeting the labor demand of this new nation landed in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. While these 20 people were technically considered indentured servants, not slaves, and were able to obtain their freedom after a contracted pre-determined time of service just like indentured servants of European descent, the laws of the land soon changed to ensure lifelong service of blacks and their offspring. In 1662, for example, Virginia established a law that allowed the slave/free status to follow the maternal line rather than to follow the paternal lineage as was the case according to English common law. This shift ensured that children produced by the union of an enslaved black woman and a free white man would be enslaved rather

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[357] Karen Teel, *Racism and the Image of God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 18.

[358] Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: First Anchor Books Edition, 2000), 55.

than free.[359] In 1664, Maryland passed a law stipulating that offspring between black men and white women would be enslaved, as well as the white woman herself, at least for the duration of her black husband's lifetime.

One-by-one, each of the 13 original colonies developed and implemented slave codes. By the time of the Revolutionary war with Britain, slavery was the law of the land for anyone of African descent. However, these slave codes merely legalized, put on the books as it were, what was already being practiced in society. In other words, these slave codes did not establish slavery, but rather acknowledged its presence, sanctioned it and regulated its conduct.[360] These codes, for example, stated that slaves served for a lifetime, were chattel property, and were able to be bought and sold independently of the land.[361]

**A Harsh Reality, A Brutal Existence**

Despite pictures and movies by the white-owned and white-controlled media depicting enslaved blacks playing the fiddle, smiling, singing, dancing and having a jolly old time, slave life was brutal. From sun up to sun down, enslaved men and women engaged in physically demanding work in the tobacco, rice and cotton fields or in the houses of owners and traders of human flesh. Black children were expected to work as soon as they were old enough to be useful, pregnant women worked almost to the point of giving birth, and after childbirth women returned to the fields quickly with little time lost.[362] Those who worked in the field were under the watchful eye of the overseer,

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[359] James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and the Making of America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 30.

[360] Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic. An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slaver*y (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10.

[361] Horton and Horton, 32.

[362] Horton and Horton, 43.

whereas those who worked in the house were under the watchful eye of the owner. Women, particularly young girls were at high risk for being raped by either the owner or the overseer. In fact rape was a common method of torture used by white slavers to subdue recalcitrant black women.[363] Rape was also a cost-effective means of increasing the cash crop of enslaved black bodies and increasing their wealth since mulattoes, according to bell hooks, frequently brought a higher price and were easier to sell.[364]

The enslaved had no rights and lived under constant threat of punishment: the lash or whipping, the sale away from or sale of a love one, or other forms of punishment. Men, women and children were all at risk for discipline for the least little infraction, walking or working too slow, singing too loud, not preparing food to taste of the mistress, not performing work to the satisfaction of the overseer, not properly hanging clothes on the line to dry, not properly setting the table for dinner, learning to read, which whites believed made slaves discontent. Ironically, whites of that era did not think slavery made the enslaved discontent, but rather it was the ability to read that made slaves discontent.

"Slaves who transgressed could look forward to a wide range of gruesome punishments including whipping, branding, nose slitting, amputation of ears, toes, fingers, hand and feet, castration and burning at the stake.[365] White mistresses would even beat black women for being raped by their white owners, their mistress' white husband. Since it was common practice for a young slave girl to sleep in the same

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[363] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 18.

[364] hooks, *Ain't a Woman*, 40.

[365] Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 57-58.

bedroom with the master and mistress, sexual assault was made more convenient.[366] hooks recounts a story in which a white mistress saw her husband raping a 13 year old slave girl and responded "by beating the girl and locking her in a smokehouse."[367] "It was painfully ironic that slave women victimized by slave masters could find themselves targets of the wrath of the master's jealous wife."[368]

**Sick and Tired of Being Sick of Tired**

As one might imagine, slave life was not only physically demanding and spiritually draining, but mentally and emotionally tiresome and annoying. For some, moreover, it was a fate worse than death, which made many enslaved men and women willing to try anything to be free from the daily barrage of dehumanizing assaults, physical and sexual abuse and labor exploitation. Some, such as Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey, chose open rebellion that ended within days and was doomed to fail from the start because of the power of the hegemony to militarily enforce its will. Others chose a less confrontational path of resistance, but no less dangerous – escape via the Underground Railroad that freed more and lasted longer.

Fugitives had to be creative when planning and executing their escape plans. They, therefore, employed various means to increase the chances of a successful escape, namely cross-dressing, passing, even carrying passes written by white slave owners. It is assumed that many fled enslavement because they feared being sold "down south." While fear may have been the rationale for some, others fled because they were, in the words of Fannie Lou Hamer, "sick and tired of being sick and tired." Passengers of the UGRR

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[366] hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 25.

[367] hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 37.

[368] Horton and Horton, 123.

were determined to have liberty even at the cost of life.[369] Following are stories from

people who reached their breaking point, determined to have liberty at any cost and fled

the peculiar institution via the Underground Railroad:

> Mary fled from Petersburg. She had been the mother of 15 children, four of whom had been sold away from her; one was still held in slavery in Petersburg; the others were all dead. She (Mrs. Reeves) being of a jealous disposition caused me to be hired out with a hard family where I was much abused, frequently flogged and stinted for food.[370]

> William and Ellen Craft, a female slave in male attire, fled as a white planter with her black husband playing the part of her body servant. William and Ellen were slaves in the State of Georgia. After thinking of various ways that might be tried, it occurred to them that one might act the part of master and the other the part of servant. Ellen being fair enough to pass for white of necessity would be transformed into a young planter for the time being. She needed only to dress in fine male attire and have her hair cut in a style usually worn by young men, but she had no facial hair, could not write and had a female's voice. So they made her as lame as possible. They gave her a toothache and covered her face with bandages, placed her right arm in a sling and cane in her left hand, which gave her an excuse for not having to sign her name and made her hard of hearing, so she didn't have to speak. In other words, overwhelmingly helpless such that the black servant took care of all of his needs. In this way, they did not look suspicious or out of the ordinary. Scarcely had they arrived on free soil when the rheumatism departed, the right arm was unslung, the toothache was gone, the beardless face was unmuffled, the deaf heard and spoke, the blind saw and the lame leaped as a hart in the presence of astonished friends of the slave. The facts of this unparalleled Underground Rail Road feat were fully established by the most unquestionable evidence.[371]

> Henry "Box" Brown was decidedly an unhappy piece of property in the city of Richmond, Virginia. In the condition of a slave he felt that it would be impossible for him to remain. Full well did he know, however, that it was no holiday task to escape the vigilance of Virginia slave-hunters, or the wrath of an enraged master for committing the unpardonable sin of attempting to escape to a land of liberty. He therefore hit upon a new invention altogether, which was to have himself boxed up and forwarded to Philadelphia direct by express. Two feet eight inches deep, two feet wide, and three feet long were the exact dimension of the box,

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[369] William Still, *The Underground Railroad Authentic Narratives and First-Hand Accounts* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2007), xiv.

[370] Still, "*Mary Epps*," 43-44.

[371] Still, "*William and Ellen Craft*," 199-210.

lined with baize. His resources with regard to food and water consisted of one bladder of water and a few small biscuits. His mechanical implement to meet the death struggle for fresh air was one large gimlet. Satisfied that it would be far better to peril his life for freedom in this way than to remain under the galling yoke of slavery, he entered his box, which was safely nailed up and hooped with five hickory hoops, and was then addressed by his friend. It was 26 hours from the time he left Richmond until his arrival in the City of Brotherly Love. The notice, 'this side up' did not avail with the different expressmen. For a while they actually had the box upside down and had him on his head for miles. Finally arriving at the designated address, with doors locked, Mr. McKim rapped quietly on the lid of the box and called out, All right? Instantly came the answer from within, alright sir! Upon opening the box, out jumped a gentlemen wet as if he had come up out of the Delaware. He soon remarked that before leaving Richmond, he had selected for his arrival-hymn (if he lived) the Psalm beginning with these words: I waited patiently for the Lord, and He heard my prayer! Those who witnessed this strange resurrection were not only elated at his success, but were made to sympathize more deeply than ever before with the slave.[372]

Pete Matthews, alias Samuel Sparrow – up to the age of 35, Pete had worn the yoke steadily, if not patiently under William S. Matthews, of Oak Hall, near Temperanceville, in the State of VA. Pete said that his master was not a hard man, but the man to whom he was hired, George Matthews, was a very cruel man. I might as well be in the penitentiary as in his hands. Nevertheless the violence of the master did not abate until he had beaten Pete over the head and body til he was weary, inflecting severe injuries. A great change was at once wrought in Pete's mind. He was now ready to adopt any plan that might hold out the least encouragement to escape. He had but $3, but he was determined to make the amount answer his purposes under the circumstances. The time arrived and Pete bade farewell to Slavery, resolved to follow the North Star, with his pistol in hand ready for action. After travelling about 200 miles away from home he unexpectedly came face-to-face with a former master who was bent upon stopping him. Pete held on to his pistol, but moved as fast as his wearied limbs would allow. Looking over his shoulder, he found that a regular chase was being made after him, so in his hour of peril, Pete's legs saved him. After this, Pete had more confidence in his understandings than in his old pistol although he held onto it until he reached Philadelphia. Pete was christened Samuel Sparrows, had the rust of Slavery washed off as clean as possible and the Committee furnishing him with clean clothes, a ticket, and letter of introduction, and started him on Canada-ward, looking quite respectable.[373]

Joseph was well acquainted with the auction block, having been sold three times and having the misfortune to fall into the hands of a cruel master each time. He

[372] Still, "*Henry Box Brown*," 49-51.

[373] Still, "*Pete Matthews, alias Samuel Sparrows*," 154-156.

had been beaten and knocked around shamefully. Joe could not stand the burdens and abuses which Sadler was inclined to heap upon him. He concluded to leave his four little children to whom he appeared warmly attached and his wife, and join his brother on the UGRR.[374]

Robert, Joseph's younger brother, was owned by Robert Slater, Esq., a regular Negro trader. In order to prepare slaves for the market, it was usual to have them greased and rubbed to make them look bright and shining. Females as well as males were not uncommonly stripped naked, lashed flat to the bench, and then held by two men, sometimes four, while the brutal trader would strap them with a broad leather strap. The strap being preferred to the cowhide, as it would not break the skin, and damage the sale. One hundred lashes would only be a common flogging. The separation of families was thought nothing of. Often I have been flogged for refusing to flog others. While not yet 23 years of age, Robert expressed himself as having become so daily sick of the brutality and suffering he could not help witnessing, that he felt he could not possibly stand it any longer, let the cost be what it might. He reasoned that he had frequent access to the money drawer and it often contained the proceeds of fresh sales of flesh and blood. He reasoned that if some of that would help him and his brother get to freedom, there could be no harm in helping himself at the first opportunity. Knowing that slave holders love to see their slaves fiddle and dance, he asked for a pass to go to the ball. In a hurry, he grabbed $1500 from the day's sale enough to pay a fugitive slave lawbreaking captain $100 each for he and his brother.[375]

Perry's exit was in November, 1853. He was owned by Charles Johnson, who lived at Elkton. The infliction of a severe flogging from the hand of his master awakened Perry to consider the importance of the UGRR. Perry had the misfortune to let a load of fodder upset about which his master became exasperated, and in his agitated state of mind he succeeded in affixing a number of very ugly stationary marks on Perry's back. However, this was no new thing. Indeed he had suffered at the hands of his mistress even far more keenly than from these ugly marks. He had but one eye; the other he had been deprived of by a terrible stroke with a cowhide in the hand of his mistress. This lady he pronounced to be a perfect savage and added that she was in the habit of cowhiding any of her slaves whenever she felt like it, which was quite often. Perry was about twenty-eight years of age and a man of promise. The Committee attended to his wants and forwarded him on North.[376]

But I thank God that I am not property now, but am regarded as a man like yourself, and although I live far north, I am enjoying a comfortable living by my

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[374] Still, "*Joseph Robinson*," 45.

