



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

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The University of Edinburgh

School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences

PHILOSOPHIES OF SUFFERING: EXCEPTIONALIST AND ASSIMILATIONIST
THEODICIES OF EIGHTEENTH- TO TWENTIETH-CENTURY BLACK
AMERICAN THOUGHT AS FOUNDATIONAL OF TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY
BLACK (NEO)CONSERVATIVE EPISTEMIC RETROGRESSION

TONY R. BAUGH, JR

A THESIS

PRESENTED TO THE

FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DECEMBER 2025

Table of Contents

DECLARATION.....	6
ABSTRACT.....	8
LAY SUMMARY.....	11
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	12
DEDICATION.....	14
INTRODUCTION.....	16
Plan of the Thesis.....	27
Literature Review.....	30
CHAPTER 1: ‘My Poor Soul’: Theodicy and the Strong Assimilationist	
Origin of Black American Philosophy.....	41
1.1. Introduction.....	41
1.2. <i>Post Facto</i> : The Four Traditions of Black Thought.....	45
1.3. Magdalena Beulah Brockden: Of Slavery, Sinners and Strong Assimilationist Theodicy.....	49
1.4. The Theodicy of Black Christian Nationalism: An Upholding of Rationalism, the Perfect Philosophy for Management and Subordination.....	61
1.5. Fundamentals of Liberation Theodicy: An Activistic Secularism against Rationalism and Capitalism, Exceptionalism and Assimilationism.....	71
1.6. Conclusion.....	80

<i>CHAPTER 2: False Dichotomy: Exceptionalist and Assimilationist Theodicy as Early Black American Radicalism</i>	91
2.1. Introduction	91
2.2. Theodicies as Radical Philosophy in Response to Ethnology: Exceptionalism (and Assimilationism) as Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Black American Thought.....	95
2.3. E. Franklin Frazier and the Exceptionalist Foundation of Twentieth-Century Assimilationism	104
2.4. Toward Emigrationism: Henry Highland Garnet, Henry McNeal Turner and the Imperialist Logics of Black Nationalism as Activistic Exceptionalist Theodicy	109
2.5. Martin Delany and the Problematics of an Exceptionalist Theodicy of Emigrationism	120
2.6. Conclusion	129
 <i>CHAPTER 3: 1885 to 2025, Alexander Crummell to John McWhorter, Thomas Sowell and Coleman Hughes: Retrogressive Black American Theodicy, a Dialecticism of Exceptionalism and Assimilationism</i>	138
3.1. Introduction	138
3.2. Alexander Crummell and the Limits of Exceptionalism: The Rationalist Penchant for Misremembering History	139
3.3. Alexander Crummell: An Archetypal Assimilationist Theodicy and Black Conservative	145
3.4. Thomas Sowell, John McWhorter and Coleman Hughes: Black Conservative Theodicy and the Problems of Assimilation.....	154

3.4a. Edmund Burke and the Mythos of Conservatism: How Nineteenth-Century Black American Radicalism and Twenty-First-Century Black Conservatism Have a Similar Ethos	155
3.4b. John McWhorter and Victimology: The Problem of Dissent.....	162
3.4c. Coleman Hughes and Neoracism: The Problem of Racism as Merely a Form of Prejudice	180
3.4d. Thomas Sowell and the Black Redneck: The Problem of Misreading History and Culture.....	227
3.5. Conclusion.....	245
<i>CHAPTER 4: Harry Haywood and the ‘Negro Question’: Toward a Liberation Theodicy.....</i>	267
4.1. Introduction	267
4.2. Groundwork for a Liberation Theodicy: Harry Haywood and the Communist International.....	268
4.3. Marxian Leftism and Rightism: A Contrast with Mainstream Bourgeois Politics	273
4.4. Haywood, Poor Black Farmers and the Liberation of Self-Determination	281
4.5. Conclusion.....	290
<i>Conclusions: Against Moral Relativism, Homogeneity and Consensus ...</i>	298
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	322

DECLARATION

I declare that I conducted the research to produce the following thesis titled 'Philosophies of suffering: exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicies of eighteenth-to twentieth-century Black American thought as foundational of twenty-first-century Black (neo)conservative epistemic retrogression'. This research was completed in accordance with the university's guidelines and there are no conflicts of interest herein. All sources and references used in this thesis have been aptly cited and acknowledged fittingly.

ABSTRACT

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This thesis interrogates theodicy as the most influential philosophical tradition among nineteenth-century Black thinkers during the American Enlightenment – a tradition rooted in the Black Church and the lived religious experience of African Americans. Before Harold Cruse and Huey P. Newton explored modes of Black nationalism, there was Martin Delany advocating for the same 100 years earlier through his activist theodicy. Prior to Marcus Garvey desiring an Africa for Africans only, Delany would presage that idea, too, out of his theodicy.

Antecedent of Du Bois postulating the need for a ‘talented tenth’, Henry Highland Garnet had already proposed such an ascendant segment of Black culture during the time of slavery. Long before Elijah Muhammad, who would influence the political philosophy of Malcolm X, advocated the need for a Black theology to redeem Black people, Henry McNeal Turner’s activist theodicy had assured him of that. However, though they were highly influential in its epistemology, I will

work to show that the activistic theodicies of these nineteenth-century Black abolitionists, though indispensable, were insufficient to form a truly liberational radicalism.

Historically, the Black American theodicy discourse manifested as nationalism and emigrationism, articulated along exceptionalist and assimilationist lines from the antebellum period through Reconstruction and into the twentieth century. While these frameworks sought to address Black suffering under racial capitalism, they remained tethered to imperial logics and rationalist metaphysics. In the post-Enlightenment era, I argue that Black conservative intellectuals such as John McWhorter (*Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America*, 2000), Thomas Sowell (*Black Rednecks and White Liberals*, 2005) and Coleman Hughes (*The End of Race Politics: Arguments for a Colorblind America*, 2024) have revived theodicy in assimilationist form. Through an epistemology of cultural integration, these thinkers construe white American culture as a 'hedge of protection', positing that Black Americans must enter this sphere to escape suffering – a Joban rendering of theodicy that frames submission as the condition for progress.

Against this backdrop, the paper advances *liberation theodicy* as a critical alternative to the false dichotomy of exceptionalism and assimilationism. Drawing on Harry Haywood's Marxist-Leninist critique of integration and his advocacy for Black self-determination in *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question* (1958), liberation theodicy reconfigures theodicy as an apophatic, materialist philosophy of religion. Rather than vindicating divine providence or rationalist

ideals of progress, liberation theodicy resists cultures of domination, hierarchisation and homogenisation. It calls for a psychical and political rupture from the capitalist world system and its imperial grammars, foregrounding the structural conditions of undue suffering and the necessity of non-domination as the ground of freedom. Through a comparative analysis of nineteenth-century exceptionalist theodicies, twenty-first-century assimilationist conservatism and Haywood's twentieth-century revolutionary materialism, this paper seeks to demystify theodicy as a theological and philosophical technology of power and to articulate its transformation into a praxis of liberation.

LAY SUMMARY

This thesis examines the concept of Black suffering. At its core, it asks a simple question: Must Black people continue to suffer undue sufferings economically, politically and socially, or is there another option? To this end, it asks another question: To what extent is Black suffering associable with capitalism, a political economy with imperial logics? To answer these questions, this research document examines the philosophies of Black thinkers from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, giving special attention to how they articulated what it is to suffer for being Black-in-the-world and how to respond to such sufferings, and to explain the ways in which Black American philosophy is vulnerable to modes of assimilation under capitalism, hampering its capacity to liberate Black people from harmful social structures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God for my mother, Dolores Walker White – for her love, her devotion and her unwavering support. I also take the opportunity to acknowledge her retirement from teaching special education for over forty years. What a testimony, what a steadfast example of service to humankind.

I thank God for sending me my writing and philosophic partner, my dog, Blu. Will the circle be unbroken?

I extend many thanks to my friend Pilar White, the first person to read this thesis, for being a significant interlocutor, a conversation partner without whom this work would not be as nearly as complete as it is.

I give thanks to my doctoral advisor Tommy Curry for helping me through the process of finishing this thesis with the guiding light of his scholarship.

Thanks to my brother Miron Clay-Gilmore for helping to sharpen this paper with his intelligence, insight and tenacity.

To my brother Darius Creț, thanks for your useful comments on the first chapter of this thesis, and for your encouragement and friendship through the PhD process. You helped create a sense of community that every academic department should strive toward.

Thanks to my teachers James Henry Harris, Bill McDonald and Nimi Wariboko for their early reading of my writing and for encouraging me to believe that it has merit.

Last, but certainly not least, in addition to Dorothy Overton, Emmett Price, III, Alexis Blackstock and DiAnn Branch, I want to thank my former students MeKayla King, Phillip Shifflett, Justin Mallory, Denitra Salley and Kamiyah Parker for helping to fund my research. May God richly bless you, my beloved.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my late father and namesake, Tony Raye Baugh, Sr., MBA, a brilliant Black conservative who loved Black people, who mentioned on 28 March 1992 that he wanted to pursue a PhD, but who died a factotum in the workplace before he ever could. This thesis is for him and for all of us Black folk who remain.

Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble.—Job 14:1

INTRODUCTION

**Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois on Hunger,
Black Suffering and What It Means to Be A Problem**

American chattel slavery (1662–1865),¹ heinous and immoral an institution as there ever has been, was, at the end of the day, about making money, indeed making money off the backs of Africans and their descendants across generations. Therefore, it seems counterintuitive and counterproductive for an enslaver to brutalise his primary workforce and greatest commodity, especially, during the acme of American slavery from 1830 until 1860, to the place and point of death at such a young age as twenty-two years in the cotton field.² Even though the enslaved African, the most vital commodity of the Industrial Revolution (1760–1850; 1860–1914) was, as property, by 1860, more valuable than three times the railroads and factories of the North combined,³ this dispensation of exploitation was the social reality of the times, and not just with regard to how the enslaved Black man and woman were mistreated, inhumanly, brutally, but also regarding how enslaved people were commonly abused by their enslavers more broadly. This phenomenon has been recorded in slave narratives, most notably the slave narratives of Booker T. Washington in his autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901) and Frederick Douglass in the account of his life, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845).

Frederick Douglass reveals that the enslaved in the labour camps (which he called plantations) were treated much worse than the enslaved person

working in the city. The closest large city to Douglass when he was coming of age as an enslaved person was Baltimore. He recounts how upon visiting Baltimore for the first time as a teen (he was sent there by his enslaver to work in the home of another enslaver, a man he called Master Hugh) he learned that a 'city slave is almost a freeman'⁴ and that he was 'much better fed and clothed'⁵ compared to the enslaved person in a rural area.

One area of cruelty exacted upon most enslaved people in the labour camps was deprivation of food, a phenomenon that, again, seems impractical from the avaricious, money-making aspect of American chattel slavery, but was in fact quite common:

He is a desperate slaveholder, who will shock the humanity of his non slaveholding neighbors with the cries of his lacerated slave. Few are willing to incur the odium attaching to the reputation of being a cruel master; *and above all things, they would not be known as not giving a slave enough to eat.*⁶

Even amongst the most morally bankrupt of enslavers, not feeding one's enslaved was frowned upon in polite society, yet Douglass goes on to suggest that it was still a common practice, even in the city, where he claims enslaved people were treated more favourably than 'on the plantation'.⁷ He recalls a man called Mr Thomas Hamilton of Baltimore, who, through the law, owned two people, Henrietta and Mary, who, according to Douglass, 'of all the mangled and *emaciated* creatures [he] ever looked upon, these two were the most so'.⁸ We are led to believe that in addition to being brutalised by the whip, Henrietta and

Mary were being starved. As C. L. R. James notes in *The Black Jacobins* (1938), 'slaves received the whip with more certainty and regularity than they received their food'.⁹ In Douglass's third (and final) autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, he remembers how he too would often be made to go hungry while enslaved:

We were oftentimes severely pinched with hunger, when meat and bread were mouldering under lock and key. This was so, when she knew we were nearly half starved; and yet with saintly air she [Ms Auld] would each morning kneel with her husband and pray that a merciful God would 'bless them in basket and store, and save them at the last in his kingdom'.¹⁰

This theme of hunger, of the food-deprived, starved, enslaved person, was not uniquely phenomenal to Douglass's experience but was also experienced on forced labour camps across the South:

[Enslavers] showed surprisingly little concern for slave mothers' health or diet during pregnancy, providing pregnant women with no extra rations and employing them in intensive field work even in the last week before they gave birth. Not surprisingly, slave mothers suffered high rates of spontaneous abortions, stillbirths, and deaths shortly after birth. Half of all slave infants weighed less than 5.5 pounds at birth, or what we would today consider to be severely underweight.¹¹

Perhaps this is a *telos* of Enslavement, that the enslaved would be

tortured as much as they were worked. This probability is exposed by Hortense Spillers as she briefly recounts the writings of Congregationalist preacher Jonathan Edward's 'observations on the tortures of enslavement' as chronicled by abolitionist William Goodell's 'contemporaneous study of the North American slave codes':

Among the myriad uses to which the enslaved community was put, Goodell identifies its value for medical research: 'Assortments of diseased, *damaged*, and disabled Negroes, deemed incurable and otherwise worthless are *bought up*, it seems... by medical institutions, to be experimented and operated upon, for purposes of "medical education" and the interest of medical science.' (86–7; Goodell's emphasis)