[375] Still, "*Robert Robinson*," 45-47.

[376] Still, "*Perry Johnson, of Elkton, Maryland*," 37.

own industry. You may perhaps think hard of us for running away from slavery, but as to myself, I have but one apology to make for it, which is this: I have only to regret that I did not start at an earlier period. I might have been free long before I was. But you had it in your power to have kept me there much longer than you did. To be compelled to stand by and see you whip and slash my wife without mercy, when I could afford her no protection, not even by offering myself to suffer the lash in her place, was more than I felt it to be the duty of a slave husband to endure. My infant child was also frequently flogged by Mrs. Gatewood, for crying, until its skin was bruised literally purple. This kind of treatment was what drove me from home and family, to seek a better home for them.[377]

## Finally, Somewhere to Run

Just as the original 13 colonies had begun slowly to legalize the practice of slavery within its borders, some northeastern states slowly began to abolish the practice within its borders. In 1777, Vermont was the first state to abolish slavery, followed by Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. Finally, there was a place of refuge for anyone who would dare to flee the bondage of slavery elsewhere in the country. This change also created a north/south, free/slave divide among existing states and across the nation as new states and territories sought to join the expanding nation.

The UGRR is believed to have been most active in the 60-years prior to the Civil War. However, letters from George Washington suggest that some form of the UGRR was operative as early as 1786. Washington writes of a slave who escaped to Philadelphia and speaks of a society of Quakers in the city that had been formed for such purposes, to liberate.[378] Quakers would aid a fugitive slave whenever one would ask protection and

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[377] Henry Bibb, "Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, 1849," in *In Their Own Words A History of the American Negro* ed. Milton Meltzer (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), 100-101.

[378] Siebert, 33.

help.[379] Quakers, in fact, had become the big anti-slavery advocates and the biggest allies of escaping slaves. According to Kate Clifford Larson,

> Though some Quakers denounced the owning of slaves from the earliest colonial times, many continued to own, buy and sell slaves until the mid-1700s when one of their own, John Woolman, denounced slavery as incompatible with faith, which forced many to reexamine their position. By 1770, many Quakers' meetings were expelling members for purchasing slaves, and manumissions by deed and will were becoming commonplace, thus providing a groundswell of activism to end slavery throughout the young nation.[380]

No one knows the exact start date of the UGRR or its place of origin, other than in some state where slavery had been abolished and among a community with strong convictions about human liberty. However, the fact that Congress passed legislation to address the aiding and abetting of runaway slaves is also suggestive that the UGRR was active soon after the Revolutionary War declaring freedom from Britain in 1776. On February 12, 1793, congress passed the first Fugitive Slave Act to enforce the constitutional provision protecting slave property. This law imposed a $500 fine upon anyone who aided a runaway slave or who prevented a runaway from being arrested, and also allowed the court to impose a 60-day prison sentence on anyone who advised or enticed a slave to leave his master or who harbored a fugitive. The effect of this first Fugitive Slave Act upon abolitionists was to affirm their efforts. According to Siebert, "A state Fugitive Slave Law like this would otherwise affect persons already engaged in aiding runaways than to make them more certain than ever that their cause was just."[381]

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[379] Siebert, 30.

[380] Kate Clifford Larson, *Harriet Tubman Portrait of an American Hero Bound for the Promised Land* (New York: One World Ballantine Books, 2004), 81.

[381] Siebert, 48.

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, however, contained features sufficiently objectionable to make many converts to the cause of the abolitionist and a systematic evasion of the law an imperative duty by thousands.[382] The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 honored only the rights of the slave owner, and according to Siebert, required all good citizens to aid and to assist in the prompt and efficient execution of the law.[383] Any attempt to rescue, harbor or conceal the fugitive made the person interfering liable to a fine not exceeding $1,000 and imprisonment not exceeding 6-months, and made them liable for civil damages in the sum of $1,000 per fugitive lost.[384]

Abolitionists detested this law, felt it reduced them to the task of slave-catching and violated their ideas of national dignity, decency and consistency.[385] Northern whites who considered themselves "neutral," neither pro- nor anti-slavery and who considered themselves otherwise unaffected by "slavery in the south" were equally incensed. They felt they were being drawn into a world they had been able to ignore previously as a southern problem and that their sense of decency was also under attack.

These Northern non-abolitionist whites prided themselves on neither owning slaves nor of being involved in or profiting from the sale of human flesh. They, therefore, did not now want to be made to be a part of the capture and return of fugitive slaves to the fields and marshlands of that peculiar institution in the south. According to Siebert,

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[382] Siebert, 23.

[383] Siebert, 23.

[384] Siebert 23-24.

[385] Siebert, 24.

the passage of this 1850 Act probably increased the number of anti-slavery people more than anything else that had occurred during the whole agitation.[386]

Of course, the writings of abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe also helped to arouse anti-slavery sentiment among Northerners not otherwise actively engaged in the debate on U.S. chattel slavery. In 1851, in response to the Fugitive Act of 1850, Stowe published a series of fictionalized stories about the plight of slaves in an abolitionist newspaper, the National Era. In 1852, she published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a story loosely based upon her associations with abolitionists in southern Ohio. The book was not only a huge literary success, selling millions of copies, but had a tremendous social and political impact as well. For example, it was one of the first novels written by a white American to portray a black central character compassionately, it became the nineteenth century's most important book on American slavery, and it so impressed the British crown that they decided to keep Canada open as a haven for fugitive slaves.[387] Moreover, according to Horton and Horton, "Lincoln is said to have addressed Stowe as the little lady who started the big war."[388]

**A Friend With Friends**

Quakers were among the first white Americans to urge the abolition of slavery.[389] In fact, Quakers began disowning members who refused to emancipate their slaves. Of course, anyone opposed to slavery were naturally considered friends of the fugitive

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[386] Siebert, 24.

[387] Horton and Horton, 154.

[388] Horton and Horton, 154.

[389] Horton and Horton, 50.

slave.[390] In the course of time, these friends as active participants in the UGRR, came to be called by many names, including stockholders, station masters, signal men, agents, station-keepers, pilots and conductors who assisted fugitives in different ways in their quest for freedom such as donating money (i.e. stockholder), or hiding, sheltering, transporting a fugitive (i.e. station master, station-keeper, agent) or leading a fugitive out of a slave state (i.e. pilot or conductor). One cannot help but to be impressed with the unselfish devotion to principle of these emancipators who were rich in courage and hospitality despite penalties and abuse and who show with what moral determination the work was carried on.[391]

The risk of suffering severe penalties by violating the Fugitive Slave laws were less wearing on abolitionists than was the social disdain they suffered by acknowledging their principles.[392] Abolitionists were the minority in many communities and frequently experienced verbal abuse, taunts and insults at the hands of personal friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, church members, etc. For example, niggerite and nigger thief, according to Siebert, were convenient epithets in the mouths of pro-slavery champions.[393] Not only was their personhood under assault, but the motivation for their assistance was also being questioned. To their credit, however, abolitionists withstood these and other attacks on their good intentions and continued their support of freedom seeker/fugitive slaves. Siebert also notes:

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[390] Siebert, 87.

[391] Siebert, 87.

[392] Siebert, 48.

[393] Siebert, 49.

Reticent as most underground operators were at the time in regard to their unlawful acts, they did not attempt to conceal their principles. On the contrary, they were zealous in their endeavors to make converts to a doctrine that seemed to them to have the combined warrant of Scripture and of their own conscience, and that agreed with the convictions of the fathers of the Republic. The Golden Rule and the preamble of the Declaration of Independence they often recited in support of their position.[394]

In other words, station-keepers/agents were known, unknown and suspected. Quakers, as previously noted, were known supporters of black emancipation. "Throughout his life Thomas Garrett made no effort to hide (or even be discreet) about giving assistance to runaway slaves."[395] He financed many of Harriett Tubman's trips into slaveholding states, and in 1848, when he was finally convicted and fined for his aid, the judge admonished him to take his loss as a lesson and in the future to desist from breaking the law, to which Garrett replied, "Judge thou has left me a dollar, but I wish to say to thee, and to all in this court-room, that if anyone knows a fugitive who wants a shelter and a friend, send him to Thomas Garrett and he will befriend him."[396]

Unlike his fellow Quaker, William Lloyd Garrison, who advocated for the slow, peaceful, non-violent emancipation of the slaves, Garrett believed that civil war was inevitable. In fact, in 1856 Garrett said, "If they (the slave states) do not do it, the slaves will rise up in mass before 20 years and murder their oppressors."[397] As it happened, it would be the confederate forces who would strike the first blow to preserve the way of life of the south. On April 12, 1861, Confederate batteries in Charleston Harbor opened

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[394] Siebert, 89.

[395] James A. McGowan, *Station Master on the Underground Railroad The Life and Letters of Thomas Garrett* (Moylan: The Whimsie Press, 1977), 48.

[396] McGowan, 65.

[397] McGowan, 68.

fire on the federal Fort Sumter, forcing slave states that had not already done so, to declare their allegiance to either the U.S. or to the Confederacy.[398] The Civil War had officially begun. By its end four years later, 620,000 Americans had died, the southern economy was destroyed, and its slave property, the South's most valuable investment was free.[399] "In April 1865, General Lee surrendered the Army of the Confederacy to General Grant at Appomattox, Virginia. Thomas Garrett, Abolitionists, and Underground Railroad workers throughout the country had seen their dream come true."[400] The Confederate defeat was devastating for many reasons. However, for John Wilkes Booth, the Confederate defeat and the embrace of the Radical Republican stand on race meant "nigger citizenship."[401] This possibility was apparently too much for him to bear and is considered a contributing factor that led him to take aggressive action against a sitting president.

Quakers, by contract, were convinced of the essential equality of all men in the sight of God.[402] Garrett, therefore, was of a particularly joyous heart on March 30, 1870 with the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, which gave the recently emancipated Negroes the right to vote. Garrett said, "I rejoice that I have lived to see this day, when the colored people of this favored land, by law, have equal privileges with the most favored."[403] The Negroes in Wilmington celebrated the event by carrying Garrett through

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[398] Horton and Horton, 173.

[399] Horton and Horton, 206.

[400] McGowan, 68.

[401] Horton and Horton, 206.

[402] McGowan, 21.