From the *Charleston Mercury* for 12 October 1838, Goodell notes this advertisement:

'To planters and others. – Wanted, fifty Negroes, any person, having sick Negroes, considered incurable by their respective physicians, and wishing to dispose of them, Dr. S. will *pay cash* for Negroes affected with scrofula, or king's evil, confirmed hypochondriasm, apoplexy, diseases of the liver, kidneys, spleen, stomach and intestines, bladder and its appendages, diarrhea, dysentery, etc. The *highest cash price will be paid*, on application as above.' at No. 110 Church Street, Charleston. (87; Goodell's emphasis)

This profitable 'atomizing' of the captive body provides another angle on the divided flesh: we lose any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions. To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory.¹²

By one instance or another, through the 'living laboratory' of Enslavement, a torturous siege of inhumanity to humankind, the enslaver became enriched at the cost of the low quality of life of the enslaved. Like in the case of Douglass, the phenomenon of hunger being ontologically indexical of a paltry quality of enslaved life was also remembered by Booker T. Washington in his memoir *Up from Slavery*, published some fifty-six years after Douglass's autobiography. In the first chapter of *Up from Slavery*, Washington, an early Black conservative, explains how his mother used to steal chickens. Growing up for the first five years of his life on the foothills of Virginia, in the labour camp where he and his family were forced to work, day in and day out (where he was not trained to teach), Washington would often go hungry. Food was so scarce on the plantation where he was enslaved that he pined for Sundays, because on Sundays he would be given something to eat other than the usual morsel of corn bread and pork and be gifted some molasses from the 'big house'. As a small child, Sundays became Washington's favourite day of the week, because molasses was by far his favourite thing to eat, 'more enjoyable to [him] than is a fourteen-

course dinner',¹³ to the point that when his mother would serve it to him in their hut he would 'tip the plate in one direction and another, so as to make the molasses spread all over it, in the full belief that there would be more of it and that it would last longer if spread out in this way'.¹⁴ However, as much as he enjoyed eating molasses, it, along with the pittance of cornbread and pork during the week, was not enough to keep him and his family from often going hungry. This was common on so-called plantations of enslavers throughout the South:

This diet lacked protein, thiamine, niacin, calcium, magnesium, and vitamin D, and as a result, slave children often suffered from night blindness, abdominal swellings, swollen muscles, bowed legs, skin lesions, and convulsions. (Mintz and McNeil 2018)¹⁵

Consequently, Washington recalls how his mother began to steal chickens from their owner to make sure that her children did not go to bed and start their workday hungry:

One of my earliest recollections is that of my mother cooking a chicken late into the night, and awakening her children for the purpose of feeding them. How or where she got it I do not know. I presume, however, it was procured from our owner's farm. *Some people may call this theft. If such a thing were to happen now, I should condemn it as theft myself.* But taking place at the time it did, and for the reason that it did, no one could convince me that my mother was guilty of thieving. She was simply a victim of the system of slavery.¹⁶

How could anyone ever accuse Booker T. Washington's mother of theft?

This is a similar question that Frederick Douglass raised in *Life and Times*:

The slave is fully justified in helping himself to the gold and silver, and the best apparel of his master...Such taking is not stealing in any sense of the word...Slaveholders had made it almost impossible for the slave to commit any crime known to the *laws* of God or to the *laws* of man. If he steals, he takes his own; if he kills, he imitates only heroes of the Revolution.¹⁷

However, I posit this query more concisely: How can property steal property?

How could Booker T. Washington's mother be accused of theft? How can property steal property? How could this property, this 'commodity that speaks',¹⁸ this commodity most precious to the functioning scheme of capitalism, that put capitalism on its back and foundationalised it for the modern world, which Karl Marx indexes but never distinguishes outright in *Capital* as the enslaved African, through theft liberate what was coeval with it: property? Could that which possessed the principal factor of capital, exchange-value, scarce liberate itself?

Marx writes on the value of this speaking commodity in this way:

[W]e will content ourselves here with one more example relating to the commodity-form itself. If commodities could speak they would say this: our use-value may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value. Our own intercourse as commodities proves it. We relate to each other merely as exchange-values. Now listen how those

commodities speak through the mouth of the economist: 'Value (i.e., exchange-value) is a property of things, riches (i.e., use-value) of man...'¹⁹

The universalisation of the flesh of the enslaved, which Spillers posited, precludes Marx, who was against slavery, from allying the plight of enslaved Africans as the most prominent example of commodities being fetishised, where the question should not have been 'if' commodities could speak but 'in that' commodities speak, stipulates that the actions of the enslaved cannot be considered a moral matter, as '[t]he morality of free society could have no application to slave society'.²⁰

Douglass pondered the universality of the moral gravity of enslavement this way, like Washington, post Emancipation, looking back over his time as an enslaved person: 'As society has marked me out as privileged plunder, on the principle of self-preservation, I am justified in plundering in turn. Since each slave belongs to all, all must therefore belong to each.'²¹ If (since) his (Washington's) mother was enslaved, she is non-human and consequently could never, by law, be accused of stealing anything. Yet Washington's Conservative retrospective understanding of the matter as a formerly enslaved person, a nascent citizen of the United States, is that, while enslaved, his mother would not have been considered a thief for stealing chickens to feed her family. If it was right during slavery for his mother to steal to feed her family, a point that Washington seems to make here, when did it become wrong? When could it become wrong for this property, this commodity that speaks, this commodity that feels suffering, that

senses pain, that understands hunger? After all, what is hunger? It is a cruelty like a festering wound is a cruelty, a wound that teems with pain yet imbibes the sound of death. Hunger is cruelty that cannot be halted by hands or washed by words. Its constancy reminds us of all we require and all we are powerless to rout. In this way, powerlessness is a hunger crueller than hunger itself. Douglass affirms this in his description of the implacable suffering he faced as he bore witness to a ritual of cruelty at the heart of capitalism, of making money, of commodity fetishisation, that is, the destruction of the Black body, that is, the whipping of his Aunt Hester by their enslaver, Captain Anthony:

Aunt Hester had not only disobeyed his orders in going out, but had been found in company with Lloyd's Ned; which circumstance, I found, from what he said while whipping her, was the chief offense. Had he been a man of pure morals himself, he might have been thought interested in protecting the innocence of my aunt; but those who know him will not suspect him of any such virtue. Before he commenced whipping Aunt Hester he took her into the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders, and back entirely naked. He then told her to cross her hands, calling her at the same time a d—d b—h. After crossing her hands, he tied them with strong rope, and led her to a stool under a large hook in the joist, put in for the purpose. He made her get upon the stool, and tied her hands to the hook. She now stood fair for the infernal purpose. Her arms were stretched up at their full length, so that she

stood upon the ends of her toes. He then said to her, 'Now, you d—
d b—h, I'll learn you how to disobey my orders!' and after rolling up
his sleeves, he commenced to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon
the warm, red blood (amid heart-rending shrieks from her, and
horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor. I was so terrified
and horror-stricken at the sight, that I hid myself in a closet, and
dared not venture out till long after the bloody transaction was over.
I expected it would be my turn next. It was all new to me. I had
never seen anything like it before...²²

The commodity, Aunt Hester in all her pulchritude, is here literally fetishised as her enslaver has fixated upon her flesh beyond the point of utility. What misdeed could her beating expiate? What crime could be committed by a 'commodity that speaks' that warranted such punishment? Aunt Hester is her enslaver's obsessional object, the desiderata of his imbrued greed dealt out as lashes stripping away her sinews. This agonising display does not possess the intelligence or the interior logics to be malicious; rather, it is part and parcel of a simultaneity of expendability and indispensability at the core of commodity as the unifying fixture at the centre of capitalism.

Beholding Aunt Hester as she wails and screams in excruciating torment, Douglass recounts this scene that haunted his nightmares until his dying day, and, though gory, it is nothing more than the dispassionate ritual of capitalism that has been in practice for over 500 years. The very word Douglass chooses to

describe his presence at his aunt's thrashing, and their enslaver, is that of 'participant'. Surely, since Douglass, stowed away in a closet, is not beating his own aunt, and he could not be said to be an active participant in this ritual. Therefore, it becomes clear that what Douglass is describing is how he is made by white supremacy, whiteness and capitalism to be a passive participant in the ritual of Aunt Hester's brutalisation.

Likewise, in 'Of Our Spiritual Strivings', the seminal chapter of W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, the author muses upon the ways that it feels for him as a Black man 'to be a problem'. Here he examines the ways in which the Black presence is an inconvenience. For Du Bois, the most striking and shocking revelation of his life was that, though white people surrounded him, and he was embroidered and embroiled roundabout by whiteness, excelling in the face of his pallid classmates, he himself was not white, and this dearth of whiteness was in fact a deficit to him. This ever appears to him as anathema, opprobrious and obstruction to the innate justice that would be his non-presence, something that wrenched him: for to not exist is a problematic that he, existing, just could not overcome. For to be present is to affront, to be present is enough to mitigate, to warrant the aversive response to the stimuli of his unabashedly unchained ontology.

He, *a priori* the startling revelation of his Blackness as a mode of undesirable difference, had borne no distinction necessitated to overcome until he was confronted by a peer – a 'girl, a tall newcomer, [who] refused [his] card – refused it peremptorily, with a glance'. It was at this precise moment that he knew

that his very heartbeat, his organs, his sense, his affections, his passions, those very things that contributed to his humanity, could neither assuage nor mollify the unremitting chasm of race. Therefore, to Du Bois's mind, the need for the double consciousness of the Black person in America is immediate and tethered dutifully to his antic composition. It is in the way solely for defence, a defence without which the Black person could not survive, much less exist.²³

Plan of the Thesis

In the following research document, I will claim that the passive participation in suffering is the benthos of traditional theodicy. However, through an active participation in being through suffering, an activist theodicy, I will explore how Black radical thinkers have mounted theodicy as a philosophy of religion, politics and personhood to respond to the legacy of anti-Black racism in the modern world, and how they have been perceived as the problem of evil itself, how the problems of evil themselves (Black people) develop pathways towards their liberation. However, I examine the procedure of theodicy as a problematic of moving from being an impediment to becoming imperial.

Historically, the theodicean enterprise of Black Americans has been expressed along exceptionalist and assimilationist lines according to a reading and rendering of an encounter with the Christian Bible: either Black people are superior to white people in their culture and in their sociological station, even if that station is enslavement, because God freed his downtrodden people in Israel from the oppression of Egypt; or, white people are superior to Black people in their culture, and therefore, Black people should strive to be more like Western

normative visions of white people in custom and culture, lest they suffer for lack of integration, similar to Job being outside God's hedge of protection. It is thought that while Black people, during slavery, hungered to be free, adopted the *exceptionalist* theodicy that Black people, since Emancipation, adopted the *assimilationist* theodicy. I expose this false dichotomy of exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicy, suggesting that both epistemologies were commitments adopted in the nineteenth century, and offer a third option for theodicy: liberationism.

The activist theodicies of the nineteenth century, though inspiring in their pursuits towards generating a self-image and autonomy, failed in a specific way – they both held allegiance to capitalism and imperialism. The liberationist theodicy I propose is a response to what I claim is an assimilationist theodicy feature of nineteenth-century conservatism found in twenty-first century neoconservatism in the writings of Thomas Sowell, John McWhorter and Coleman Hughes. In the title of this thesis, when I suggest that the exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicies of eighteenth to nineteenth-century Black American thought were foundational of twenty-first-century Black conservative thought, I am not suggesting a *Grund* of Black conservatism but a *prevenience* in the sociological and economic assimilationist epistemologies of Black conservatism as a political philosophy.

Therefore, the chapters of this thesis take the following shape: Chapter 1, “‘My Poor Soul’: Theodicy and the Strong Assimilationist Origin of Black American Philosophy’, is an examination of the *Lebenslauf*, a personal memoir of

the Christian conversion of a Black Moravian slave in the 1750s, which I claim is not only the first published Black American philosophy but a precursor to the major Black philosophy of the nineteenth-century American Enlightenment, theodicy. Chapter 2, 'False Dichotomy: Exceptionalist and Assimilationist Theodicy as Early Black American Radicalism', analyses the first Black American philosophical tradition, theodicy, along its exceptionalist and assimilationist lines, observing the statist and capitalist allegiance resident in its radical push towards nationalism and emigrationism. Chapter 3, '1885 to 2025, Alexander Crummell to John McWhorter, Thomas Sowell and Coleman Hughes: Retrogressive Black American Theodicy, a Dialecticism of Exceptionalism and Assimilationism', is an exegesis of economist and philosopher Thomas Sowell's major work *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (2005), in addition to an examination of the concepts of other major Black conservative works: 'Victimology' in John McWhorter's *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (2000) and 'neoracism' in Coleman Hughes's *The End of Race Politics: Arguments for a Colorblind America* (2024), comparing their assimilationist thought as a twenty-first century theodicy to the paragon of sociological exceptionalism of the nineteenth-century Alexander Crummell. Finally, Chapter 4, 'Harry Haywood and the "Negro Question": Toward a Liberation Theodicy', poses Harry Haywood as an archetype of liberationist theodicean philosophising through an elucidation of his pamphlet *For the Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question* (1958), a rejoinder to the false dichotomy of exceptionalism and assimilationism, and my attempt to develop a theodicy that makes Black suffering contextually bearable.

All the appertaining research of this document will be to raise the following question: Is it possible that Black philosophy is susceptible to the assimilationist logics of capitalism, imperialism and colonialism, and, if so, by which mechanism(s) can Black philosophers prevent such epistemic vulnerability?

Literature Review

For all the chapters of this research document, the philosophy of Cornel West's *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, a text demonstrative of Africana philosophy, history of philosophy, pragmatism, Marxist philosophy and Black theology, becomes an organising figurehead. Each chapter begins (or refers to) West's formulation of what he describes as the four major traditions of Black thought emergent around the time of the American Revolution in response to the vicious legacy of European Enlightenment-induced anti-Black racism in the world – exceptionalism, assimilationism, marginalism and humanism. Of concern for this paper, however, are the first two categories of Black thought that Black leaders and writers engaged in during the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In his historical and genealogical periodisation, West does not name them as such, yet I claim these two categories, exceptionalism and assimilationism, are indicative of theodicy. Additionally, in each chapter, I will offer a critique of West's formulations around exceptionalism and assimilationism towards a richer understanding of philosophies of Black suffering.

Chapter 1

In Chapter 1, I first recount how West in the 'Notes' section of *Prophesy* suggests that there are no examples of what he calls strong (ontological) assimilationism among Black thinkers throughout American history. I trouble this notion as a gap in knowledge by engaging with what I term the strong assimilationist proto-theodicy of Magdalena Beulah Brockden. Moreover, I call Brockden's the first Black philosophy ever published in America. Before Olaudah Equiano, before Phillis Wheatley, indeed, before Frederick Douglass, the first published Black American was probably Magdalena Beulah Brockden. A paper written by Seth Moglen titled 'Enslaved in the City on a Hill: The Archive of Moravian Slavery and the Practical Past' is central to Chapter 1 for the following reason: while Moglen's focus is on narrative as a genre of slave literature, and the idiosyncratic community of Moravian Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, my focus is on articulating Magdalena Beulah Brockden's *Lebenslauf*, the memoir of her Christian conversion, as a theodicy, a rich philosophy of religion and politics. This epistemic space is where Moglen's exegesis of Brockden's *Lebenslauf* and my own differ.

Therefrom, the other major exegetical work in this chapter deals with *State Capitalism and World Revolution* by the Marxist-Trotskyist political philosopher C. L. R. James. I chose this text because it confronts headlong the rationalism/spiritualism within which Brockden, as a transmogrified Black soul, is engaged, preventing her from reading her material conditions aright. Thus, I perform an exegesis of James's final chapter, called 'Philosophy and State Capitalism', in which he names rationalism and (German) idealism as the perfect

philosophies for subordination and management because of their misapprehension of materialism, what I claim Brockden, through her strong (ontological) assimilationist theodicy, professes. What I want to do with this literary engagement is to connect the Trotskyist James in Chapter 1 with the Leninist Haywood in Chapter 4, both of these Black men wrangling a non-Western modality of socialism through various critiques of rationalism and economics, to demonstrate the anti-integrationism of liberation theodicy.

Finally, I give a first articulation of what the tenets of my liberation theodicy are, citing past and present scholarly debates around theodicy, anthropodicy, and Black theological criticisms of capitalism. In this pursuit, I examine concepts from the works of Lewis Gordon ('Race, Theodicy, and the Emancipatory Challenges of Blackness'), Biko Mandela Gray ('On Black Accursedness: A Political Theodicy, or the Problem of Evil in Black'), Cornel West ('Black Theology and Marxist Thought' and *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*), Ionut Untea ('Anthropodicy and the Fate of Humanity in the Anthropocene: From the Disenchantment of Evil to the Re-enchantment of Suffering'), Leonard Harris ('Necro-Being: An Actuarial Account of Racism') and Maikki Aakko ('Knowing Where We Are: On the Intelligibility of the World, Living Well and Meaningless Suffering'). West's 'Black Theology and Marxist Thought' is instrumental here because he is a thinker whose early work demonstrates a compatibility between religion and Marxism, a coupling that my liberationist conceptualisation of theodicy adopts and secularises. Additionally, West's discussion in *Prophesy* of the debate between James Hal Cone (*God of the*

Oppressed) and William R. Jones (*Is God a White Racist: A Preamble to Black Theology*) around Black theology is contributory to developing my theodical account of liberationism.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2, like Chapter 1, begins with a brief examination of a section of West's *Prophesy*. This time, I foundationalise the chapter with West's historiographical examination of the history of European Enlightenment Age ethnologies and aesthetic theory, against which the Black theodicians of the nineteenth-century American Enlightenment worked. Further, this chapter complicates the notion that Black exceptionalism was a radicalism that had no assimilationist leanings. I work to show that the major Black philosophical thought of the nineteenth century was exceptionalist theodicy, and that this theodicy worked along the lines of nationalism and emigrationism, but that this conception of exceptionalism also contained assimilationist means through a strong allegiance to statism, imperialism and capitalism, no different than Ralph Waldo Emerson, who published perhaps the first activist and exceptionalist American theodicy, as discussed in Chapter 1. To make this claim, I consult the following major texts: *Black Nationalism and Theodicy: A Comparison of the Thought of Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner* by James Arthur Holmes, 'Black Theodicy: African Americans and Nationalism in the Antebellum North' by Patrick Rael, and 'The Negro Emigration Movement, 1849–1854: A Phase of Negro Nationalism' by Howard A. Bell.

Through an analysis of the philosophy of Martin Delany, Henry Highland Garnet and Henry McNeal Turner, Holmes, Rael, and Bell all contribute to a concept of Black nationalism as theodicean, and they all reveal the possibility of a softening of the dichotomy between exceptionalism and assimilationism, with a view towards twentieth-century Black thought. To exemplify a twentieth-century version of their nineteenth-century American Enlightenment, I turn to the writings of E. Franklin Frazier. Though in *Prophesy*, West suggests that early Frazier was the archetype of twentieth-century, *studied* Black weak assimilationism, introducing my concept of Joban theodicy, I complicate his position by examining two texts that Frazier produced the same year, 1927. In 1927, Frazier produced two texts that prove a synthesis of exceptionalism and assimilationism as a false dichotomy with statist ambitions and capitalistic commitments: 'Racial Self-Expression' and 'The Pathology of Race Prejudice', respectively. This exegesis is to be a view towards articulating a third option to the false dichotomy of exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicy, liberation theodicy. This is a connection that Holmes never makes. However as a pit-stop, we move to Chapter 3, an examination of the twenty-first century retrogression in Black (neo) conservative thought predicated by the preceding generations of exceptionalism and assimilationism.

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, after showing a mutualism between exceptionalist and assimilationist renderings of theodicy in the Black philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I try to draw a throughline from the exceptionalist dogma

undergirded by the assimilationist proclivities of Alexander Crummell of 1885 to three Black conservative thinkers of three different generations writing in the twenty-first century: linguist John McWhorter in 2000 with his text *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America*, economist and philosopher Thomas Sowell in 2005 with his book *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* and Coleman Hughes in 2024 with his treatise *The End of Race Politics: Arguments for a Colorblind America*. To do this, I begin with West's brief historiography of Crummell in *Prophesy*. From thence, I examine Crummell's famous speech at Storer College in West Virginia in 1885 titled 'The Need of New Ideas and New Aims for a New Era'. Here, though West would suggest that Crummell the paragon of Black exceptionalism never engaged in moments of sharp critique of Black people and culture, I show that Crummell, in the second half of his life, castigates Black people on the other side of Reconstruction for daring to think that they should be lifted to public office. I suggest that this is a moment of assimilationist theodicy on the part of Crummell the exceptionalist that sounds strikingly similar to McWhorter's, Hughes's and Sowell's weak assimilationism of the twenty-first century.

After a brief discussion of the classical Conservatism of Edmund Burke, found using Emily Jones's fascinating paper on Burkean conservatism 'Conservatism, Edmund Burke, and the Invention of a Political Tradition, c.1885–1914' (2015), providing a baseline understanding of conservatism as a political philosophy, I look at the three thinkers' major works of right-wing libertarian social and cultural criticism, in which they follow the same modes of criticism that

Crummell promulgated in the nineteenth century, and lift out three overarching Black conservative concepts found in their major works – for Sowell, ‘Black rednecks’, for McWhorter, ‘Victimology’ and for Hughes, ‘neoracism’. Thereby, I attempt to demonstrate a retrogression in Black thought through Black conservative assimilationist theodicy and a mindless allegiance to a self-vitiating ideology of imperial statecraft. I call this a retrogression in Black philosophy, from Crummell to Delany or Garnet, who engaged in modes liberational thinking combined with modalities of imperialism, statism and capitalism through rationalist epistemologies, to McWhorter, Sowell and Hughes, who engage in outright, unbridled assimilationist epistemology. Though, here, I try to complicate matters by suggesting that, owing to a bounty of available empirical data, McWhorter, Sowell and Hughes, unlike Crummell, reject materialism in favour of theodicean rationalism to support their sociocultural and socioeconomic assimilationism.

Chapter 4

In *Prophesy*, Cornel West identifies Harry Haywood as ‘the father of right-wing Marxism in Afro-America’.²⁴ My decision to foreground Haywood’s major work of political philosophy – his pamphlet *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question* – rests on two considerations. First, the text functions not only as political theory but also as autoethnography, offering a deeply situated account of Black life and struggle. Second, and more pertinent to the aims of this chapter, Haywood’s work serves as a forceful rejoinder to Sowell’s assimilationist theodicy, as analysed in Chapter 3.

As I argue in Chapter 4, Sowell's historical interpretation in *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* pivots on a cataclysmic moment in American political history: the civil rights era. Sowell asserts that prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, 1966 and 1968, along with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Black Americans were economically better off. Like early Frazier and Crummell before him, Sowell exhibits little concern for what West terms 'the least of these'. For this reason, Haywood's pamphlet becomes an indispensable counterpoint. Although Sowell lived through the period often designated as the Second Reconstruction (1954–1968) – much as Crummell lived through the First Reconstruction (1865–1877) – his analysis betrays a striking amnesia regarding the pervasive poverty endured by Black communities both before and after the legislative gains of the Civil Rights Movement. Haywood, by contrast, writing and organising during this era, directs his analytic gaze toward the plight of Black farmers in the 1950s, foregrounding the structural dimensions of Black poverty.

To round out what I call Haywood's liberation theodicy, a philosophy of suffering that seeks to disimbricate (in the words of Frank Wilderson) Black liberation from the capitalist world order, I exegete Oscar Berland's great papers on Haywood's involvement in the Communist International, 'The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the Negro Question in America: 1919–1931, Part One' and 'The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the Negro Question in America: 1919–1931, Part Two', respectively. These texts add to my claims that Haywood is an exemplar of what I call liberation theodicy, a response to the false dichotomy of exceptionalism and assimilationism in Black thought, and a

rejoinder to realist assumptions that capitalism as a system of world mastery is an imperialist logic that must be adhered to by Black thinkers.

Conclusions: Against Moral Relativism and Consensus

The conclusion of this research document begins by engaging West's PhD dissertation *Ethics, Historicism, and the Marxist Tradition* to reinforce several claims advanced throughout the paper. The first of these concerns the moral relativism evident in Sowell's sociological assimilationist theodicy. West's *Ethics* provides epistemic grounding to critically address Sowell's assimilationist assertions regarding people and culture.

Building on this, I draw upon Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, which appears throughout the document, as a resource for the historicising work that West advocates in his dissertation. This serves as a counterpoint to Sowell's assimilationist theodicy. Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate that theodicean assimilationism – akin to exceptionalism – operates in service of imperialist ends and reproduces the same logics that underpin colonialism.

¹ Though the first Africans were brought in chains and against their will by the privateers of The White Lion to the shores of the Virginia Colony in 1619, the legal status initially imposed upon them more closely resembled forms of indentured servitude rather than codified chattel slavery. The fully institutionalised system of racialised, hereditary chattel slavery, defined by juridical transformation of human beings into commodified, perpetual property, emerged in Virginia in 1662 with the enactment of the statute articulated in Latin as *partus sequitur ventrem*, meaning 'the child follows the condition of the womb'. This legal doctrine established that the status of the mother irrevocably determined the status of her offspring, thereby ensuring that the condition of

enslavement would be reproduced intergenerationally and an entrenched as a self-perpetuating system.

² Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2016), 30.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 19.

¹⁰ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass Written by Himself* (Boston: De Wolfe & Fiske Co., 1892), 129.

¹¹ Steven Mintz and Sara McNeil (2018), 'What Was Life Like under Slavery', *Digital History*, para 2.

¹² Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's Baby/Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', in *Afro-pessimism: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: racked & dispatched, 2017), 97.

¹³ Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1990), 125.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mintz and McNeil, para 3.

¹⁶ Washington, 5. (Italics my own.)

¹⁷ Douglass, 129. (Italics my own.)

¹⁸ Marx, *Das Capital, Volume I* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1909), 95.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Douglass (1892), 129.

²² Douglass (2016), 6.

²³ This brief section on Du Bois is from my Boston University School of Theology master's thesis titled 'Toward a Ritual to Die For: How America's Religion Cost Its Soul' (2019).

²⁴ Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 139.