[403] McGowan, 69.

the streets, heralding him as 'Our Moses' and  saying in a portion of a poem written by a black female poetess, Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, "With freedom's chrism upon thy head, Her precious ensign in thy hand, Go thy once despised name, Amid the noblest in the land."[404]

Garrett is one UGRR station-keeper among many appreciated and remembered for living his religious conviction in service to others, for confronting his peers, for challenging the hegemonic status quo and for assisting fugitives in their quest for seeking and securing the freedoms he enjoyed merely by virtue of his white skin color. His commitment and sacrifice blessed untold thousands during his lifetime, and can serve now as an example to another generation of Christians, encouraging them to do the same in this time and in this season in U.S. history, to be the change they want to see.

**Where You Lead, I Will Follow**

Persons participated in the UGRR at great risk to themselves and to their families. As stated earlier, if caught, blacks could be enslaved/re-enslaved, but anyone could be beaten, maimed, fined, imprisoned or killed, and of course, some were. Seth Concklin, for example, died in pursuit of freedom, but not for himself. Concklin was a white male UGRR conductor, who travelled into Alabama to lead to freedom the wife and three children of Peter Still, who had been left enslaved after a failed escape attempt by his mother, but who later bought his freedom. Seth's story is as follows.

> In the long list of names who have suffered and died in the cause of freedom, not one, perhaps, could be found whose efforts to redeem a poor family of slaves were more Christ-like than Seth Concklin's noble and daring spirit has been so long completely shrouded in mystery. Seth Concklin was naturally too singularly sympathetic and humane not to feel for Peter and especially for his wife and children left in bonds as bound with them.

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[404] McGowan, 68-69.

Hence, as Seth was a man who seemed wholly insensible to fear, and to know no other law of humanity and right, than whenever the claims of the suffering and the wronged appealed to him, to respond unreservedly, whether those thus injured were amongst his nearest kin or the greatest strangers – it mattered not to what race or clime they might belong – he in the spirit of the good Samaritan, owning all such as his neighbors volunteered his services, without pay or reward, to go and rescue the wife and three children of Peter Still.

The magnitude of this offer can hardly be appreciated. It was literally laying his life on the altar of freedom for the despised and oppressed whom he had never seen whose kins-folk he was not acquainted with. Seth was told of those who, in attempting to aid slaves to escape, had fallen victims to the relentless Slave Power, and had either lost their lives, or been incarcerated for long years in penitentiaries, where no friendly aid could be afforded them; in short he was plainly told, that without a very great change, the undertaking would cost him his life.

Having once laid his hand to the plough he was not the man to look back – not even to bid his sisters good-bye, but he actually left them as though he expected to be home to his dinner as usual. On leaving home he simply took two or three small articles in the way of apparel with $100 to defray his expenses for a time. He would boldly assume the part of a slaveholder, and the family naturally that of slaves, in this way he hoped to reach Cincinnati direct, before their owner had fairly discovered their escape.

At Vincennes, Indiana, a white man calling himself Miller and four Negroes were arrested. A report found its way into the papers to the effect that the white man arrested in connection with the capture of the family was found drowned with his hands and feet in chains and his skull fractured. It proved, as his friends feared, to be Seth Concklin. Up to this moment the two sisters were totally ignorant of their brother's whereabouts.[405]

Of course, the most famous conductor on the UGRR was and still is Harriett Tubman, herself a runaway, who made several trips into slaveholding areas to assist others in their quest for freedom. "Driven by desire to liberate her family and friends, guided by an unquestioning belief in God's protection, and confident in the vast

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[405] Still, "Seth Concklin," 1-15.

underground network she had come to know so well, Tubman returned several times to the Eastern Shore to guide groups of slaves to freedom."[406]

Tubman organized her escapes to leave on a Saturday because no runaway slave advertisements could be taken out until Monday.[407] She chose rendezvous points away from the plantations themselves, places that would not raise suspicion if blacks were gathered there, places like a cemetery. Freedom seekers/fugitives typically travelled at night, so Tubman preferred winter escapes when the nights were longer, though she did lead escapes at other times of the year and would also occasionally travel during the day. It is well known that

> Tubman guided her groups of fugitives by singing spirituals and other songs with coded messages. If danger lurked nearby, Tubman would sing an appropriate spiritual to warn her party of an impending threat to their safety. When the road was clear, she would change words or the tempo or the song and guide them on to the next safe place.[408]

It is well known also that Tubman carried a gun, not only as protection from pursuers, but also as an added incentive for any tired or fearful fugitive who might want to give up or turn back. She would also take some time to be alone on these trips to feel what she called the 'mysterious Unseen Presence.' Tubman was aided in her efforts by agents like Thomas Garrett who funded many of her travels and by confidential informants, who would tear down wanted posters, or who would provide food, clothing, shoes, medical attention or a safe place to rest to her passengers. Sources vary suggesting that she made between 13-19 trips, taking 70-80 people with her to freedom, and

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[406] Larson, 100.

[407] Larson, 100.

[408] Larson, 101.

directing another 50-60 people to freedom that travelled separately. Yet all sources agree that she never lost a passenger to capture, defeat or death.

## The UGRR, This Is How We Roll

As noted earlier, the UGRR of necessity operated in secrecy to protect the identity of participants, who were at risk for arrest, fine, imprisonment, enslavement, beating, death, etc. "The risk of aiding fugitives was never lost sight of, and the safety of all concerned called for still tongues."[409] The secrecy was not just a matter of safety, but also of practicality and resistance. As Frederick Douglass noted, "I would keep the merciless slaveholder profoundly ignorant of the means of flight adopted by the slave."[410]

Yet some of the participants, namely station-keepers and conductors, were well-known or at least suspected. For example, vocal abolitionists and Quakers were known to assist. Thomas Garrett was, of course known,  eventually tried, found guilty and fined, even though he was never the victim of violent reprisals from southern slaveholders – in spite of his open opposition to the slave system and general lack of secrecy in giving assistance to runaway slaves.[411] Harriet Tubman was also known, and there was a bounty on her head. In fact, she was once close to capture escaping only by pretending to read. Since she was also known to be illiterate, her would be captors assumed that this black woman with a book in her hand was not the one wanted for liberating the slave owner of his/her property. Fortunately for her, the book was right side up.

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[409] Still, xvi.

[410] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 60.

[411] McGowan, 48-49.

Of course, what the slave holder and/or slave catcher knew, while important, was perhaps less important since they worked at cross purposes of the station keeper, the conductor, and the freedom seeking fugitive. For the latter, what was most important to know was how one boards the UGRR to freedom land. There is, of course, no one answer to that question. The UGRR operated differently in different parts of the country. Moreover, some fugitives escaped without the benefit of a conductor or station-keeper. They are nevertheless included in the annals of UGRR history by virtue of their daring escape and also because they became helpers to assist others in their escape.

Still, like the legend of its beginning, many are the assumptions. For example, many are assumed to have escaped only from Border States because it required less travel time and less geographic space to get into a free area, but there are reports of escapes from the Deep South (i.e. Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana). The cross-dressing, passing Crafts, in fact, escaped from Georgia. It is also assumed that many escapees travelled alone, as it seemed easier and faster to travel without company. While many did travel alone, many travelled as a family. The Robinson brothers, for example, left together. Moreover, the many trips led by the "Moses of her people," Harriet Tubman, disproved that travelling in groups increased risks of failure or of capture as she made several trips with multiple passengers each time and boasts of never losing a passenger.

Coded language was used to transmit messages, particularly the singing of Spirituals. The Spiritual, "Steal Away," it is believed, served to announce both secret/sacred meetings and pending escape. Most escaping fugitives could not read, and therefore needed other ways to recognize safe houses. It is believed that lighting was

employed for this purpose. "When the black coach lantern was lighted, the escapees were alerted they had reach a safe haven. When a lantern was not lit, the slaves understood they should journey onward."[412] The use of quilts for messaging has been debated, with some scholars saying no, absolutely not and others saying yes or maybe. For the latter, the use of quilts is assumed to indicate safety or direction, and/or as providing mnemonic device to aid the slaves in memorizing directives before leaving the plantation.[413]

Many escapees left in the night, when they were less likely to be missed, and travelled under the cover of darkness when they were less likely to be seen, and so they could follow the North Star, but not all. Some fugitives left during the day, especially when their masters (thinking their property would never leave them) were foolish enough to take them into Free states. Other freedom seeker/fugitives, depending upon their means of escape (i.e. river boats or passing as white), also travelled during day. As noted previously, blacks escaped by cross-dressing and by passing, mimicking the superior attitude of whites/whiteness and/or by carrying passes written by their white masters. Perhaps most ironic, slaveholders themselves proved helpful in aiding escapes in unintended ways of course, for example,

> They [slaveholders] sought to deter their chattel from flight by talking freely
> before them about the rigors of the climate and the poverty of the soil of Canada.
> Such talk was wasted on the slaves, who were shrewd enough to discern the real
> meaning of their masters. They were alert to gather all that was said and interpret
> it in the light of rumors from other sources. Thus, masters themselves became
> disseminators of information they meant to withhold.[414]

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[412] Cuesta Benberry, "The Heritage of an Oral Tradition: The Transmission of Secrets in African American Culture," in *Hidden in Plain View a Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* by Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard (New York: First Anchor Books Edition, 2000), 1.

[413] Tobin and Dobard, 69.

[414] Siebert, 29.

The stories of fugitive escapes vary widely, but reflect one burning desire – a longing to be free from service, but not necessarily free from serving. Many who escaped, left the servanthood of slavery behind, but continued to serve their fellow man or woman by becoming helpers in some way or another on the UGRR. According to William Still, who recorded many fugitive escapes:

> In the records can be found interesting narratives of the escapes of many men, women and children, from the prison-house of bondage; from cities and plantations; from rice swamps and cotton fields; from kitchens and mechanic shops; from Border and Gulf States; from cruel masters and mild masters – some guided by the north star alone, penniless, braving perils of land and sea, eluding the keen scent of the blood-hound as well as the more dangerous pursuit of the savage slave hunter …[415]

A unique feature of the UGRR was that there was no one leader and no one method employed by all. A shared conviction regarding the theological anthropology of all humanity is perhaps the binding force that held it together and that compelled so many to risk so much. Participants did, however, fall into three primary roles or categories:

- *Conductors*, who travelled into slaveholding states to lead freedom seekers/fugitives north to free states or territories (i.e. Canada),

- *Station keepers or agents,* who provided aide – housing, clothing, food, money, legal defense, legal advice, maps, medicine, wound care, etc., and

- *Freedom seeker/fugitive*, who left the chains of bondage and who subsequently assisted others to do the same by either returning to free family and friends, and/or becoming station-keepers/agents assisting other escapees.

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[415] Still, xiii-xiv.

Since there was so much variation for escape across the country, for the purposes of the model to be proposed herein, I will use the methodology employed by Harriet Tubman, not simply because she is so well-known, but because she employed so many aspects of the UGRR and epitomized the courage and conviction of the various participants of the UGRR. She was a fugitive who risked her life to save others from the chains of slavery. Given her multiple trips into Maryland, her method proved successful repeatedly and was somewhat more organized and more strategic than taking money on a whim from the sale of human flesh for the day and running suddenly like the Robinson brothers did. Tubman did advance planning. For example, she would work as a domestic or as a cook between trips in order to earn money for her liberating missions. As noted previously, she started her journeys on Saturdays because she knew the advertisements/wanted posters could not be produced and distributed before Monday, which provided some lead time before anyone other than immediate plantation staff would be looking for them. Tubman also had a means of communication with her UGRR community and she actively engaged all three roles. She would use the mariners who travelled up and down the river ways to communicate with family about pending rescue and she would use the spirituals to communicate with fugitives regarding a meeting place and to indicate whether it was or was not safe to move from a hiding place.