CHAPTER 1: 'My Poor Soul': Theodicy and the Strong Assimilationist Origin of Black American Philosophy

1.1. Introduction

This chapter advances a historical and philosophical claim about the origins of Black American thought. It argues that Magdalena Beulah Brockden's *Lebenslauf* – a Moravian spiritual autobiography authored by this enslaved Black woman in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania – constitutes the earliest *published* work of Black American philosophy. I read Brockden's brief testimony as a proto-theodicy of strong (ontological) assimilationism: an epistemic and spiritual posture in which theological rationalisation absorbs the subject's being into the dominant ecclesial-imperial order. In Brockden's narrative, inward certitude and ecclesial mediation confer truth and moral standing, while the material determinants of bondage and extraction are rendered spiritually indifferent. Such theodicy, I contend, inaugurates a consequential current in Black intellectual history, one that normalises domination by translating suffering into providential meaning, thereby disciplining the soul and foreclosing liberationist politics. In this sense, the text models a philosophy of religion whose practical effects align with imperial rule and statist economisation; its grammar is anti-liberationist, and, insofar as it ratifies racialised hierarchy, it is anti-Black and anti-democratic.

Two clarifications prepare the ground for this argument. First, by *Lebenslauf* I refer to the Moravian genre of spiritual life narrative that was composed, edited and circulated within the church, often read at a congregant's

death. The *Lebenslauf* is not a transparent window onto an individual interiority but a doctrinally shaped auto-narrative, one that codifies key tropes – obedience, submission, affective union with Christ and providential ordering. As we will see in the ensuing chapters, God’s providence is a cornerstone of Black American theodicy, and it is articulated through multiple perspectives. Second, by ‘strong (ontological) assimilationism’ I distinguish a deep identificatory stance from strategic or pragmatic accommodation. Strong assimilationism involves reconstituting personhood, through its truth, value and intelligibility, inside the dominant spiritual-political frame; what counts as knowledge, virtue and hope is measured against that frame. In Brockden’s case, the grammar of sanctification not only *interprets* enslavement but redeems it as a spiritual vocation, thus de-materialising exploitation and rendering critique impious. This is the rationalist/immaterialist quotient of the text: its elevation of inward, ecclesially ratified certainty over analysis of social causality.

Methodologically, the chapter integrates three moves. First, drawing on Cornel West’s typology of Black intellectual traditions, I position Brockden’s testimony as a counter-pole to prophetic, liberationist Christianity. West’s map helps name the tension between spiritual rationalisation and emancipatory critique, allowing me to specify how Brockden’s narrative fits within, and also presses against, eighteenth-century possibilities for Black Christian thought. Second, through a close reading, attending to Moravian editorial practices, of the narrative’s affective economy, I show how the text’s theodical logic naturalises domination while portraying dissent as spiritual failure. Finally, informed by C. L.

R. James's insistence that there are no classless philosophies, I treat the *Lebenslauf* not as private piety but as a political-economic text: a discourse whose theological consolations stabilise labour discipline, social hierarchy and imperial sovereignty. James's lens makes legible the passage from spiritual obedience to social order, from interior sanctification to the normalisation of bondage.

This approach yields three claims that structure the chapter. First, Brockden's *Lebenslauf* should be recognised as philosophy by virtue of its explicit ontological, epistemological and practical commitments: it explains what is real (a providential cosmos that redeems subjection), how we know (through inward assurance disciplined by ecclesial authority) and how we ought to live (as obedient subjects whose sanctity is proven in suffering). Second, the text exemplifies a strong assimilationist theodicy, a form of rationalism/spiritualism that displaces material analysis, thereby laundering domination through religious meaning. Third, this early articulation presages a larger nineteenth-century problematic: the recurring struggle within Black American philosophy over whether theodicy will serve liberation or order, whether the grammar of suffering will animate critique or mute it.

The chapter unfolds in five sections. §1.2 situates the argument within debates about canonicity and method, clarifying what I mean by *published*, by *philosophy* and by *strong assimilationism*, while briefly acknowledging rival candidates for primacy and explaining the criteria by which Brockden's text stands. §1.3 reconstructs the Moravian editorial regime and political theology that

shaped the *Lebenslauf* genre, establishing the constraints under which enslaved voices were made legible, and offers a close reading of Brockden's narrative, tracing the movement from providential lexicon to moralised submission, and isolating the epistemic operations that privilege immaterial certitude over social causality. §1.4 turns to James to theorise the text's political-economic effects, mapping how its theodicy mediates labour, discipline and sovereignty. §1.5 is a preamble to my concept of liberation theodicy, through an examination of how Black theology and Marxist philosophy are compatible. Finally, the Conclusion, §1.6, briefly sketches a genealogy into the nineteenth century, juxtaposing accommodationist and prophetic strands of Black American thought to argue that the question of theodicy, its uses, limits and costs, became a central axis of Black American philosophy.

Recasting Brockden's *Lebenslauf* as foundational philosophy rather than mere devotional testimony is not an antiquarian gesture. It compels us to renegotiate the boundaries of the canon, to read religious genres as sites of subject formation and political work and to confront the enduring temptation of theodicy to explain away domination in the name of spiritual order. By naming this early form of strong assimilationist theodicy, we can better see, both historically and today, how the promise of inward peace can be made to service outward subjection, and why any liberatory philosophy of religion must refuse that bargain.

1.2. *Post Facto*: The Four Traditions of Black Thought

According to Cornel West, in his text *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (1982), since the late eighteenth century, there have been four critical traditions developed by Black people in America¹ in response to the legacy of European Enlightenment Age-induced anti-Black racism.² The first of these cultural philosophies is strong (ontological) and weak (sociological) exceptionalism, the view that 'lauds the uniqueness of Afro-American culture and personality',³ and that Black people are superior to white people. Strong exceptionalism was a view held by early W. E. B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson and Elijah Muhammad. Weak exceptionalism was propounded by the likes of Black leaders such as Marcus Garvey and Martin Luther King, Jr. The next tradition is strong (ontological) and weak (sociological) assimilationism, which 'considers Afro-American culture and personality to be pathological'⁴ and holds that Black people, because of their social and cultural inferiority, should strive to be more like white people. Weak assimilationism is a view that was held by thinkers such as Charles Wadell Chesnutt, Booker T. Washington and early E. Franklin Frazier. Marginalism, an anti-mutualist view that 'posits Afro-American culture to be restrictive, constraining, and confining',⁵ prevents perceptions of exceptionalism along lines of culture and essence, and simultaneously finds white culture too exclusive along ontological and sociological lines, preventing assimilationism. The marginalist view 'emphasizes the suppression of individuality, eccentricity, and nonconformity within Afro-American culture',⁶ and was held by intellectuals and writers like Richard Wright and James Baldwin.

Finally, humanism is 'the Afro-American...tradition that extolls the distinctiveness of Afro-American culture and personality'⁷ but allows for the dialectics of both the grotesquery and the heroism of Black people as a possibility. Humanism 'provides a cultural springboard useful in facing the ever-present issue of self-identity for Afro-Americans and joins their political struggle to other progressive elements in America',⁸ and was an epistemology communicated by Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison.⁹

West does not believe that there were any traditions of Black strong (ontological) assimilationists, those Black folk who hold the view that Black people are pathological in their very being, born diseased and therefore obliged to assimilate to a model of white cultural and social norms. He maintains, in the 'Notes' section of *Prophesy* on page 164, 'Fortunately, there are no Afro-American strong assimilationists, though there are still a few white ones around, e.g. Shockley and Jensen'.¹⁰ However, I claim that the first philosophical tradition to be articulated by a Black person in America was ontological, or strong assimilationism and that it was announced as a theodicy. While marginalism and humanism are epistemological commitments that eschew and evade exceptionalism and assimilationism, these traditions do not begin to take shape until the twentieth century. Before then, at the time of the American Enlightenment of the nineteenth century, exceptionalism was the prevailing cultural philosophy of Black thinkers, who expressed these epistemologies as theodicies.

Theodicy is often articulated as the theological response to the presence of evil, or ponerology.¹¹ It is a realisation that God allows bad things to happen to good people, and is a search for the justness of God in the sufferings of humanity. In the Western tradition, while 'Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz coined the term *Théodicée*'¹² in the eighteenth century, theodicy was first formulated by the early fathers of the Christian Church – Augustine, Aquinas and Irenaeus – all of whom presented various explanations for why God allows suffering in the world. Augustine (354–430 AD) believed that 'God is completely and eternally good',¹³ writing an elucidation of evil 'as the privation of being'¹⁴ where evil 'becomes evil only when it ceases to be what it ought to be',¹⁵ that '[e]vil is a negative being, an absence of a positive good that ought to be present', thus having 'no ontological being', '[existing] as the privation of a perfect being'.¹⁶

Aquinas (1225–1274 AD), influenced by the thought of Augustine and his *Confessions*, emphasised action and potentiality in his theodicy, holding that 'nature or being, whether fully realized or in potential towards realization, is basically good',¹⁷ and that 'evil is simply the privation of a perfect being and therefore has no ontological status'.¹⁸ To Aquinas, '[e]vil [could] exist only in something good because as a lack of being or privation it needs a host or a foundation which is a being and hence good'.¹⁹ In this way, Aquinas thinks of evil as sin and sin as a pathology that prevents man from being wholly just, or wholly whole, in the sense of Plato's account of Socrates attributing sickness to a dearth of virtue.²⁰

In contrast to Augustinian and Aquinian theodicies, Irenaeus's very early Western theodicy was such that it grounded itself in human development, with Irenaeus (125–202 AD) '[maintaining] that men and women were created in an early stage of developmental awareness with the capacity and the call to grow toward ultimate perfection',²¹ humanity 'not [being] completely perfect, or totally evil'.²² We will pick up Irenaeus's theodicy later in Chapter 2, when we compare it to Emerson's unconvincing activist theodicy, which also dealt in understanding human potential as not being fully unleashed in the earth as a justification for suffering. For now, to conclude this brief exploration of early and foundational Western theodicies I want to note why they are incompatible with Black American theodicies: regarding both Augustinian and Aquinian theodicies, a Black theodicy does not view evil as having no ontology. In various accounts of Black suffering, which this research document uncovers, evil takes multifarious forms. This multivariate form of evil is accounted for in Black theodicies as chattel slavery, Western civilisation, racism(s) and Black ghetto culture. In this account of Black suffering, Irenaean theodicy falls flat as well because there is a segment of humanity that is totally evil, or pathological. A Black theodicy parses out this pathology along exceptionalist and assimilationist lines.

Within the Black American theological tradition, efforts to reconcile divine justice with Black suffering in the nineteenth century manifested primarily in two interpretive frameworks: the Mosaic and what I term the Joban. The Mosaic strand, representing a weak exceptionalist epistemology, construed African Americans as analogous to the Israelites of the Exodus – enslaved under

Pharaoh's oppressive regime. This perspective affirmed that God aligned with the oppressed and warned that, should America (figured as Egypt) refuse to emancipate its enslaved population, divine judgement would precipitate national ruin.

Conversely, the Joban strand, reflecting a weak assimilationist epistemology, likened African Americans to the biblical Job of Uz, whose suffering ensued after God withdrew His protective hedge, permitting Satan to afflict his body. In this formulation, as I describe it, God's hedge of protection becomes secularised as America, Western civilisation and white cultural hegemony. The Joban account of theodicy is that God favours Black people but wants Black people to suffer to prove their loyalty to him. Western Civilisation is a political arrangement, a hedge beyond anti-Black racism — it simply desires to subsume those that will submit to its overarching liberalising and marketizing pursuits towards world mastery. To step outside this protective hedge is to incur suffering as a heretic; to remain within it is to secure safety. Both the Mosaic and Joban theodicies sought to interpret divine sanction of Black suffering, yet neither framework – whether exceptionalist or assimilationist – predated the American Revolution or the founding of the United States. Rather, the earliest Black American theodicy emerged as a strong ontological assimilationist epistemology articulated by an enslaved Black woman in the 1750s Colony of Pennsylvania.

1.3. Magdalena Beulah Brockden: Of Slavery, Sinners and Strong Assimilationist Theodicy

Unlike the English and the Irish, when German whites began to emigrate *en*

masse to the United States in the nineteenth century, they largely did not enslave Africans. In his paper, 'German Immigrants and African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, 1850–1880', included in the book *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange* (2010), Jeffery Strickland explains that, in South Carolina, while 'most elite white Charlestonians viewed the Germans (immigrants) as white, they did not accept Germans into the urban establishment during the antebellum period'. He writes, 'It appears that most Germans did not aspire to own slaves, and this affected their status in southern society...'²³ Instead, Germans, who were 'disinterested in planting and slaveholding',²⁴ excelled as shopkeepers. As grocers and shopkeepers, 'many Germans had the economic means to own slaves but they chose not to enter the slaveholding class, and they were underrepresented among people of means who chose to own slaves. The historian Walter Kamphoefner investigated slaveholding among Westphalian immigrants in Missouri with a view toward their socialization patterns, and he determined that German immigrants were underrepresented as slaveholders in nearly every wealth category. The same was true in Charleston.'²⁵

A consideration of both the historiographical record and the historical evidence, as interpreted by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983), underscores the demographic and structural foundations of racial capitalism in the Americas. Drawing on Philip Curtin's quantitative analysis, Robinson notes that approximately 38 per cent of all Africans transported to the New World as enslaved labourers were taken by

Portuguese traders to Brazil. By contrast, British merchants consigned roughly 20 per cent of their slave cargoes to the North American colonies – a figure amounting to less than 5 per cent of the total number of Africans brought to the Americas by European powers. Curtin's best estimate places the number of Africans imported into the English colonies during the entire transatlantic slave trade at 399,000, with an additional 28,000 arriving via French traders supplying Louisiana.

Robinson further observes that this African population was most densely concentrated in the Southern colonies, particularly South Carolina, where Black people constituted approximately 60 per cent of the colony's population in the eighteenth century. These demographic patterns not only shaped the economic and social order of the colonial South but also provided the material conditions for the emergence of a distinct Black radical tradition – one forged in the crucible of racialised labour exploitation and settler colonialism.

Additionally, during the antebellum period, Germans entering the nineteenth century as shopkeepers in South Carolina, for many years home to the largest concentration of Africans, whom they refused to enslave,^{26 27} 'sold liquor and traded with slaves',²⁸ even '[extending] credit to stimulate repeat business'²⁹ of enslaved people. These peculiar business practices infuriated the white Charlestonian elite and '[t]he Court of General Sessions prosecuted hundreds of German shopkeepers for selling liquor to slaves and trading with them for property requisitioned from their masters during the 1850s (Lesesne 84–5)'.³⁰ This prosecution faced by German immigrants ('Jacob Schirmer, an

influential German southerner, noted that the fines against shopkeepers for selling liquor to slaves were the highest allowed by the law (Schirmer, January 30, 1858)',³¹ in addition to the persecution they faced by police, who 'arrested countless Germans for loitering or allowing African Americans to loiter outside their stores – probably under the presumption that the Germans were conducting illegal trade with them (see, for example, Daily Courier, November 21, 1853, April 7, 1854, July 12, 1855)'.³²

Consequently, on Germans and German emigration to the United States, Frederick Douglass, in an August 1859 article, writes, 'A German has only to be a German to be utterly opposed to slavery. In feeling, as well as in conviction and principle, they are anti-slavery.'³³ Douglass goes on to write, 'the many noble and high-minded men, most of whom, swept over by the tide of the revolution in 1849, have become our active allies in the struggle against oppression and prejudice'.³⁴ Douglass, the formerly enslaved abolitionist and editor of the *Douglass' Monthly*, believed that the March Revolution of the German Confederation (1848–1849), led by the 'radical and liberal Forty-Eighters', 'though anything but a solid bloc... [,] encompass[ing] a spectrum of different ideological outlooks, regional backgrounds, and occupational orientations', engendered in Germans almost a homogeneous and 'profound aversion to the American institution of slavery'.³⁵

Though enslaving Africans in America had never been common to German-speaking emigrants prior to 1850, an idiosyncratic eighteenth-century Colony of Pennsylvania community of Moravians were enslavers. Bethlehem,

Pennsylvania was founded in 1741 by 'members of a central European Protestant sect'³⁶ known in German lands as the *Brüdergemeine* and, in English-speaking places, simply as the Moravians. Egalitarian in their community formation, everyone in their commune was taught to read, 'women and men of all races alike',³⁷ 'achieving nearly universal literacy in a community populated by people from five continents'.³⁸ Additionally, '[w]omen were emancipated from privatized domestic labor in order to pursue leadership roles in the community',³⁹ where they were 'responsible for raising and educating girls, for teaching one another trades, for overseeing economic activity in their choirs, for representing their choirs in the governing councils of the city – and for attending to the spiritual needs of girls and women as spiritual guides (choir laboresses), deaconesses, missionaries, and priests'.⁴⁰ The Moravians of Bethlehem developed a sophisticated utopic political economy they called the 'General Economy' that was 'technologically sophisticated and...successful'.⁴¹

Between 1741 and 1762, a population that grew from seventeen to seven hundred supported more than sixty different trades (many of them water-powered), constructed the first system of municipal running water in North America, and created a prosperous, economically vibrant and self-sustaining city that was regarded with admiration (and amazement) by visitors to the Pennsylvania frontier.⁴²

'Everyone in the community was cared for, on terms of material equality, from

birth until death', '[t]he Moravians eliminated poverty in their founding generation',⁴³ and their General Economy foundationalised the infrastructure for the behemoth of industry that would become known as Bethlehem Steel.⁴⁴ However, '[e]ven during its most egalitarian period...indeed, from its very inception...Bethlehem rested on a brutal racial contradiction'.⁴⁵ Whereas the Africans 'held as chattel in Moravian Bethlehem were privileged in comparison to most enslaved people – and it was one sign of that privilege that they were taught to read and encouraged to tell their life stories...they had been enslaved nonetheless and, in their memoirs, they described and reflected upon aspects of their bondage'.⁴⁶

Strict in the formation of their faith, the Moravians 'had a spiritual responsibility to write a memoir – a *Lebenslauf* [life course] – that would tell the story of their Christian redemption'.⁴⁷ These *Lebensläufe* '[recounted] the sinfulness of [their] author, her resistance to salvation, and her ultimate embrace of the Savior' and 'affirmed the idiosyncratic Christian vision and social norms of the Moravian community'.⁴⁸

The memoirs of enslaved people in Bethlehem rehearsed, later in life, the spiritual narrative that each had to develop in order to be admitted to the congregation and, in turn, to membership in the General Economy. It is important to remember that Bethlehem was a closed religious community. Only those who had embraced their particular spiritual vision could join the congregation. Any enslaved person who wished to become a full congregant – and live as a

brother or sister within the General Economy – had to be capable of speaking in that idiom, of reproducing that narrative, and of organizing the facts of his or her life within its structure.⁴⁹

The *Lebenslauf* was for the Moravians an organising observation of their soul's salvation in the finished work of redemption of Jesus Christ on the cross, a testimony of God's irresistible grace subsumed by their unyielding faith. *Lebenslauf*, transliterally 'the run of one's life', gives an account of one's theophanic encounter with Christ, how God saved them from their sin, suggesting that one did not live until they knew the ransoming power of Jesus. Consider, however, that for the enslaved Moravian, unlike most African slaves, though fed with the food from their enslaver's table, though never brutalised by the crack of the whip, though taught to read and write, the antagonisms of their publishing a confession of their sinfulness while being sinfully enchained would engender some internal contradictions. This internal contradiction would become the site of strong assimilationist theodicy among the enslaved Moravians, in particular Magdalena Beulah Brockden, whose memoir I examine below.

It is often thought that the earliest published Black people in the Americas were Phillis Wheatley (*Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*) in 1773 and Olaudah Equiano (*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, the African*) in 1789. Yet, because of the idiopathic and idiosyncratic enslaving habits of the Moravians of Bethlehem, the first published writers of African ancestry on the North American continent were Moravian

slaves. In fact, because of her memoir, 'probably written in the mid-1750s',⁵⁰ Magdalena Beulah Brockden's *Lebenslauf*, which has garnered a striking lack of attention,⁵¹ 'appears to be the first piece of writing by an African woman in North America, or at least the earliest thus far discovered'.⁵² Because of its deep theodicy, a philosophy of religion that gives an account of suffering through the metaphysics of ontology and personhood, seeking an intelligible world while bounded, what I will work to prove is that Brockden's was strong assimilationist epistemology. Therefore, I claim that Brockden's Moravian memoir is the first published articulation of Black American philosophy.

Brockden was born in 'Little Popo on the Guinea coast of Africa in 1731',⁵³ and 'was bought and sold repeatedly by the age of ten, when she was purchased by a wealthy white man named Charles Brockden – who called the enslaved girl, apparently without any irony, Beulah, the promised land'.⁵⁴ According to Seth Moglen in his paper 'Enslaved in the City on a Hill: The Archive of Moravian Slavery and the Practical Past' (2016), when Brockden held converse with his soul, 'disturbed and conflicted about his own slaveholding',⁵⁵ he resolved that the woman must remain his property for her own protection, to keep her from lascivious living, determining that the best place for her to go is to the commune of Moravian Bethlehem. When she was twenty-seven, Beulah was finally fully manumitted into the community of the Moravians by Brockden, where she was baptised and given the name Magdalena.⁵⁶ It was thereafter that she wrote her *Lebenslauf*, which, for the purposes of exegesis, I record in full as Moglen has in his text below:

I was, as is known, a slave or the property of the late Mr. Brockden who bought me from another master, when I was ten years old and from then on I served his family until I was grown. Because my master was much concerned about the salvation of my soul and he saw that it was high time that I was protected from the temptations of the world and brought to a religious society, so he suggested to me that I should go to Bethlehem. Because I had no desire to do so, I asked him rather to sell me to someone else, for at that time I still loved the world and desired to enjoy it fully. However, my master said to me lovingly that I should go to Bethlehem and at least try it. He knew that I would be well treated there. And if it did not suit me there so he would take me back at any time. When I arrived here I was received with such love and friendship by the official workers and all the Brethren that I was much ashamed. [She arrived on 23 November 1743 in Bethlehem.] I soon received permission to remain here. My behavior at the beginning was so bad; I really tried to be sent away again, which did not happen. The love of the Brethren, however, and in particular the great mercy of the Saviour that I came to feel at this time moved me to stay here. Sometime after, my master came here and gave me his permission and blessing, and I became content and happy. **The Saviour showed great mercy to my poor soul, which was so deeply sunk in the slavery of sin that I never thought that I would be**

freed from these chains and could receive grace. How happy I was for the words, 'Also for you did Jesus die on the stem of the cross so that you may be redeemed and eternally blessed'. I understood this in faith and received forgiveness for my sins.⁵⁷

As Moglen notes, the Moravian slave memoir differed from the abolitionist narrative that 'denounces the institution of slavery itself from the perspective of formerly enslaved people who had joined a revolutionary movement to overthrow the slave system'.⁵⁸ Here, in the account of Brockden, it can be seen that she observes a behaviour in herself that was 'bad', acting in a way that would cause her to 'be sent away again', presumably sold to another enslaver. These sentiments of Brockden reflect no critique of chattel slavery, no criticism of her coerced state of servitude. She is more critical of her propensity to behave such that she would be 'sent away' than the fact that she is being held against her will, albeit in an egalitarian society of nonviolent slaveholders. In Bethlehem, the violence is in the holding, not in the brutalising. That Brockden refers to her 'bad behaviors' as 'sins', in substance, communicating her desire to exist where she wills, how she wills, as a pathology, suggests a deep inner conflict with her ontology, vivified by a dragooned assimilation through religiosity. Brockden is being assimilated while developing her own assimilationist epistemology and theodicy. '*Theodicy* literally means "god's justice". From theo (god) and *dikē* (justice), the word emerges from a problem forged by expectations of a good or benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent deity',⁵⁹ but to Brockden justice exists outside the Black body, lives abstracted from the Black soul. The bondage of the

Black human spirit is greater than the bondage of chattel slavery.

Beulah Brockden's psychological break from her physical bondage while still enchained is a realisation of her subjectivity where 'the subject's possession of itself and its objects...is troubled by a dispossessive force [that] objects exert', that 'subjectivity is understood also as subjection and subjugation'.⁶⁰ Yet Brockden fails to locate enslavement as the 'dispossessive force' and rather views her sinful nature, predicative of her misdeed of wanting to be free, as the site of her subjection and subjugation rather than being subjugated by a colony of enslavers. In this way, she embraces the mind as a sphere of philosophical inquiry with privileged representations and the idea of a self-reflective transcendental subject whose only limitation is that she is a Black sinner. She writes not of how her chains were a sin, but that her great sin was the sin of her own soul. This is a view of cardinal sins versus mortal sins as abstracted from political sins, indeed the political, mortal and cardinal sin of slavery. Her strong assimilationism, then, viewed her ontology as slavery without any analysis of the literal slavery her personhood existed under. She would rather be in the fellowship of 'such love and friendship by the official workers and all the Brethren', such love that made her feel 'ashamed' of her wayward soul, than to blanch the repute of Bethlehem. Beulah's 'poor soul' needed saving, her physical freedom be damned. In the Book of Job, upon God agreeing with Satan's overtures to remove the hedge of protection about Job of Uz, God instructs the devil to only touch his body, not his soul. In a Christian environment, the devil of chattel slavery, tied to white supremacy and its fortifying other, capitalism,

bettered that instruction and blighted the soul of Magdalena Beulah Brockden. In essence, Brockden did not mind being the property of the Moravians, as long as she was not the property of sin.

The earliest Black American philosophical framework reflects modes of acquiescence to what might be construed as a 'slave mentality' through strong assimilationism, constituting an ontological reductionism articulated within a philosophy of religion. Religion – derived from the Latin *religare*, meaning 'to bind again' – in this context becomes vast and immanent, tolerating no dissent within the body politic. I contend that this epistemology functions as a foundational cognitive precursor to what may be termed Black Christian nationalism.

Christian nationalism is commonly defined as the advocacy for a nation governed by Christian values and laws, permeating the structures of civil society. Brockden's theodicy represents a variation of this paradigm, insofar as she interrogates her spiritual station with greater intensity than her social station. Brockden, an enslaved Black woman later manumitted, never repudiated her Christian testimony according to extant sources. Thus, strong assimilationism as a theodicy is grounded in spiritualism – an immaterialism that privileges metaphysical redemption over material liberation.

No evidence suggested that Beulah would obtain freedom; indeed, her husband Andrew remained enslaved despite being admitted as a full member of the congregation prior to Beulah herself. Yet Beulah professed joy upon hearing the words: '[h]ow happy [she] was for the words, "Also for you did Jesus die on the stem of the cross so that you may be redeemed and eternally blessed"', a

promise of salvation experienced amid coercive servitude. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, theodicy and nationalism frequently operate as coeval epistemologies within Black radical thought. However, they are often imbued with a conservatism that inhibits a comprehensive critique of the structural systems inimical to Black existence.