She, of course, was the conductor, the fugitives varied per trip, and she had a network of trusted station-keepers, who aided her along the way, from Thomas Garrett who funded several of her freedom missions, to persons she knew in the area that watched slave catchers and tore down wanted signs for her. Tubman knew Garrett and would simply request money, or rather say to him that God had told her he (Garrett) had

money for her to make a trip. He would always oblige giving her money that would be given to "whites who could be paid off."[416] Even during her travels Tubman employed prayer/meditation, quiet time to be alone with the mysterious unseen Presence. Narratives of many participants suggest that Tubman and her crew had faith in God and a fundamental belief that they were doing not only the right thing, but the will of God. Giving place and space for God, is needed to hear from heaven and to be strengthened in mind and body to do the will of God, and also to know what one believes and to be able to articulate the same.

**Lessons from the UGRR**

The story of the UGRR is an epic of moral courage, religious inspiration, and unexpected personal transformation played out by a cast of extraordinary personalities who combined then radical ideas about race and political action with traditional notions of personal honor and sacred duty.[417] Their conviction and courage is certainly worthy of emulation in confronting the discriminatory –isms facing the nation today. More specifically, the model employed by participants in the Underground Railroad can and should be recreated by Christian educators in the academy and in the church when teaching the tenets of the faith in general and when teaching aspects of the faith more specifically that allow believers to deal with race and racism in contemporary society, theological discourse, namely theological anthropology and ecclesial practices and in autonomy/agency/ownership in regard to what is believed about the faith and why. In addition, a model of Christian education based upon the attributes exemplified by UGRR participants include:

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[416] Larson, 100.

[417] Bordewich, 4

1. Personal conviction – belief in what they were doing was right/will of God,

2. Responsibility for others – fought for those who could not fight,

3. Socio-political awareness and moral challenge – did not deny reality,

4. Both tradition (honor) and race radical perspective – counter-hegemonic,

5. Communal, courageous – to face down neighbors and to share conviction,

6. Passion and compassion – for liberty and for the people of God,

7. Thoughtful, strategic and organized – plan of escape,

8. Mindfulness of pitfall and resources of the enemy – slave holder rage,

9. Meditation, prayerful – time set aside for the unseen presence, and

10. Creativity and resourcefulness – means employed for escape, cross-dressing, passing.

I will elaborate more on these attributes in the next chapter as well as detail what the model of Christian education based upon the UGRR looks like and how it operates.

**Chapter Six**

**A Liberatory Pedagogy:**

**The Underground Railroad as a Model for Christian Education**

**Don't Let Nobody Turn You Around**

On September 17, 1849, Harriet Tubman and two of her brothers, Ben and Henry, ran away from the institution of slavery. Since Tubman and her brothers would hire themselves out to work on other plantations, it was not until sometime later that their absence was even noticed, and not until October 3$^{rd}$ that an advertisement/wanted poster was released offering a reward for their capture. Somewhere in their travels, however, the brothers disagreed with Tubman about the directions, feared capture and returned, dragging her back with them despite her protests. Soon thereafter, however, Tubman fled again, this time without her brothers and with the help of the UGRR.

Unable to explicitly tell anyone black of her plans to leave again, but desperate to say goodbye, Tubman began to sing,

I'm sorry I'm going to leave you, farewell, oh farewell;

But I'll meet you in the morning,

Farewell, oh farewell,

I'll meet you in the morning,

I'm bound for the Promised Land,

On the other side of Jordan,

Bound for the Promised Land.[418]

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[418] Kate Clifford Larson, *Harriet Tubman Portrait of an American Hero Bound for the Promised Land* (New York: One World Ballantine Books, 2004), 82-83.

The plantation owner may have heard Tubman singing. Of course, if he did, he did not understand either the song or the message being conveyed.

Of necessity, she did tell someone she believed could help her escape. Tubman only told of her plans to flee to an unidentified white woman, presumed to be a Quaker, who gave Tubman two names and directed her to the first station keeper or agent, who in turn helped her and then directed her onto the next. The exact route taken and the identities of her aides are unknown. Larson, however, reports that:

> When Tubman reached the first safe house, the woman of the house asked her to sweep the yard – a deceptive tactic that helped mask Tubman's purpose while she waited for her husband to return from the fields. When darkness fell, the man loaded his wagon, covering Tubman so that she could not be seen and took her to the next sympathetic home.[419]

Tubman travelled mostly at night, followed the North Star and stopped at each safe house as she had been instructed. When she finally crossed the border into Pennsylvania and into freedom, Tubman said, "When I found I had crossed the line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven."[420]

Her joy soon took on a somber reality. Tubman said, "There was no one to welcome me into the land of freedom. I was a stranger in a strange land; my home, after all, was down in Maryland; my father, my mother, my brothers, sisters, and friends were there. But I was free and they should be free." Tubman decided that her family should enjoy the same freedom from slavery as she. Therefore, she set about to liberate them as well, relying upon the secret communication network of black watermen and mariners

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[419] Larson, 80-84.

[420] Larson, 84.

who carried messages up and down the coasts and who knew safe places and sympathetic whites who could assist, and upon the network of white abolitionists and anti-slavery activists who would also aid in her liberation efforts. Their coordinated covert activities, as part of larger a liberation movement, provide the basis for the model of Christian education proposed in this chapter.

## The UGRR as an Educational Paradigm

To briefly recap, Tubman used the UGRR as her means of escape from a Maryland plantation. She later became a conductor on the UGRR to help others to escape the peculiar institution. She used station-keepers and agents to assist her and her passengers in their escape attempts. They travelled primarily at night, following the North Star, and she communicated with escaping fugitives by singing the Spirituals. They hid in safe, but not always comfortable spaces, until they finally stepped onto free soil.

Foundational to developing and employing a model of Christian education based upon the UGRR is the recognition that discriminatory practices exist despite the socio-political and theo-political rhetoric that sanctioned it. In other words, participants were able to distinguish between fact and fiction. A Christian Education program based upon the UGRR must be able to do the same.

Additionally, employing an educational paradigm based upon the UGRR is to envision the teaching/learning experiences as one of escaping enslavement to discriminatory ideologies, moving to a place of freedom and community, and therefore of journeying with students from one place of understanding to another, not as filling empty vessels with indoctrinating propaganda, which is the presumption informing the banking mode of education. Approaching the religious education experience in this way, as a

journey, reflects a partnership, the mutuality of teaching and learning between teachers and students, and suggests some basic and some special-needs curriculum that would be applicable to any church community as we journey through life. Religious education begins with the basic human need to make sense.[421] Therefore, any Christian education program that enables participants to makes sense of the world in which we live – of aging bodies, of conflict, stress or financial management, of health and wellness, of new legislation, of preparing a will or advance directives, of dealing with grief, (whether burying a loved one or losing a job or suffering a divorce) or any number of life experiences that we are likely to experience merely by living to be a certain age – is enhanced if it is envisioned and approached as accompanying, as journeying, as travelling through life with a friend.

Other aspects of the UGRR that correspond to a liberatory education paradigm are:

1. The *instructor*, who like the UGRR conductor, leads freedom seeking students from a place of enslavement, confinement, rigid/restrictive thinking to a place of freedom to think contrary to inherited oppressive traditions. The enslavement need not be physical (i.e. addiction), but can be mental to unhealthy, discriminatory policies and oppressive ideologies, some discriminatory and exclusionary practices committed in the name of Jesus (i.e. slavery, non-ordination of women and LGBTQ persons). The place of freedom is where students begin to feel comfortable examining, questioning, analyzing, assessing, evaluating, disagreeing, challenging the hegemonic

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[421] J. L. Seymour, M. A. Crain & J. V. Crockett, *Educating Christians. The Intersection of Meaning, Learning and Vocation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 11.

powers that be and where students take responsibility for their faith-based beliefs and praxis. A conductor/instructor, like Tubman, has been this way before. The conductor/instructor knows the subject matter, as Freire, would expect and they know the way. He or she knows the community of helpers (i.e. station-keepers and agents), and how and when to communicate with these many assistants. They know too how to encourage the weary traveler because they know the risk of the tired one affects all aboard. They also work in community with the students who have fears, concerns, hopes, and knowledge. Students may also know how to read the landscape. Only as the station-keeper and agent engages the realities of the students will continuing growth occur. Just like Tubman's brothers, students have choices as they move along the journey. They must be free to do this, yet the station-keepers and agents keep a vision out in front and engage the deep realities of student's lives.

2.  The *aides*, who like the station-keepers and agents assist in the liberatory process by providing whatever resources and insights they can.  Whereas UGRR station-keepers/agents provided shelter, food, clothing, transportation, messages, advice, etc. in a model based upon the UGRR, aides are colleagues in ministry, guest speakers, especially persons impacted by laws or doctrines, course readings and other course assignments that provide whatever insights they can. They are selected intentionally with the express intent of provoking critical thought about and critical engagement with the socio-economic, socio-political and theo-political realities of participants, of their family, friends,

neighbors, colleagues, community, nation, church members, etc. as it relates to the subject of study. These aides must specifically address in some way the inter-relatedness of race (or other point of discrimination), religion, economics, politics and power. For example, these aides might speak to or question who is impacted by what state, federal or local laws or church doctrines? How? Why? By whose authority? On what basis? What is the evidence? What is necessary to implement challenge or change? What might be the counter-attacks? Tubman selected aides who could help in the particular ways that she needed. The mariners travelled freely up and down the waterways. Thus, they were better-suited to convey messages to those about to be rescued. Blacks and others in the community who had sight of and physical access to advertisements/wanted posters were better suited to removing them. Tubman utilized the resources available to her and asked them to provide the service they were best-suited to do. Abolitionists with the freedom to do so went about the country openly advocating manumission. In her book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe, humanized black people in the eyes of Northern whites who previously had seen them distantly and through the lens of pro-slavery advocates. Here, guest speakers, who have been touched by discrimination become a face to an otherwise faceless cry for relief. A Christian Education program based upon the UGRR would likewise utilize the resources in the midst, the gifts and graces available, which means letting people do what they are gifted to do, rather than allowing them to do what they are not gifted to do.

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3. The *student* in this model is to be seen as the freedom seeker/fugitive, and who, like the escaping slave, purposes in his/her heart to secure freedom from that which controls their thinking (i.e. socially acceptable) and restricts their movement (i.e. upward mobility, ordination, etc.), that which binds to an unhealthy or unholy past or present (i.e. stereotypes), that which holds them or others in bondage to skewed theological anthropologies (i.e. white privilege, black disposability) and discriminatory policies, practices or stereotypes, and prevents them from full humanization (*Imago Dei*) and full participation in civic society and in the life of the church. Like the fugitive slave who remained so until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the nation, the fugitive student forever remains a fugitive from the enslaving hegemonic ideologies of discrimination for as long as they remain the law of the land. This fugitive, moreover, is expected to become an agent or conductor/instructor willing to share their resources, their insights, and their knowledge of the way to assist another escaping fugitive.