1.4. The Theodicy of Black Christian Nationalism: An Upholding of Rationalism, the Perfect Philosophy for Management and Subordination

On the night of 17 June 2015, during a Bible study under the guise of humble prayer, a white supremacist opened fire on a group of Black members of Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, killing nine. During the funeral of the church's pastor, Member of the South Carolina Senate Clementa C. Pinckney, after rendering a eulogy for the slain governmental official, standing behind the seal of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, President Barack Obama ascended into a rendition of the traditional church hymn 'Amazing Grace'. At this, seated behind the president, enrobed in their veronica frocks, the Black bishops, pastors and elders of the AME Church, the oldest Black American Christian denomination, jumped up in unison thrall, like characters in Son House's 'Preaching Blues', ecstatic and enthralled. What significance could this scene have? Could it be that these Black preachers esteem 'Amazing Grace' as an empyrean and indispensable song of the Church? Or could it be that sighting the holder of the nation's highest office, and a Black man, through sonorous and

solidaristic sonics, seemed aligned with their theological vision for a theocratic America?

To be frank, I have little concern about white Christian nationalism, also called Christian fascism. Concern, at least in part, would need to grow out of shock or surprise. By now, white people being racist and xenophobic should surprise no one. No one ought to be gobsmacked by the varied permutations in which whiteness marshals racism like a toothless crow hoarding a dying and bloodied mink. Whiteness and fascism go together as a technology of procuring and maintaining power. This is known.

I am concerned, however, about Black Christian nationalism. In comparison with being a Black atheist, when visions of God and his justice have inspired and sustained Black revolutionaries and reformists from Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner to Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fannie Lou Hamer, being a Black Christian nationalist seems an irremediable contradiction of fates. Yet many a Black parishioner has sat under Christian nationalist theology of a multifarious Sunday, and thought nothing of it. When I was coming of age in the Black Church of the humid wetlands of Southeastern Virginia, a non-denominational congregation with National Baptist precepts and Pentecostal views, enrobed in trench coats, two disaffected and murderous youths massacred their classmates at a high school in Colorado. It happened on a Tuesday. The following Lord's Day, having mounted the sacred desk, as he preached, my pastor suggested that the reason for the shooting, at the time the deadliest school shooting in US history, the sordid progenitor of many more, was

that prayer had been taken out of the schools. Quoting 2 Chronicles 7:14, he said, 'If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land'.⁶¹ He was a Black whooping preacher from Suffolk, Virginia, who lived under the swelter of racial apartheid, in 1999 intoning the sentiment of Oklahoma Representative Jim Olsen in 2024, who sponsored a bill to bring the Ten Commandments to public school classrooms.⁶²

The Black Christian nationalism that I observe is like that vulgar materialism that Trinidadian philosopher and occasional Trotskyist C. L. R. James writes about in his text *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (1950). What James calls vulgar materialism is tantamount to that hermeneutic that sees the material conditions of working-class people yet offers few tactile operations of how to ameliorate them. It is what James calls Christian humanism. James compares Christian humanists to Stalinists (whom they often abetted), who represent the most dangerous counter-revolution because they cloak themselves in materialist language,⁶³ while the kernel of their philosophy is that 'the worker must work harder than he ever did before'⁶⁴ under a system of state-run capitalism. For James, these Catholic Christians of mid-century Europe, who believe the 'masses must not have absolute sovereignty',⁶⁵ are 'militantly anti-rationalist',⁶⁶ yet 'militantly anti-democratic',⁶⁷ and in their allegiance to bourgeois political economy and statism 'prepares the middle classes to resist to the end the proletarian revolution and to adapt themselves at decisive moments to

Fascism'.⁶⁸ According to James, the Christian humanist appropriates the Hegelian dialectic, interpreting it as an unceasing conflict between affirmation and negation, between deciding for or deciding against.⁶⁹ If James is right, and philosophy must be more proletarian,⁷⁰ more accessible to the working-class masses, then theology too must become more insistent upon the working-class and working-poor experience. Otherwise, the rationalist philosophy of Stalinism, that is, 'the philosophy of the elite, the bureaucracy, the organizers, the leaders',⁷¹ runs hazard of becoming the theology of the Black Church, if it is not already.

In the final move of *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, his treatise of the Fourth International and the variegated forms of draconian or socialistic nationalised political economies, in the chapter titled 'Philosophy and State Capitalism', C. L. R. James develops a discourse around which major schools of thought are most conducive to the maintenance of regimes of power and which are most constitutive of liberation from these regimes. To James, while materialism engenders in the masses of working-class people a wellspring of political engagement towards radical change, rationalism is the philosophy of the intellectual and managerial elite.⁷² While he cites Kant as the first philosopher of the 'modern world of the dialectic which begins with the recognition of contradiction',⁷³ James avers that 'the greatest of all the bourgeois philosophers, the most encyclopedic mind that Europe had produced, the founder of the dialectic, in Engels' words, the maker of an epoch',⁷⁴ was Hegel.

Yet, in James's rendering, Hegel 'could not transcend his historic barrier and was recaptured in the rationalist trap from which he had sought so profoundly to extricate European thought'.⁷⁵ James writes, 'Hegel destroyed all dogmatisms but one – the dogmatism of the backwardness of the masses'.⁷⁶ James's is a similar discussion about the materialist conception of the state that is found in Marx's *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (1843–1844), and with how much confidence Hegel imputes the revolutionary character of the Bureaucracy against how much confidence Marx assigns to the radical capacity of the working class. Here is a summation of Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy of right, as it inspired James: A materialist conception of the state, that is, the state-mind, that is, the political state (static status), not the modern state as an abstraction of the *real man*⁷⁷ but the state represented in its totality by the Legislature (Constitution), is not as the law yet to be discovered but the enfleshment of the popular desire of executive power (the will of the Civil Society made public).⁷⁸ This Legislature is the conscious self (Ego, character, constitution) of the political state, which is mediated by Civil Society (unary masses of individuals) through the Estates; the Estates themselves are an embodiment of the dynamic/static dialecticism of the political state by which Civil Society is made more than Appearance, transforming itself into political society, or actual society, showing itself as the drive for the fullest possible universal participation in legislative power.⁷⁹ The formulation of the state hinges upon the dialectics of the participatory capacity of the Estates to bring Public Affairs into actual being, the Estates themselves the Executive singularity individuated as

many. Public Affairs and the Estates possess each other in a dialectical formation that is *an sich* and *für sich*, that is, 'of itself' and 'for itself', thus *content* and *form*, the immaterial and the material in a single, unifying Self, as it, the Estates, holding the potentiality towards ever-transmuting the state, interacts *vis-à-vis* empirical consciousness (the materialism of history) as motricity from intellectual intuitionism (mysticism and spiritualism).⁸⁰

The dialectic of the Estates and Civil Society is challenged by the dialectic of Bureaucracy and Corporations, which too have a hypostatic union, yet are in a state of constant struggle for control.⁸¹ Corporations (materialist), in this way, are bureaucratic, and the Bureaucracy (immaterialist) is corporatistic, both vying for a procurement and maintenance of power and authority of the state. Bureaucracy (and Corporations), the greatest enemy of vigorous action, rising with the rise of capitalism, concretising power within itself through capital, is nothing but the formalism of power; however, it is a mystification (mythologisation) and spiritualisation (anti-materialisation) of the Executive, that is, the functioning potential of the Estates as executors of the Legislature towards activating Civil Society through Public Affairs.⁸² The bureaucrat, then, is the theologian of this anti-materialism, this spiritualism of the Appearance of power, to wit, the Bureaucracy (the imaginary state) in its relation to the state.⁸³ Because of this mystification and mythification, an anti-materialist political philosophy made manifest via Corporatist interest, the power of the Bureaucracy has been its ability to obscure the function of the Estates, the mediator between the Crown⁸⁴ and the Executive, in curating and creating the state through direct participation

in politics *vis-à-vis* Civil Society.⁸⁵ Instead, the Estates become confederate with the Crown and the Bureaucracy and the Corporations. Often, the Estates, an entity, the only one that is capable of mounting radical change, is deputised by the Bureaucracy, the salaried functionaries of the bourgeoisie,⁸⁶ an organised political opposition to Civil Society.^{87 88}

Thus, 'Once', James says, 'the revolutionary solution of the contradiction escaped him', that is, eluded Hegel during (and after) the Napoleonic Wars, (1803–1815) when he published *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820), 'he clung to the bureaucracy'.⁸⁹ 'Hegel', James recounts, 'did not know the socialized proletariat',⁹⁰ and 'began by regarding all history as the history of the philosopher, or consciousness and self-consciousness, and ended with the state bureaucracy'.⁹¹

The intellectual elite would rescue society and discipline the revolting masses. Reinstated were uncritical materialism, a purely material existence for the masses, and uncritical idealism, the solution of social crisis by the intellectual bureaucracy.⁹²

This is the Summum Bonum of German idealism as it is read through Kant and Hegel: it is a philosophy that seeks 'to propagate the fiction of the classless nature of rationalism and materialism',⁹³ which sees the 'enemy [as] the proletariat resisting labor discipline by the bureaucracy',⁹⁴ and spiritualises the form and content of political statism, thereby precluding the working classes from engaging in perfecting the public affairs of society. As James writes, 'Materialism without the dialectics of objective contradiction is idealism'.⁹⁵

For James, German idealism and French rationalism possessed the same pitfalls. While he agrees that Hegel had his own criticism of rationalism, that '[c]ontradiction, not harmonious increase and decrease, is the creative', '[a]ll development takes place as a result of self-movement, not organization or direction by external forces', '[s]elf-movement springs from and is the overcoming of antagonisms within an organism, not the struggle against external foes', '[i]t is not the world of nature that confronts man as an alien power to be overcome', and '[t]he end toward which mankind is inexorably developing by the constant overcoming of internal antagonisms is not the enjoyment, ownership or use of goods, but self-realization, creativity based upon the incorporation into the individual personality of the whole previous development of humanity'.⁹⁶ As he writes, 'Marx himself in his fight against the vulgar materialism reaffirmed that "the Hegelian contradiction (is) the source of all dialectic". Without the dialectic of Hegel, the idealism of Hegel could not be destroyed.'⁹⁷

Though, for Hegel, 'theodicy [was] a philosophical endeavor that reconciles thought with evil through a systematic grasping of history',⁹⁸ he was prevented from '[carrying] the dialectical logic to its conclusions in the socialist revolution because he could not base himself on the advanced industrial proletariat'.⁹⁹ What 'he saw and described with horror [was] the fragmentation and loss of individuality by the worker under the capitalist division of labor',¹⁰⁰ 'but the workers whom he knew were not the organized, disciplined and united proletariat which had by Marx's time begun to announce itself as the new organizer of society and which we know so well today'.¹⁰¹ Hegel's idealism, thus,

became inhibited by the material realities of his day. Therefore, it is understandable that Hegel's idealism functions as a rationalism, similar to that of Beulah Brockden.

Could it be that Brockden's theology suffers the same pitfalls as Hegel's penchant for aiding managerial middle class of professionalised intellectual elites through the rigidity of the dialectical formulation of her strong assimilationism? Hers is a rationalism (spiritualism), which is 'the philosophy of bourgeois political economy'¹⁰² that denies her material reality in favour of the transcendental unseen. To conclude, Brockden's theodicy is dissociative of the material malevolence facing her, thus idealist, and, thus, in its materialism is classless. Therefore, if James is right, and rationalism is a political philosophy that 'seeks to expand the productive forces and increase the sum total of goods',¹⁰³ a rationalist account of personhood is 'a division of labor between the passive masses and the active elite',¹⁰⁴ thereby reinstating idealism.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, the essence of rationalism is uncritical or vulgar materialism.¹⁰⁶

This vulgar materialism, which observes through the imagery of the cross of Calvary the material conditions of working-class people, yet offers few tactile operations of how to ameliorate them, is tantamount to what James calls Christian humanism. He writes:

The Christian Humanists have a systematic political economy. They propose decentralized self-governing corporations of private property with every worker in his place. They have a philosophy of history. They believe in the eternal ambiguities of the human

situation and the impossibility of ever attaining human freedom on earth. They have a theory of politics. The natural and ideological elite must rule, the masses must not have absolute sovereignty. Since evil and imperfection are eternal, they say, the alternatives are either limited sovereignty or unmitigated authoritarianism.¹⁰⁷

This is the picture of a Black body under the aegis of imperial dogma – spiritualist, immaterialist, enslaved, forced to labour in the noonday sun of their obnubilated soul. This is the consequence of the propagation of ‘the fiction of the classless nature of rationalism and materialism’.¹⁰⁸ The spiritualism of strong assimilationist theodicy is that it accounts for Black suffering while discounting the humanity of the subjectivised being – a being capable of both Apollonian heroism and Nietzschean grotesqueries.¹⁰⁹ Brockden’s proto-American Enlightenment Black theodicy presages the false dichotomy between exceptionalism and assimilationism in Black radical philosophy (nationalism and emigrationism), which would lead the thought production of Black thinkers from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, from David Walker and Alexander Crummell to Marcus Garvey and E. Franklin Frazier. Though advocating a release from physical bondage, this false dichotomy of theodicies of exceptionalism and assimilationism implicitly encouraged an allegiance to statism and imperialism, without observing a third option, a liberationist theodicy, a modality abstracted from the capitalist drive for world mastery. Consequently, along the line of demarcation between exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicy,

Christian humanists and Christian nationalists are allowed to flourish, using religion to procure and maintain power.

1.5. Fundamentals of Liberation Theodicy: An Activistic Secularism against Rationalism and Capitalism, Exceptionalism and Assimilationism

As this introductory chapter concludes, and in anticipation of the analyses in Chapters 2 and 3 of the contours and convergences between nineteenth-century Black radical exceptionalism and twenty-first-century Black conservative assimilationism, I will delineate my conception of liberationism as an activistic theodicy — hereafter referred to as liberation theodicy — in preparation for its fuller exposition in Chapter 4.

Liberation theodicy constitutes a secular, praxis-oriented framework that interrogates the problem of suffering through an anti-rationalist critique of the assimilationist epistemologies embedded within Black conservatism. Rejecting conciliatory engagement with Western liberal statecraft, it advances a non-integrationist socialist analysis of capitalism, imperialism and colonialism as structural mechanisms of domination, thereby articulating technologies of resistance against racialised oppression. This conceptualisation rests upon two fundamental realities: first, while suffering is a universal human condition, Black communities endure disproportionate and qualitatively distinct forms of suffering under the political economy of Western civilisation; second, the institutional arrangements of capitalism, nationhood and population governance have historically failed to secure the collective interests of Black peoples. Accordingly,

liberation theodicy posits two principal propositions: an activist and separatist logic that repudiates the moral legitimacy of Western civilisational paradigms, and a commitment to material and ideological interventions that prioritise liberation over reconciliation. In this sense, liberation theodicy reconfigures theodical discourse from metaphysical justification to political and economic emancipation, situating resistance as the locus of meaning in the face of systemic injustice.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, theodicy is often articulated as the theological response to the presence of evil. It is a realisation that God allows bad things to happen to good people, allows them to suffer. In the Book of Job, these bad things are depicted as sufferings Job must endure because God removed ‘the hedge’ of protection that surrounded him, allowing Satan to attack his body. For Ralph Waldo Emerson, however, ‘theodicy essentially asserts three things: that “the only sin is limitation”,¹¹⁰ i.e., constraints on power, that sin is overcome and that it is beautiful and good that sin should exist to be overcome. His theodicy held that ‘exceptional individuals *qua* America can overcome all obstacles, solve all problems, go beyond all limitations’,¹¹¹ and is a philosophy of religion that is ‘optimistic, moralistic, and activist’.¹¹² Indeed, Emerson’s articulation of his theodicy led Sydney Ahlstrom to suggest ‘that Emerson is in fact the theologian of something we may almost term ‘the American religion’ and Harold Bloom to conclude that Emerson’s ‘truest achievement was to invent the American religion’.¹¹³ Emerson’s view that ‘the basic nature of things, the fundamental way the world is, is congenial to and

supportive of the moral aims and progress of the chosen or exceptional people, i.e., Americans',¹¹⁴ is one that is tethered to a naivete and a transcendental subjectivation beyond the pale of the Black experience in America. That Emerson's theodicy held that 'the world...is itself incomplete and in flux, always the result of and a beckon to the experimental makings, workings, and doings of human beings',¹¹⁵ and that these makings, workings, and doings 'have been neither adequately understood nor fully unleashed in the modern world',¹¹⁶ reveals that he is aiming towards human potentiality along an is/ought dialectic for positive change in the world. However, I argue that the sin of white supremacy is difficult to overcome when it is conjoined with the practice of whiteness and capitalism, a three-corded band not easily broken.

Inspired by the activist quality of nineteenth-century Emersonian-style theodicy, a liberation theodicy works against its sanguine hermeneutic that reads human potential being unfulfilled as explanatory procedure for understanding suffering. Emerson's, like we shall see in the next chapter, Chapter 2, in our discussion of Henry Highland Garnet, Henry McNeal Turner, and Martin Delany, is a traditional nineteenth-century take on an Irenaean theodicy, espoused by the early Church Father of the second century. For Irenaeus, a theodicy explains suffering as God rigging the race in order that good will ultimately prevail over evil.¹¹⁷ Irenaeus, like Emerson, universalised suffering under the aegis of the human condition in a broken world. The problem of classical Irenaean theodicy and activist Emersonian theodicy, then, is the same problem of Ionut Untea's anthropodicy — the constitutive lack of differentiation between human suffering

and what Leonard Harris calls undue death¹¹⁸ and what William R. Jones might have called the maldistribution of ethnic suffering.¹¹⁹ While an anthropodicy secularises theodicy and celebrates suffering,¹²⁰ a liberation theodicy secularises theodicy to enumerate an actuarial account of evil.¹²¹ In this way, liberation theodicy holds a secularity similar to Lewis Gordon in 'Theodicy, and the Normative Emancipatory Challenges of Blackness' (2013) or Biko Mandela Gray in 'On Black Accursedness: A Political Theodicy, or the Problem of Evil in Black' (2025). The materialist and sociological rigors of liberation theodicy realises an assessment of the Anthropocene, the heightened ubiquity of human suffering due to the human-instigated deracination of the natural world, that is critical of explanations of sufferings as inevitable, univocal, and uniform.

Such renderings of suffering as resultant of a catastrophe of a decaying Earth negates and falsifies the testimonies of Black people, who in the modern age (from 1500) have suffered before the technological advancements and capitalistic pursuits that hastened the Anthropocene, and since these developments with highly contingent manifestations. While today '[a]nthropodicy in this epoch may be that worldview which may help people shape not only institutions that are concerned with justice and fairness towards individuals as rational agents',¹²² its penchant for celebrating suffering because many people '[have] witnessed the suffering of [their] loved ones',¹²³ having to accept carrying 'the burden of suffering as if instead of others',¹²⁴ while Black people live in a state 'beyond being [that] makes the dismembering of bodies of victims of racism an industry...'¹²⁵ An actuarial account of racism that moves away from moral and

logical accounts allows one to perceive how ‘racism persists...because it works sufficiently well in an imperfect world to ensure a confluence of benefits, especially the most important benefit—namely, health benefits for a sufficient number of people over generations and the preconditions for the possibility of embodied well-being’.¹²⁶ This contingent view of the variegated program of racism is missed by Irenaean and Emersonian theodicy, and it is neglected by the anthropodicy of Clive Hamilton, Ernest Becker, and Ionut Untea. Untea, for example, believes in a ‘re-enchantment’ process in suffering via his anthropodicy, which like Emerson before him observes suffering as an opportunity for organic growth,¹²⁷ because of his profound misunderstanding of the uneven development of undue sufferings, regardless of an Anthropocene moment. Viewing racism as an actuary would a risk evaluation of a corporate enterprise through what Harris calls ‘racisms’ allows a liberation theodicy the dispassion of cost/benefit analysis, mathematising the explicit toll of the acts of racism’s predicates in the form of multifarious mortalities, without clinging to modes of rationalism, which is too experiential, moralism, which is too dogmatic, or logicism, which is too rigidified.

The question forthwith might be raised, ‘Though your research project engages a secularised form of theodicy, how is a Marxist materialist analysis of philosophy of religion possible?’ To this query I respond with the following: *Prophesy*, Cornel West’s major work that I use throughout this research document as an organising figurehead, is actually an expansion of his earlier essays ‘Black Theology and Marxist Thought’ (1979), which appeared in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (1979), edited by James Cone and

Gayraud Wilmore, and 'Black Theology and Socialist Thought' (1980), appearing in *The Witness*, Vol.63., and based in part on lectures he gave at Rev. Herbert Daughtry's House of the Lord Pentecostal Church in Brooklyn.¹²⁸ In these essays, West ponders if the estranged schools of thought, namely Black theology and Marxist philosophy, can intercede on the behalf of the other to bring about a social-change phenomenology through culture, what West calls counter-hegemony, inspired by Antonio Gramsci's political philosophy.

In 'Black Theology and Marxist Thought' (1979), West examines ways of inducing the Marxist philosophical tradition to ramify into the rich legacy of Black Protestant theology in America. West believes that these two schools of thought have similarities and that they can help evolve each other towards the betterment of humankind: the Marxist tradition, with its historicist analysis of the socioeconomic character of capitalism, Black theology's closeness to the cry of the oppressed masses of society, are both generative and instructive means by which a society in gradual moral decay and sociopolitical decline can redeem itself. To West, 'Black theologians belong to the degraded cultural group in the United States. As intellectuals trained in American colleges, universities and seminaries, they have first-hand experiences of cultural condescension, arrogance and haughtiness. They know what it is like to be a part of a culture considered to be provincial and parochial. Hence, they view Black culture and religion as something to be preserved and promoted, improved and enhanced, not erased and replaced'.¹²⁹ 'In short,' West notes, 'Black theologians

acknowledge their personal debts to Black culture and religion and incorporate its fecundity and fertility in their understanding of American society'.¹³⁰

According to Marx himself, in his critique of Hegel's 'philosophy of right', the process of government has been abstracted from the people through the illegitimacy of perceived authorities, when it is the people, as a conscious mass, who should control their own destiny. This abstraction is a resultant of the spiritualization (immaterialism) of the processes of statecraft.¹³¹ In substance, this was Marx's critique of religion as being the opium of the people.¹³² It is not that Marx called for the dissolution of religion (though he believed that religious entities held large swaths of private property that were used to exploit economic growth of the working class); rather, it is that Marx saw religion through its affluent spiritualisms obscuring the body politic's sensitivity to their material responsibility towards liberation and beatification, which take their apothecic form in the development of the highest statecraft, to wit, needing no state at all. Thereby, Marx's political philosophy emerges out of a philosophy of mind that critiques the immaterialism of spiritualism as an insufficient rationalism. This is how I use the materialist analysis of the Marxist tradition to critique rationalism as the handmaiden of assimilationist and exceptionalist theodicies throughout this research document, and this is how a Marxist materialist analysis of philosophy of religion is possible.

Therefore, in addition to being anti-rationalist and anti-capitalist in its materialist analysis, liberation theodicy critiques modes of Black sociological and economic exceptionalism and assimilationism. Liberation theodicy critiques

modes of Black exceptionalism and holds that, while, for reasons of self-image and social beatification, it is understandable to read God as being Black and on the side of the oppressed, as in a James Hal Cone with Black liberation theology. In their debate of the late 1970s, Cone and William R. Jones differed in their analysis of the problem of suffering. For Jones in *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology* (1973), '[B]lack theologians have not taken seriously the possibility of a malevolent deity [and that] an acceptable [B]lack theology must deal adequately with...theodicy'.¹³³ For Cone in *God of the Oppressed* (1975), 'Jesus' victory over suffering and death constitutes the necessary and sufficient evidence for the belief that God sides with the oppressed and acts on their behalf',¹³⁴ '[holding] that empirical evidence is never a reliable basis of a biblical truth...the problem of theodicy is never solved in a theoretical manner, only defeated by one's faith in Jesus Christ.'¹³⁵ However, as a secularised theodicy, liberation theodicy, in order to give an account of undue Black suffering and to provide theory to meliorate it, is not concerned with whether the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is white, or racist, or evil. Further, in his discourse on 'divine racism', when Jones writes in his text that a 'theology of liberation must provide persuasive grounds for removing the sanctity and hallowed status from those segments of the culture it seeks to reform',¹³⁶ it seems that he is espousing a Black theological response to suffering that is activistic inasmuch as it is reformist. In contrast, liberation theodicy attends to a classical separatist model of Black radicalism, yet one that is divorced from the imperial operation of capitalism as a political and economic arrangement.

For example, in the succeeding chapters, in our analysis of the thought of Garnet, Delany, and Turner,¹³⁷ we shall see that their Mosaic account of God's providential care in the sufferings of Africans in America was not only insufficient, though indispensable for its time, its inherent exceptionalism, undergirded by an assimilationism, rendered impossible a critique of the very economic system that led to African enslavement in the first place. As Victor Anderson writes, 'With the emergent age of Europe, European intellectuals understood the dynamics of their times in terms of the epic',¹³⁸ so too did the Black American radical intelligentsia understand their times in terms of the biblical mythos of the Israelitish origin. These Black men made use of an exceptionalist activist theodicy of worldbuilding to explain their plight as a dispossessed people, with a view towards redeeming the nation of their bondage. This search for intelligibility in the world is what I claim is the source of nineteenth-century assimilationist exceptionalism, and it is what keeps exceptionalist theodicy from being liberational.

Liberation theodicy critiques modes of assimilationism and holds that the passivity (and insufficiency) of a traditional theodicy is in its intelligibility thesis, that is, according to Maikki Aakko, how 'due to evils, it seems *prima facie* plausible that the world does not exhibit intentional and intelligible [readable, understandable] order'.¹³⁹ A liberation theodicy does not seek to 'build a connection between the intelligibility of the world's larger character—i.e. the intelligibility thesis—and...human moral agency and practice'.¹⁴⁰ Liberation theodicy is not, consequent of a lack of order, an attempt to 'overcome the

world's meaninglessness [with] a kind of subjective *fiat* that creates its own law and order'¹⁴¹ because Black people 'do not find meaning in the world nor is the world conducive to [their] meaning-making efforts',¹⁴² where Black people may say of themselves, 'we make meaning *despite* the world'.¹⁴³ Though inspiring in its activist formulation, this world is one that destroys Emersonian potential towards self-actualisation because it is a world that was never meant to hold the Black body in its fullness. In Chapter 4, as we shall witness, this is how the Marxist-Leninist Harry Haywood describes the act of assimilationism, built on the belief that civilisation is just and that society is salvageable. In a liberation theodicy, Black people do not make meaning of the world *despite* the world; Black people *make a world* despite having no world.