4. *Safe space*, which is not to be confused with and considered the same as comfortable space. Examining long-held, but previously unexamined beliefs and assumptions can be fearsome and risky. The conductor/instructor seeks to assess and mitigate the risk with the students. The fugitives were oftentimes safe, meaning hidden, not necessarily at risk for imminent capture, but they were not necessarily comfortable. Henry 'Box" Brown, for example, was confined in tight quarters (two feet eight inches deep, two feet wide, and three feet long) for 26 hours, much of his journey spent upside down despite

signage saying, "this side up." He emerged tired, hungry, wet, but free. In fact, some discomfort is to be expected as long-held beliefs are examined, questioned, and challenged, and as students experience an epistemological rupture (i.e. a disturbance in the way they formerly understood the world), but freedom and responsibility awaits on the other side of that discomfort. It is possible, according to Jane Vella, for a group of adults to create a healthy learning environment that is safe, challenging and demanding.[422] Although admittedly there have been times when the phrasing, *safe space*, has been used to maintain the status quo. Persons fearful of conflict (teachers and students) have used this phrase to intimate "don't make me uncomfortable" with questions or critiques of my worldview. Thus the phrase can be used as a buzzword to derail attempts to challenge and/or to change the status quo. Citing her experiences in feminist classrooms, for example, bell hooks has said of her experience with feminism, "Belief systems that we had been comfortable with all eighteen or more years of our lives were being contested. And yet we were being told that we should accept that this spirit of contestation and challenge should take place in a placid environment.[423] Safe space does not mean encounters with no conflict. Rather it means knowing how to cope in situations of risk where there is disagreement.[424] In fact, Joe Kincheloe says that it is to be expected that tensions will develop in social

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[422] Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen – Learning to Teach. The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), xiv-xv.

[423] bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 85.

[424] hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking,* 87.

knowledge as the understandings and insights of individuals change and evolve.[425] Advising students to expect some discomfort is not the same as giving them a license to be disrespectful or to be manipulative in order to avoid challenge and thereby to maintain the hegemonic status quo. Safe space requires monitoring exchanges among and between students such that the discomfort is manageable, that it does not leave students so outraged they become violent or so vulnerable that they shut down and no longer engage. It is working to ensure a balanced atmosphere with enthusiastic students engaged in passionate debate even on polarizing topics.

5. *Signs and symbols of the movement, auditory and visual, even night-time travel and darkness,* which enabled effective, understandable communication and represented physical transitions and spiritual shifts. The parties involved understood what was being asked of or said to them whether through looks/glances or through songs (Spirituals) or through quilts (debatable to be sure) or through lanterns (lit/unlit) or through motions (sweep the dirt to conceal your purpose here) or through direct verbal exchange, "God says you have money for me," or "please take down advertisements/wanted posters," or "please hide this person in your cellar." Night/night-fall, which is typically associated with darkness, something foreboding is the time when most fugitives made their escape. In other words, they could not be and were not afraid to travel in the darkness that would lead them to the light of liberty. Christians too should not be fearful to travel in the darkness. In fact, it is out

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^{425} Joe L. Kincheloe, *Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2008), 39.

of darkness that significant events in the life of faith have occurred: God formed the world out of darkness (Genesis 1:2 and darkness was upon the face of the deep), salvation entered the world when darkness covered the earth as Jesus died upon the cross at Calvary (Luke 23:44 there was a darkness over all the earth), and it was dark when resurrection of the Christ was made known (John 20:1 The first day of the week came the Mary Magdalene early when it was yet dark to the sepulcher). Educators employing a model of Christian education based upon the UGRR must be able to read the signs and symbols of the socio-political season, of classroom participants, able to translate the faces of confusion and to hear the intonation and inflection of student voices in the classrooms, and to respond accordingly, and also able to encourage the hearts of the people even in the night seasons, times of uncertainty, great change and even greater possibility. A part of not fearing the darkness includes not fearing to say, "I don't know." In fact, it is far better to say I don't know, I'll get back to you on that, or does anyone have a response to that question than to give an erroneous response.

**Other Attributes and Benefits**

Other attributes and benefits of a model of Christian Education based upon the people and processes of the UGRR are as follows:

1. *Personal conviction* – all participants believed not only what they were doing was right, but that human freedom was the will of God. The enslaved understood the Exodus story where God freed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage as his support for human freedom. Leaders within communities of

faith (i.e. Quakers and some others) began to see slavery as incompatible with both Christianity and with the documents of the republic, namely the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Of course, to have a personal conviction, one must know what they believe and why. Use of aides helps to define and to develop this conviction.

2. *Responsibility for others* – participants in the UGRR fought for those who did not have the wherewithal to fight for themselves. To do battle in this way, persons first had to recognize what privilege(s) they had, then used them in service for another. For William Lloyd Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe, for example, it was a public forum and the power of the pen. Garrison had an abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, and Stowe wrote a book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Both influenced public opinion, especially among their own – whites. Thomas Garrett had money and places of refuge. He shared his money with Tubman and his places of refuge with weary travelers on the UGRR. Tubman had knowledge of the routes, resources in the area, and she used her knowledge and vast network of resources to assist others.

3. *Socio-political awareness and moral challenge* – Participants in the UGRR were not deceived by the pseudo-scientific, pseudo-Spirit-led rhetoric of philosophers, presidents or pastors, suggesting black inferiority/white superiority, nor by widespread public acceptance of U.S. chattel slavery as fixed by universe and as ordained by God. In fact, such assertions challenged their moral sensibilities. For those who attempted to remain neutral on the issue of slavery in the south, there came a point when even their sense of

decency was violated by government legislation (Fugitive Slave Act 1793 and 1850) and they were compelled to resist being made a part of human degradation. They would not be made a slave catcher. In the global village of the 21st century, there is no practice that leaves someone somewhere untouched by human greed. There ought to be a point where even a capitalist can say, enough is enough.

4. *Traditional and (race) radical perspective* – Participants in the UGRR held traditional views about such things as honor and humanity, and at the same time held counter-hegemonic perspectives about such things as race, and humanity. For example, they saw humanity as reflective of the *Imao Dei* and deserving of human freedom and radically they saw blacks as reflective of the *Imago Dei* and deserving of human freedom. In other words, they held traditional and non-traditional views. Not everyone believed in the theo-political rhetoric of black inferiority or black animalism or blacks as heathens. They were able to separate rhetoric from reality. For example, blacks did not believe themselves to be inferior, animal-like or heathen. Instead, blacks believed themselves to be human and image bearers of the living God. Quakers, similarly were convinced of the essential equality of all men in the sight of God.[426] Participants did, however, seem to hold defining principles that governed their life. For them it was important to live their principles, thus their acts of civil disobedience was a matter of personal honor and integrity (a traditional human value).

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[426] McGowan, 21.

5. *Communal and courageous* – Participants operated in multiple communities and did so courageously. Station-keepers and agents operated collaboratively with other UGRR participants, but did not sever ties with communities of neighbors, friends, church members that taunted them and did not share their abolitionist views. We too live in multiple communities, and neither can we sever ties simply because we don't agree on every subject. "We need to learn of God and we need to do so through engagement with each other."[427] Such learning occurs in community with people both like and with people unlike us, people who agree with us, and people who disagree with us. As such, Ian Markham says, "We need to live in a community of church that is connected, ready and willing to learn from those who disagree, deeply committed to pluralism, and persuaded that our capacity to do this is a vitally important witness to the gospel values of constructive peace making."[428] Fugitives were in community with persons upon whom they depended, persons they did not know beyond safe house to safe house and conductors. Fugitives were also in community with family they left behind, who prayed for their safe passage. All participants were courageous – those who withstood the taunts, lived their principles, and broke the law, those who left family for parts unknown, trusted strangers and the North Star, and those who heard the gathering song, bided farewell, but could not depart.

6. *Passion and compassion* – Participants exemplified both a passion and a compassion for liberty, not only for themselves, but for others. As pointed out

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[427] Ian S. Markham, *A Theology of Engagement* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003), 2.

[428] Markham, 6.

earlier, this movement marked for the first time active responsibility for others' human rights. Also, nothing but passionate belief and compassionate heart can make one risk life and livelihood for self, or for another, or for a stranger, particularly for a stranger that the government, the church and society has labelled 3/5ths human and a slave for life. Participants in Christian educations programs based upon the UGRR must likewise be passionate about the subject matter and about teaching, and compassionate about the people-of-God.

7. *Thoughtful, strategic and organized* – Participants in the UGRR were quite thoughtful, strategic and organized. For example, it took a great deal of thought to decide to open one's home to fugitives, to place one's self and loved ones in harm's way, to do so in a way that does not draw much attention. It takes thoughtfulness, strategizing and organization to decide to leave your home, to decide to leave family, to develop a plan of escape and to implement that plan successfully. Many failed. In fact, Tubman's brothers failed on their first attempt at escape, even forcing her to return against her will. She, however, developed a plan for herself and executed it successfully with the help of UGRR station-keepers. She repeatedly developed and executed plans freeing other family, friends and strangers by relying on trusted partners and timelines.

8. *Mindfulness of pitfall and resources of the enemy* – Participants in the UGRR knew, "slave owners whose property disappeared in the night went to great

trouble to track down these fugitives."[429] They knew too the slave holder rage over the audacity of these uppity slaves who dared to leave their white-designated post, they knew the resources that pro-slavery forces had at their disposal for capture, and the capacity pro-slavery forces had for punishment to discourage other would be fugitives. As such, Tubman knew when advertisements/wanted posters could be released, and therefore, arranged escapes at times that would provide her with the greatest lead time before other resources (i.e. other slave catchers) could be brought into the hunt. Those fugitives who passed for white knew how to display a certain hubris that meant they would not be questioned or approached in a particular way. Likewise, curriculum developers need to be mindful of the pitfalls and resources of the enemies of critical thought and enemies of a liberatory pedagogy. What prevents otherwise thinking adults, for example, from critically thinking about the various aspects of the faith and questioning or challenging, as appropriate? Is it a matter of time and opportunity to think about these things? Or is it that students have not been given permission to question the tradition? Or is it that students have not been instructed in the hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval? What will move someone from *authority bound/dualistic* knowing that is external to the self to a *convictional commitment* knowing that is internal to the self, able to articulate beliefs, able to withstand challenge, able to re-examine beliefs in light of challenge or new evidence and to change accordingly?

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[429] Milton Meltzer, ed. *In Their Own Words A History of the American Negro* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), 99.

9. *Meditation, quiet, prayer* – Quakers believe in the power of silence to hear from God. Tubman, likewise, believed in setting aside time to be in quiet before the Lord. She believed in the power of this mysterious unseen Presence to guide her, to see her safely to and from all liberation journeys. If we are to develop meaningful, life-affirming Christian education programming, we too must spend some time in quiet, in prayer and meditation so that we too might hear what thus saith the Lord. A friend and Soror of mine talks of being advised by her spiritual adviser to sit in silence for some period of time each day. She admits to hearing nothing at first, but she was faithful to the practice and over time and in a different setting, she heard in response to her crisis of faith, "I don't really want all that in my life right now."[430] For those of us who believe, an unseen Presence is still speaking, protecting, giving direction, ordering our steps into a place of freedom and responsibility.

10. *Creativity and resourcefulness* – Participants in the UGRR displayed immeasurable creativity and resourcefulness in their means of escape, of influencing public opinion and of evading capture. Many were enslaved, but only one thought to mail himself north – Henry "Box" Brown – and it worked. The Crafts apparently figured out that they could pass themselves off as a white person and his Negro servant by virtue of their coloring, but it was the wife who was light and the husband who was dark. Their creative workaround was phenomenal. Not only did they make her a white male, but a lame, near deaf, white male with a tooth and hearing problem so she didn't have to speak

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[430] Arionne Yvette Williams, *Love Like I've Never Been Hurt How to Heal from Heartbreak* (Independence: Arionne Yvette Williams, 2014), 136.

or write and needed her trusted black servant constantly at her side. When direct appeals to Christian sensibilities did not work to change the hearts and minds of non-abolitionist "neutral" Northern whites, Stowe wrote a book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was able to portray the institution of slavery in a very different, less palatable, less tolerable light. The book changed hearts and minds. Tubman, an illiterate black woman, singing particular Spirituals in a particular way to indicate danger or safety and pretending to read a book were other acts of creativity that helped her and her passengers avoid capture. That ability to think quickly, no doubt, saved her life and that of others yet to be liberated by her efforts. In fact, the UGRR itself is a stroke creative of genius. To develop a means of escape for fugitive slaves, combining overt abolitionist efforts (i.e. newspapers and books) with covert abolitionist efforts (i.e. safe houses and coded language), operating subversively, counter-hegemonically and in plain view to create such a divide between the whites in North and whites in the South, eventually leading to a war that changed the nation, now that's creative and resourceful.

## An Example

Conductor/Instructor arranges room in a circular fashion to indicate that all participants are equal in value and stature. He or she explains that all opinions are welcomed, are to be shared in a respectful manner and that we are to be heard with a spirit of open mindedness. Conductor/instructor asks students to pay attention not only to what is being said, but also to what is not being said, to facial expressions, to heavy sighs, to sounds of distress in voices as signals of discomfort or signs that we may need to pause

or engage a bit more on a specific comment, then shares texts for discussion: Matthew 8:5-13 in which Jesus heals the centurion's servant without hesitation, saying of him, "In no one in Israel have I found such faith." Matthew 17:21 in which the disciples were unable to heal a man's epileptic son because of their little faith and he tells them, this kind comes out only by prayer and fasting. Mark 7:24-30 in which Jesus heals the Syrophoenician woman's daughter, but not before telling her, "It's not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." John 4:18, the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, who goes running into the city saying, "Come meet a man who told me everything I have ever done."

Questions: What differences in Jesus' responses are immediately apparent? One, there's no evidence in these texts that they were colorblind, but there is evidence that they were "raced." Their socio-political identities are specifically named centurion (Roman), Syrophoenician, Samaritan and Jesus responds to them differently. Might that be a reflection of race, gender or class? What dynamics of race, power, politics, religion and economics seem to be operating in these stories? Can your life be summed up in a single statement, namely in terms of your husband(s), and according to the custom and you think that is something to shout about? Do you find the story of either the Syrophoenician or Samaritan woman empowering? How or why? How do you see the same or "different' treatment in the wider society, or in the church? How is it manifested? How does that make you feel? What resources are available to you to bring notice to these inequities in church and society? What commitment can or will you make to alter the perceived normativity in these stories? What, if any, discomfort do you have with noting the

different responses Jesus has toward men and women or toward the oppressor (centurion) and oppressed (women)?

Aides: People, especially women, on both sides of debate, church doctrine regarding women in ministry, articles regarding women in business, particularly in positions of leadership, commentaries about Syrophoenician and Samaritans, historical and contemporary articles about internalized racism and/or the colonized response to colonization.

This is an example of a lesson that could be taught thematically about race, gender, class or power or like the movie "Do the Right Thing," can take a single theme and discuss it from multiple positions of power (i.e. the women, Jewish male, Roman male). Approaches vary, like escape attempts, but attention to discriminatory practice is not negotiable. It must be the focus of examination.

### The Underground Railroad – Contributions and Challenges

The proposed model does not build directly upon the work of any other scholars of religious education. To my knowledge, no one else has examined the Underground Railroad in order to identify aspects or attributes relevant to developing Christian education programming or curriculum. It is, however, similar to models of Christian education proposed by Grant Shockley, Anne Wimberly and Yolanda Smith. For example, the model proposed herein is rooted in and reflective of the black experience. It gives space and place for the oral traditions and coded culture of the African people. It is intended, like story-linking, to give voice, meaning and hope to the stories of participants past and present in the struggle to break free from mental and spiritual enslavement to hegemonic ideologies that sanction discrimination. Like Shockley's model, it allows for

self and social awareness, social analysis and transformation. A Christian Education program based upon the attributes and operation of UGRR would be, like a Christian Education program based upon the triple-heritage of the black experience embodied in the Spirituals: communal, creative, critical and cooperative. The mere existence of the UGRR exemplifies critical reflection of discriminatory, hegemonic policies and practices. Of necessity, the network of abolitionists was communal and cooperative, and they employed an assortment of creative means to escape enslavement, to influence public opinion about enslavement and to avoid capture and subsequent punishment according to the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850.

In addition, this model showcases the personal agency/authority/accountability known to the participants of the UGRR as honor, integrity, decency, moral outrage, and responsibility for ensuring civil/human rights of others. It highlights the cross-cultural cooperation of the movement, and helps to distinguish between white supremacist thought and behavior and white allies or white race-radicals who recognized their skin color privilege and who presumably did not feel either white shame nor white guilt, but rather were unafraid and unashamed to use that white privilege for the benefit of another. It also highlights that fugitive blacks also had privilege and were not afraid to use it for the benefit of another. In other words, escaping blacks did not claim to have pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps, telling others to do the same.

A model of Christian education based upon the workings of the Underground Railroad revisions the teaching/learning experience as one of journeying, of travelling with our students from one place of understanding to another. It requires teachers and curriculum developers to be mindful of how the material under study impacts the lives of

the students. In other words, it requires the teacher to have assistants, aides that will promote and provoke social analysis and critique of subject matter/course content in light of socio-economic, socio-political, theo-political realities. It requires the student also to assume responsibility, to not enjoy freedom alone, but to become a conductor/instructor or station-keeper/agent to help others enjoy freedom. In other words, freedom is not free. Nor is it having access and privileges enjoyed by some with the power to deny the same to others. Freedom is a place of responsibility. A model of Christian education based upon the UGRR acknowledges the distinctions between safe space and comfortable space. It requires the conductor/instructor to read the signs of the times, to discern from the faces and sounds of participant voices whether it is safe to move on, take questions or discuss a misunderstanding.  This model, when implemented with appropriate aides, can promote and provoke critical engagement with the socio-economic, socio-political and theo-political realities of participants' day-to-day existence as advocated by critical/emancipatory pedagogues W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson and Paulo Freire. As such, this model can contribute to the guild by offering another methodology for empowering students, for analyzing race/power dynamic operative in the country, for examining and challenging oppressive conditions and practices in society and in the church, and for recognizing and utilizing places of privilege to subvert state/church sanctioned discrimination. In fact, it absolutely requires the latter.

The UGRR as a Model of Christian Education is flexible, meaning if the program or syllabus meets the criteria as outlined, the model itself is applicable in either the academy or the church and on any given subject matter (i.e. race, sexuality, gender, class,

religion, citizenship, mental/physical ability). Moreover, because the conductor/instructor uses aides with specific intent, the model cannot help but to yield:

1. *Personal conviction* because the aides allow participants to be asked what do you believe and why? "I just don't see it that way," is not a sufficient response.

2. *Responsibility for others* because aides should question what are your privileges and resources, how might you use them to help another?

3. *Socio-political awareness and moral challenge* because analysis of power dynamics is required. Any program using this model, of necessity, will have an aide that addresses socio-political awareness and moral challenge.

4. *Traditional and (race) radical perspective* because course aides will again question what does the tradition say, what is the contemporary challenge? Here I've used (race), but the radical perspective can be in regards to gender, sexuality, citizenship, class, religion, and mental/physical ability – any hot button topic under discussion.

5. *Communal and courageous* because the conductor/instructor and aides employed should both teach and encourage community and a theology of engagement whereby one can disagree without being disagreeable, or agree to disagree and yet remain in community. Again, this is a balance. We don't sever friendships over every little disagreement, nor can we persuade or influence if we cut off relationships after every disagreement. Here too conductor/instructor and freedom seeking fugitives can learn from one another as advocated in the pedagogy of the oppressed.

6. *Passion and compassion* cannot necessarily be taught, but can be encouraged. Conductor/instructors should, therefore, develop course content and engage course material in such a way that students cannot help but to become passionate about the subject matter. It is important to help them see they are most likely affected by any given topic in the church and as believers in Christ, our confession of faith assumes compassion toward all as the people of God created in his image reflecting his likeness. The Scripture does not say that only Christians or only whites or only males or only Americans were created in his image and likeness. The Genesis 1:27 NRSV text reads, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them."

7. *Thoughtful, strategic and organized* because conductor/instructors have selected material and assignments that require thoughtful engagement, which should lead to strategies and organized activities directed, as necessary, at challenge and change of discriminatory beliefs and practices.

8. *Mindfulness of the pitfalls and resources of the enemy* because the conductor/instructor has taught students the hermeneutics of suspicion and of retrieval, because the conductor/instructor has granted permission and given instruction to freedom seekers/fugitives to examine, to question, to challenge, because the conductor/instructor has enabled persons in the earlier stages of faith development as identified by Sharon Parks or James Fowler to take action necessary to become more reflective, more

responsible for their own faith-based beliefs and practices, to take ownership of their understanding of the traditions and doctrines of the faith. Here too conductor/instructors would be mindful of word choices and able also to distinguish between behaviors and personhood (i.e. behaved stupidly versus is stupid).

9. *Meditation, prayer* because the conductor/instructor has encouraged quiet, silence, stillness, maybe even beginning each class period with this practice or encouraged journaling or note taking to record thoughts on subject matters as they come.

10. *Creativity and resourcefulness* because the conductor/instructor via the aides have provided tools and resources to enable freedom seekers/fugitives to critically assess circumstances, to ascertain their own conclusions, and not just look to authority figures to answer life's problems for them.

The challenges of implementing a program of this type include resources (i.e. staff numbers – are there enough people, staff qualifications – do they have the expertise, staff beliefs on sensitive subjects and staff self-actualization – can they handle the challenge). For example, to educate in a manner that is empowering, requires professors and the leadership of the church to become actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes his/her own well-being.[431] Self-care in this manner cannot be over emphasized and thus should become a primary focus of anyone claiming a call to minister the good news of Jesus Christ, particularly since persons who embrace the

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[431] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 15.

challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply.[432]

Self-actualization is particularly important because, as Parker Palmer points out, when we teach, we project the condition of our soul onto the students.[433] Stated more explicitly and more succinctly, and more dauntingly, he says, "We teach who we are."[434] In other words, if we are not intentional and attentive to the teaching/learning process and to our personhood, then we too can teach out of our fears, our insecurities, and our unexamined assumptions, thereby passing along the same to our students.

Self-awareness and self-care thus become as equally essential to the teacher and to the teaching process as is knowing the material. In fact, Palmer says that good teaching is not so much a matter of technique, but rather good teaching comes from the *identity* and *integrity* of the teacher. Identity is where all of the different influences in one's life converge – the good, the bad and the ugly. For Palmer, these forces include: genetics, family, culture, and life affirming and life negating people and experiences. He says, "Identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am."[435] Integrity, on the other hand, lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death.[436] Intentional awareness of both is fundamental to good teaching. Palmer concludes, "When a person is healthy and

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[432] hooks, 22.

[433] Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 2.

[434] Palmer, 2.

[435] Palmer, 14.

[436] Palmer, 14.

whole, the head and the heart are both-and, not either-or, and teaching that honors that paradox can help make us all more whole."[437] This is particularly important, if paradox is a sign of Christian maturity as suggested by Parks and if we are to guide students into living in that paradox, then we ourselves must become comfortable with paradox in our world.

This model assumes self-actualization of the conductor/instructor and a higher stage of faith development (i.e. convictional commitment on the Parks' scale or at least individuated faith on the Fowler scale). Participants in the UGRR, were self-actualized. Station-keepers and agents endured taunts and continued to assist. The conductors and the enslaved knew the risks of failure were high and the risk of capture were higher, but they took the risk anyway. If the person tasked with developing the Christian education curriculum using this model, holds a particular position and cannot explain why or cannot hear challenges to his/her position, this model would not work. I dare say, the model would not be applied.

This model also assumes that the conductor/instructor sees the various –isms facing the country as discriminatory and problematic. If, for example, persons have no problem with various forms of discrimination, such as papers please laws requiring persons to prove immigration status targeting persons presumed to be Latino/a, or Religious Freedom Restoration Act, bills that allow businesses to refuse service to persons based upon their (business owner's religious conviction), which for now seems to be targeting the LGBTQ community, but which is eerily familiar to laws refusing service to blacks and can soon switch to other targets, then a model of Christian education that is based upon the principles and practices of the participations of the UGRR would likely

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[437] Palmer, 66.

have no place in your Christian education programming. If you believe that the U.S. is a color-blind society or post-racial state, then this model will not work for you. In other words, the applicability of a model of Christian education based upon the UGRR is limited to persons who recognize that discrimination based on race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, citizenship, mental/physical ability) exists in this country, including in the church, and who are willing to use their places of privilege to dismantle it.

To those who dare, welcome aboard freedom's train, the UGRR, destination – the Promised Land!

## Afterword

There are at least two problematic tendencies in the Church that Christian educators both in the academy and in the church can and should address. These are:

1. A lack of consciousness about the role race and racism had, and continues to have in contemporary U.S. society, theological discourse particularly theological anthropology and ecclesial practices, and

2. The inability of Christians to articulate what they believe and why they believe it.

Fundamentally, the Church has and continues to ignore the history of racism between a developing Western Christianity and the ancient Jewish people. It was after all Christian supremacy, according to James Perkinson, that gave birth to white supremacy.[438] White supremacist thought and behavior was then wedded to European colonial expansion resulting in U.S. chattel slavery and the necessary socio-political and theo-political rhetoric to uphold the unjust socio-economic system of black enslavement, and to justify the material consequences of white privilege and black disposability that is still operative in this country to this very day.

Moreover, with every real or imagined civil rights' advancement for people-of-color in this country, white hegemonic elites have countered with overt and covert attempts to maintain the unequal socio-political status quo and economic advantage where white interests remain central, at the expense of non-whites both here and around the world. White supremacy has continuously morphed in this country changing from the overt and acceptable U.S. chattel slavery and Jim Crow segregation, to false claims of

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[438] James W. Perkinson, *White Theology Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 2.

reverse discrimination, to the covert and "politically correct" assertions of being colorblind, where race isn't seen, now with the election of the nation's first black president, to claims of being a post-racial state, where race doesn't matter.  The colorblind and post-racial rhetoric is intended to deceive, to have the ill-informed believe that the racial inequities of the past have been overcome by the civil rights legislation of the mid-twentieth century, which is simply not true. "The technique of nonrecognition [sic] ultimately supports the supremacy of white interests."[439] The truth is, in the U.S., race is seen and race does matter. To believe or to pretend otherwise is problematic for a number of reasons, particularly for persons of faith who would continue this charade in the name of religion.

It is problematic because it prevents persons of faith from understanding the impact both race and racism has upon Christian identity formation – meaning how one sees oneself and how one sees others, particularly how white Christians see black people. It is problematic because failing to understand race and racism and the impact of race and racism prevents persons of faith from understanding how racial identification informs self-understanding/self-worth and praxis of faith – meaning how one exercises faith-based beliefs and behaviors when claiming the *Imago Dei* and when engaging or interacting with others of a different race or ethnicity, particularly when whites are interacting with black people. This lack of race consciousness shows up as micro-aggressions or as statements explaining away racist statements and behaviors usually stated as, "I'm not racist," my former friend's Facebook response or "Black people say it or do it," pretty much every white person's response when caught on camera using the N-

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[439] Gotanda, 36.

word or "A black person was present," which was the Academy response when the movie Selma received so few Oscar nominations and so many accusations of being snubbed by the industry, as though the presence of a black person excused the blatant oversight. Finally, it gives theological credence to white normativity.

Moreover, the inability of Christians to articulate what is believed and why is problematic because it prevents people of faith from taking responsibility for faith-based beliefs and practices both inside and outside of the church – meaning being autonomous thinkers, taking ownership for what is believed, no longer relying on the faith assertions of an authority figure (i.e. pastor, parent or tradition). It is a poor Christian witness to not be able to articulate what is believed and what informs that belief. Finally, these tendencies are problematic because they prevent persons of faith from recognizing socio-political and theo-political or ecclesial "othering" and then from naming and using places(s) of personal and corporate privilege to counter discrimination and oppression of those "othered" people groups – meaning acknowledging and admitting that oppressions are not only individual, but institutionalized.

"Othering" is embedded in society and in the church and goes unnoticed by many who consider racist and discriminatory comments and behavior normal. These tendencies are problematic, moreover, in that they exhibit a lack of understanding about the ways some expressions of Christianity has created and continues to create and to support an "us versus them" identity formation, socialization and enculturation. As noted previously, it started with Western Christianity trying to distinguish itself from Judaism, which then became European cultural superiority over and against all people-of-color. It has manifested differently against different people of color, but manifested as U.S. chattel

slavery against people of African descent, as Japanese internment camps during World War II, as papers please laws in certain parts of the country with high Latino/a populations. In a post-9/11 world, it has manifested as anti-Islamic sentiment. In a country that boasts First Amendment rights to religious freedoms, it denies the same to others who want to build a mosque. More recently, it has manifested as anti-immigrant laws directed at undocumented workers, as opposition to the Dream Act, which would allow children who came to this country as a minor a path to citizenship under certain conditions, and as Religious Freedom Acts, which for now are anti-LGBTQ. These laws and behaviors have a deleterious impact not only upon the economy meaning if they were allowed to come out of the shadows companies could not under pay them and all workers could demand a living wage, but also upon the personhood of all "othered," especially when done so in the name of religion. Moreover, "othering" is a damaging witness to the Christian message.

Christian educators in the church and in the academy are uniquely positioned to address these tendencies because we have the forum to allow passionate debate in safe spaces, questioning, and ultimately re-visioning of the hearts and minds of friends and neighbors. In fact, one of the tasks of Christian education is revision.[440] In fact, it is through education that disciples challenge the culture of domination/status quo in an effort to transform, empower, restore and resist in order to bring about liberation and healing.[441] The people impacted by the tendencies noted above cry out for deliverance,

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[440] Kenneth H. Hill, *Religious Education in the African American Tradition A Comprehensive Introduction* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 6.

[441] Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Juan Floyd-Thomas, Carol B. Duncan, Stephen G. Ray, Jr., and Nancy Lynne Westfield, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 153.

and Christian educators, with their trusted aides and allies, can and must respond with a liberating pedagogy.

In the course of U.S. history, others have cried out for deliverance from oppressive circumstances. Their cries were heard and answered by persons aware of the injustice in the land, by persons of faith who did not turn a deaf ear to the pleas the oppressed or a blind eye to their circumstance. Neither did these listeners buy into the socio-political and theo-political rhetoric of the day that sanctioned the abuse, but rather risked life and liberty to secure freedom for another – the participants of the Underground Railroad (UGRR).

The UGRR was this country's first racially integrated civil rights movement in which whites and blacks worked together, taking great risks together, saving tens of thousands of lives together and ultimately succeeding together in one of the most ambitious political undertakings in American history.[442] The Underground Railroad was a network of multi-racial, multi-generational abolitionists, including Native Americans, free whites, and formerly enslaved blacks who worked collaboratively to undermine and to subvert a state-sponsored system of enslavement and inequality at a time when oppression of and discrimination against black bodies were socially accepted, theologically sanctioned, scientifically rationalized, economically profitable, politically supported and constitutionally upheld. "In an era when emancipation seemed subversive and outlandish to most Americans, the men and women of the underground defied society's standards on a daily basis, inspired by a sense of spiritual imperative, moral

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[442] Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan. The Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America's First Civil Rights Movement* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 4.

conviction, and especially on the part of African American activists, a fierce visceral passion for freedom."[443]

The story of the UGRR is an epic of moral courage, religious inspiration, and unexpected personal transformation played out by a cast of extraordinary personalities who combined then radical ideas about race and political action with traditional notions of personal honor and sacred duty.[444] Their combined efforts freed thousands from slavery's grip, and clearly demonstrate what can happen when people have an awareness of the dynamics of race, religion economics, politics and power operative in this country, a passion for justice, understand the Christian faith as liberatory for all, and then choose to live out life-affirming theological convictions in the public square by working to help the least of these by challenging the various socio-political and theological othering that yields economic exploitation and injustices of anyone, anywhere. The UGRR provides a framework from which we can model Christian education programming with the same liberatory intent.

First, the participants in the UGRR did not deny the discriminatory practice despite the socio-political and religious rhetoric that sanctioned it. In other words, participants were able to distinguish between fact and fiction. In addition, the basic concept of *escape* and *travel* undergirding the UGRR offers a way of envisioning the teaching/learning experience as one of leaving behind or of abandoning unhealthy, discriminatory ideologies and also as one of journeying with students from one place of understanding to another. It is a way of helping them to see that what is presumed normal is in fact discriminatory. Primary participants, *(i.e. conductor, station-*

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[443] Bordewich, 4.

[444] Bordewich, 4

*keeper/agent and freedom seeker/fugitive* and key aspects *(i.e. safe space and the signs/symbols of communication)* of the movement also offer a way of better understanding or better defining the role and responsibility of the instructor, including better use of resources and assignment selection (i.e. readings and assignments must address power relationships, socio-political, theo-political and socio-economic positioning and consequences), room setup (i.e. speaks to safe space physically and atmospherically, ground rules address mutual respect, engaged listening), and non-verbal or coded communication (i.e. learning to perceived through other senses, compassionate observation, etc.).

The benefits of employing a model of Christian education based upon the interworking of the UGRR include, but are not limited to: developing a personal conviction because students are asked why, what is your belief, what informs your belief; a sense of responsibility for others because participants are asked who is impacted by legislation or doctrine, what resources, gifts, skills, abilities do you have to assist those without the same in achieving/obtaining the same access or opportunity; a socio-political/theo-political awareness because conductor/instructor is required/expected to use aides that speak to and address these very relevant components. In fact, if there is no socio-economic, socio-political and theo-political engagement, then the model has not been employed properly.

A model of Christian education based upon the UGRR also provides a radical counter-cultural, counter-hegemonic perspective that is informed by faith and that is evidenced by praxis. Course assignments are to include an aspect of tying it all together, of the conductor/instructor ascertaining resources to achieve a liberatory objective and of

requesting participants to ascertain their resources and to make commitments to affect change in the church, community, in the world. Finally, teachers themselves are expected to exemplify a maturity in the faith, to be a model, as a conductor/instructor, as an aide and even as a freedom seeker/fugitive, continuously learning. The conductor/instructor is expected to be self-actualized or at least working toward that goal, able to challenge authority and able to be challenged as the authority.

A model of Christian education based upon the workings of the Underground Railroad revisions the teaching/learning experience as one of journeying, of travelling with our students from one place of understanding to another. It requires teachers and curriculum developers to be mindful of how the material under study impacts the lives of the students. In other words, it requires the teacher to have assistants, aides that will promote and provoke social analysis and critique of subject matter/course content in light of socio-economic, socio-political, theo-political realities. It requires the student also to assume responsibility, to not enjoy freedom alone, but to become a conductor/instructor or station-keeper/agent to help others enjoy freedom. In other words, freedom is not free, it is a place of responsibility.

A model of Christian education based upon the UGRR acknowledges the distinctions between safe space and comfortable space. It requires the conductor/instructor to read the signs of the times, to discern from the faces and sounds of participant voices whether it is safe to move on, is there a question, is there a misunderstanding? It also understands that times of great and glorious transition occur in darkness and so are not afraid of the darkness and are able to stay on the journey until the break of a new dawn, a sunrise of freedom. This model, when implemented with

appropriate aides, can promote and provoke critical engagement with the socio-economic, socio-political and theo-political realities of participants' day-to-day existence. As such, it is consistent with other critical/emancipatory pedagogies that offer student empowerment and autonomy. More specifically, by incorporating insights from Critical Race Theory, this model also contributes to the guild another methodology for analyzing race/power dynamic operative in the country, for examining and for challenging oppressive conditions and practices in society and in the church, and for recognizing and the utilizing places of privilege to subvert state/church sanctioned discrimination.

As a straight, educated, able-bodied, Christian black woman with a U.S. passport, I have focused this work primarily in anti-black racism and pro-black advocacy. I believe, however, that the educational model proposed herein is equally applicable to addressing other forms of discrimination plaguing the nation – sexism, heterosexism, classism, religion (anti-Jewish/anti-Muslim), anti-immigrant patriotism, and limitations in mental/physical able-ness).

This dissertation and the model it proposes has advanced the field of Christian religious education by showing, as have others, that theological analysis is inseparable from cultural dynamics of church and society, but also by insisting that religious education and theological analysis are incomplete without socio-economic, socio-political and theo-political analysis. In other words, there is no separation of church and state, and there is no sacred secular divide. Both church and stated colluded to create the institution of U.S. chattel slavery and both faith and civic disobedience was required to overturn it. Yet more work is still needed to fully dismantle the long-term dehumanizing effects of that peculiar institution, which still manifest itself today as pejorative

stereotyping and imaging of black/blackness and as black disposability. In the past, it was filling slave ships to the brim and throwing black bodies overboard at any sign of trouble. Now, it is more money spent on prisons than education and black bodies lying in the street, their white killers found not guilty, if even charged with a crime.

For this reason, the insights of Critical Race Theory, namely racism is normal, not aberrant, can and should be applied to religious education in order to show the similarities of an overtly racist past with the covertly racist present. The approach I have taken will be understood as having impacted the conversation by mandating engagement with dynamics of power. In other words, any model of Christian education based upon this model, of necessity, must employ aides that bring the socio-economic, socio-political, theo-political, into the discussion and must employ some means of critical analysis, critical race analysis and self-reflection. Participants in the UGRR knew what they believed (i.e. human freedom, equality of humanity), what they were willing to risk for that belief (i.e. life, livelihood, imprisonment, fine, enslavement, etc.), and they were able to articulate it, how else could they experience taunts from friends, family and neighbors or write newspaper articles, books, new church doctrine, give speeches, or persuade others to assist in similar counter-hegemonic practices.

With this work I hope to bring to light that Jesus' message was informed by his "raced" socio-political identity as a Jewish man living with colonial oppression under Roman Imperial rule in his Palestinian homeland, and so too is our interpretation of that message. To erase his historical and embodied flesh, to disregard the socio-economic, socio-political and theo-political circumstances of his day-to-day reality that informed his preaching is to feign colorblindness and/or a post-racial state that doesn't exist anywhere,

and that benefits white supremacist thought and action. It really is okay to be Black, Latino/a, Asian and even White. It is okay to be proud of one's racial/ethnic heritage as well. It is not okay to be ethnocentric to the point of presumed supremacy over all others and to exclude them from full participation in civic society and in the life of the church. Jesus didn't transcend his difference. He didn't come to earth in a clear, non-colored, non-gendered, non-descript, non-raced body. Rather, he respected and embraced difference, one could argue, created difference.

Participants in the UGRR respected and embraced difference, racially and with the resources they had to offer. We too can and should do the same. We should not have to be "alike" to be respected, embraced, or presumed to be equally reflective of the *Imago Dei* as anyone else. Neither do I have to deny who I am, particularly my black racial identity, to make you feel better about who you are. I, therefore, hope this work will help people acknowledge, especially white people acknowledge that race and racism are not problems of past generations, but are problems of this present age and are reflected in our theological anthropology that yields either white privilege (all things good and positive and kind) or black disposability (oh well another one bites the dust) as demonstrated by the very different response to the same activity in black or white public figures and as demonstrated in micro-aggressions, that for many whites, make their interests and agenda (i.e. TV critics, SAE frat brothers, communication directors, receptionists) take precedence over the interests, intelligence, integrity of blacks. I hope too that people, black and white, realize that blacks are also image bearers of the living God, even without being thin, with long blonde hair, blue eyes, and slender noses.

Future work with this framework will include an ethnographic study, and also take a closer look at the cross-applicability of this model to these other forms of discrimination. For example, one might conduct a bible study on the theme of gender roles, or the role or activities of women in Scripture. In fact, stories like Lot's daughters coming up with the idea of having an incestuous one-night-stand with their drunken father (Genesis 19:30-38) because "there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth," begs the question who then will come into their offspring? Did these two young ladies honestly think the whole world was destroyed, when they knew they had an Uncle Abraham somewhere beyond Sodom and Gomorrah? In fact, so much of Scripture begs for critical analysis, which can be done without destroying one's faith.

Research, according to Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, is not a detached, purely objective endeavor, but rather is an interactive process shaped by personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity.[445] Similarly, Margaret Ann Crain has noted that one's social location impacts research. Therefore, she too suggests that we (1) ask ourselves questions about the impact of our social location on our research interpretations,[446] and (2) reveal how certain values and assumptions affect outcomes of the research project.[447] In closing, let me highlight my social location, as it is relevant to my research interests and vocational aspirations.

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[445] Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, ed. *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1994), 3.

[446] Margaret Ann Crain, "Redefining the Fundamental Question," in *Religious Education*, (Fall, 2006), 101:4. 238.

[447] Crain, 440.

I am a straight woman of African descent, who by virtue of my academic accomplishments and a corporate work history, am considered by some standards to be "middle-class." I have experienced both racism and sexism, but I reject "oppression" as core to my identity. It has been my experience only. Like Mellody Hobson, I too have been mistaken for the hired help, a janitor, despite not wearing a forest green uniform of the hospital housekeeping staff. Just as a black woman in America, I have frequent micro-aggression experiences where some white person insults my intelligence or my integrity. For example, a white female colleague at the seminary once said to me that I had a "good vocabulary." She was being complimentary, but she also seemed surprised. On another occasion, while at a local grocery store, having paid for my purchases, actually as I was receiving my change, a white male bagger asked the cashier if she charged me for the water in my cart. When I asked him why he asked that question, he looked down and refused to answer.

However, I also have places of privilege. I'm educated; I have advance degrees and I have held a management-level positions with major corporations (AT&T and Lucent Technologies) meaning that I have marketable skills that can be used in service to others. Based upon my physical appearance, no one is likely to ask me for "papers," but if so, I have a U.S. passport, I can prove my citizenship, which also means I have the I.D., if required, to vote. I was too young to participate in the marches and sit-ins of the 1960s, but I am a benefactor of the civil rights movement. Thus I feel a sense of responsibility to the generation coming after me to preserve the rights won during the hard-fought battle of 1960s that are slowly being rolled back and taken away, and also to secure civil and human rights for persons now "othered" by mainstream hegemonic society. More

importantly, I am an imager bearer of the living God. Collaborating across the racial divide is the means God has given me to help those who cannot now fight their own battles. I invite others to join me in the great escape on this journey to the Promise Land.

Famed author and poet Maya Angelou, believed that one never really leaves home, but rather carries the dreams, fears and dragons of home under one's skins, at the extreme corners of one's eyes and possibly in the gristle of the earlobes.[448] There is a particular home training, as my mother calls it, that I no doubt carry with me and that informs my particular research interests. I was raised in a household with a man denied certain rights by then king of the south, Jim Crow, but who allowed me time and space to express my thoughts in opposition to his and who also did not allow tattling, which was always met with the question, "what did you do?" In other words, he encouraged self-reflection. I am thus a firm believer in questioning authority, in knowing what one believes, why, in the ability to articulate the same, and how one has contributed to the situation being what it is.

Developing and employing a model of Christian education based upon the UGRR, one that employs aides and safe space, and reading the signs and symbols of the times, that is not afraid of the dark, and that encourages questioning of authority and self-reflection is not only my thing by reason of the liberatory call of Christian Education and my affirmative response to the call of God on my life, it is my home training, which has taught me to question my beliefs and the assumptions that informs my faith-based beliefs and praxis in safe space with other people-of-faith, to grow and to mature in the faith with other people-of-God. It provides personal conviction about my claims of faith. It gives me joy and personal satisfaction knowing that I have used my places of privilege to

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[448] Maya Angelou, *Letter to My Daughter* (New York: Random House, 2009), 6.

help another, less fortunate than myself. Finally, it assures me that I have fulfilled my calling, my vocation, and my divine purpose. I wholeheartedly invite others to join me aboard Freedom's Train bound for Glory!

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