1.6. Conclusion

Gordon notes, 'the problem of theodicy is of great significance to Africana philosophy',¹⁴⁴ and, in addition to adumbrating my concept of liberation theodicy, this chapter functioned to outline the proto-theodicy of Magdalena Beulah Brockden. The theodicy of Brockden, the earliest published Black American philosophy, illuminates the trajectory of Black American thought in at least three respects. First, Black philosophy is forged in and through struggle. Second, it is often self-interrogating to a fault, at times more rigorously critical of itself than of traditions, such as so-called egalitarian fascism, draconian utopianism or Christian nationalism, that obscure or deracinate the very communities that produced them. Third, like much philosophy, it can tilt toward rationalist or idealist aspirations to classlessness, even when ample historical and scientific evidence

troubles those aspirations. Brockden's inquiries into theodicy, ontology, subjectivity and personhood were shaped by a pronounced assimilationist sensibility, a rationalist-spiritualist posture that discounted aspects of her own being and blunted the possibility of a sustained critique of the structures that enslaved her. Her request to Charles Brockden, an early enslaver and namesake – 'to sell [her] to someone else, for at that time I still loved the world and desired to enjoy it fully' – registers a capitulation to the social stratification and political economy of Bethlehem society.

The next chapter situates these dynamics within the falsely dichotomised exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicies of nineteenth-century Black American Enlightenment thought and the subsequent rise of a secular Black intelligentsia in the twentieth century. There, I examine how notions of assimilation presuppose a linear cultural journey, from pre- to post-contact, from margin to centre, that most Black leaders of the era did not in fact undertake. Brockden's strong assimilationist dogma restricted the horizon of her world-love as surely as her enslavement did; yet only her ontology became the locus of philosophical inquiry. In this sense, her philosophising functioned as an inadvertent extension of nationalist and imperial projects underwriting expansionist American procedures, she being quadruply colonised, an African slave within the Moravian settlement of Bethlehem, within the Colony of Pennsylvania, within the Thirteen Colonies of Great Britain.

Building on this analysis, the chapter argues that a programme of Black American philosophising, one that draws nationalist and emigrationist radicality,

was preconditioned by white American nationalism, statism and colonial/imperial imaginaries, all tethered to an allegiance to capitalism. I contend that this programme shaped nineteenth-century Black theodicy and perdures into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this light, and by way of foreshadowing, I read Thomas Sowell,¹⁴⁵ a Black conservative thinker, as advancing an idealism operating as rationalism with attenuated attention to the material conditions of suffering, a theodicy of sorts. Unlike Hegel, however, in our earlier discussion with C.L.R. James on rationalism, Sowell formulates this position amid decades of empirical evidence that challenge a classed philosophy of suffering; yet the rationalist commitments of his framework preclude a robust encounter with that evidence.

¹ In the 'Notes' section of *Prophesy*, West explains the following about these four 'traditions' of epistemological responses by Black people. Though he suggests that for Black people this was in response to the legacy of anti-Black racism in the modern world, he specifies that these four responses can be basic to any group: 'These four ideal-types represent the basic responses of any group, community, or nation entering modernity. In the American context, they are found among emerging Irish, Italian, Polish, Jewish, etc., communities beginning to interact with the dominant WASP culture and society. In the European context, these traditions are salient in early nineteenth century Germany, late nineteenth-century Russia, early twentieth-century Spain, etc. They are presently forming in Third World countries. The best recent studies on this problematic of groups entering modernity are those of John Cuddihy on Jewish intellectuals, Rockwell Gray on Spanish thinkers (esp. Ortega y Gasset), and Elaine Showalter on British women novelists. For samples of their work, see John Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Lévi-Strauss, and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity* (Basic Books, 1974); Rockwell Gray, "Ortega y Gasset

and Modern Culture”, *Salmagundi*, No.35 (Fall 1976), pp. 6–41; Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë [sic] to Lessing* (Princeton University Press, 1977).’

² Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 69–70.

³ Ibid, 70.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, 71.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 91.

⁹ In the ‘Notes’ section of *Prophesy*, West extends the humanist tradition of Black thought into what he calls the reformist tradition, which ‘extends from Frederick Douglass through Booker T. Washington to Benjamin Hooks’ (West 1982, 166). West (1982) writes, ‘This stream is represented by those people who satisfy the cultural criteria of Afro-American humanism and advocate certain reforms in the capitalist system. They fail to promote structural change in society’ (166). In this way, the reformist tendency is similar to the exceptionalist theodicy that I claim is undergirded by a socioeconomic assimilationism.

¹⁰ Ibid, 164.

¹¹ Ponerology as the study of evil deals with all aspects of the presence of evil in the world. This study could be about the nature of evil, it could be speculation on the possibility of ending evil, etc. Theodicy as an area of systematic theology, and as a philosophy of religion, deals in epistemics of how evil might be explained in a universe where God is the Potentate, a universe that is not always readable, or intelligible.

¹² Neal Spadafora, ‘Calling the World Dead: Marx’s Philosophy of History and the Question of Theodicy’, *Political Theology*, November (2025): 3.

¹³ James Arthur Holmes, *Black Nationalism and Theodicy: A Comparison of the Thought of Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner* (Boston: Boston University, 1997), 212.

¹⁴ Ibid, 213.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 214.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Plato, *The Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 157.

²¹ Holmes, 215.

²² Ibid.

²³ Jeffery Strickland, 'German Immigrants and African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, 1850–1880', in *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange* by Larry A. Greene and Anke Ortlepp (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 55.

²⁴ Ibid, 56.

²⁵ Ibid, 115–17.

²⁶ Germans' refusal to enslave Africans should not suggest that they held a humanistic belief in racial equality. According to Strickland, during Reconstruction, 'Germans became white southerners first, Germans second', a process that, for example, 'was more gradual in Charleston and it was not complete until 1876' (*Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange* (2010), p. 60).

²⁷ Strickland, 60.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 55.

³⁰ Ibid, 56.

³¹ Ibid, 57.

³² Ibid.

³³ Mischa Honeck, 'An Unexpected Alliance: August Willich, Peter H. Clark, and the Abolitionist Movement in Cincinnati', in *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange* by Larry A. Greene and Anke Ortlepp (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 35.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Seth Moglen, 'Enslaved in the City on a Hill: The Archive of Moravian Slavery and the Practical Past', *History of the Present* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 159.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, 160.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 159.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 178.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 160.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 159.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 164.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 165.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 173.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 174.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 175.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 165–6.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 177.

⁵⁹ Lewis Gordon, 2013, 'Race, Theodicy, and the Normative Emancipatory Challenges of Blackness', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 725.

⁶⁰ Fred Moten, 'The Sentimental Avant-Garde', in *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 1–2.

⁶¹ 2 Chronicles 7:14, *King James Bible*.

⁶² 'Olsen Files Bill to Display Ten Commandments in Public School Classrooms', https://www.okhouse.gov/posts/news-20230102_1.

⁶³ C. L. R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1986), 126.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 121.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 126.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 127.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 128.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 130.

⁷¹ Ibid, 121.

⁷² Ibid, 119.

⁷³ Ibid, 117.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 120.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 119.

⁷⁷ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1970), 137.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 118.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 62–7.

⁸¹ Ibid, 46–7.

⁸² Ibid, 47–8, 67.

⁸³ Ibid, 47.

⁸⁴ Synecdochical of the investiture of singularised authority of the many into a Sovereign.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 118, 125.

⁸⁶ Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), 86.

⁸⁷ Marx, 61.

⁸⁸ Written in close succession to his *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, Marx's 'On the Jewish Question' (1844) further clarifies his conception of civil society. In this text, Marx characterizes civil society as the sphere in which the human being appears in an unpolitical form, defined by egoism, particularity, and the pursuit of private interests characteristic of the bourgeois individual (Marx [1844] 2010, 15). From this perspective, Marx understands civil society not as a neutral domain of social interaction but as a historically specific configuration through which bourgeois power is reproduced and class antagonisms are intensified. Consequently, civil society functions as an alienating structure whose internal contradictions, in Marx's view, would ultimately precipitate its own dissolution and the emergence of a classless, communist society.

⁸⁹ James, 120.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 124.

⁹¹ Ibid, 125.

⁹² Ibid, 120.

⁹³ Ibid, 123.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 124.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 117.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 118.

⁹⁸ Spadafora, 1.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 119.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, 115.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 127.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 123.

¹⁰⁹ Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on Religious and Cultural Criticism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

¹¹⁰ Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 17.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 14.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid, 17.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 15.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 19.

¹¹⁷ Ionut Untea, 'Anthropodicy and the Fate of Humanity in the Anthropocene: From the Disenchantment of Evil to the Re-enchantment of Suffering', *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 32 (2019): 878.

¹¹⁸ Leonard Harris, 'Necro-Being: An Actuarial Account of Racism', *Res Philosophica* (2018): 293.

¹¹⁹ William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology* (New York City: Anchor Press/Double Day & Company, 1973), 21.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 888.

¹²¹ Harris, 293.

¹²² Untea, 888.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Harris, 298.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 274.

¹²⁷ Untea, 886.

¹²⁸ Cornel West, *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (New York: The Monthly Review Press, 1991), xxv.

¹²⁹ Cornel West, "Black Theology and Marxist Thought," *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, ed. James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 561.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Marx, 131, 136.

¹³² Ibid, 131.

¹³³ West (1982), 169.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 169-70.

¹³⁶ Jones, 68.

¹³⁷ Alexander Crummell will also be included in this analysis of nineteenth century theodicies, though in Chapter 3.

¹³⁸ Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on Religious and Cultural Criticism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 121.

¹³⁹ Maikki Aakko, 'Knowing Where We Are: On the Intelligibility of the World, Living Well and Meaningless Suffering', *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* (2025): 3.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Lewis Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 43.

¹⁴⁵ John McWhorter and Coleman Hughes, prominent Black conservative social and cultural critics, will also be included in this latter textual analysis.

CHAPTER 2: False Dichotomy: Exceptionalist and Assimilationist Theodicy as Early Black American Radicalism

2.1. Introduction

The most consequential Black American response to the Enlightenment's racial order in the nineteenth century was a distinctly activist theodicy, a theological-political defence of Black being that paired providential claims with organised action. Against the hollowing effects of modern racial science and the unfolding apparatus of anti-Black oppression, Black thinkers mobilised Christian grammar and republican idiom to vindicate Black humanity and to imagine social futures. Yet, I argue, this project, though indispensable to the moral and intellectual defeat of slavery, proved insufficient as a liberatory radicalism. Its very strength, an exceptionalist posture that inverted the terms of Western civilisation, often re-anchored freedom to the civilisational metrics, statist imaginaries and imperial geographies that had organised unfreedom in the first place.

By activist theodicy, I mean a mode of thought that grounds the defence of Black life in a providential or theological horizon and couples that horizon to programmes of uplift, emigration, institution building and nationhood. This theodicy is 'activistic' in that it refuses quietism: it directs sermons, editorials, conventions and diplomatic schemes toward tangible projects of collective advancement. At the same time, it is also exceptionalist, asserting forms of chosenness, historical vocation or civilisational rebuttal in order to refute

ethnological denigration. Crucially, I demonstrate that this exceptionalism frequently coexisted with, and even depended upon, assimilationist standards – statehood, respectability, civilisational emulation – such that the idiom of difference (Black nation, Black destiny, Black divinity) remained structurally tethered to the norms of the very world it sought to transcend.

This chapter unfolds from a tension first surfaced in the previous chapter's reading of Magdalena Beulah Brockden, whose mid-eighteenth-century assimilationist dogmatics laboured to vindicate Black humanity within prevailing Christian-civilisational frames. If Brockden exemplifies an early Black philosophical posture that met white supremacy as a species of fascism through *conformist* theological strategy, nineteenth-century Black theodicians responded with a more insurgent, *exceptionalist* orientation. They did not merely attempt to qualify for the moral household of Western civilisation; they claimed providential warrant to rearrange it. And yet, I will show that this rearrangement remained bounded by the state, by imperial cartographies of sovereignty and by a civilisational confidence that conferred legitimacy in terms recognisable to the very order it opposed.

The genealogies of anticipation are striking. A full century before Harold Cruse and Huey P. Newton pressed the case for Black nationalism, Martin Delany pursued emigrationist statecraft and extraterritorial sovereignty. Prior to Marcus Garvey's 'Africa for the Africans', Delany envisioned Black geopolitical futures rooted in territorial self-determination. Before W. E. B. Du Bois theorised the 'talented tenth', Henry Highland Garnet articulated an ethic of vanguard

education and uplift during slavery itself, aimed at inspiring mass elevation from sociological penury. And long before Elijah Muhammad's proclamation that the Black man is God shaped the consciousness of Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali and Louis Farrakhan, Henry McNeal Turner had already preached a theology of divine Blackness from the AME pulpit. My claim is not one of direct causation but of structural convergence: these later twentieth-century formulations recapitulate nineteenth-century patterns forged within an activistic theodical frame.

To situate these arguments, I first reconstruct the intellectual antagonist: ethnology, that nineteenth-century amalgam of anthropology and aesthetics that furnished scientific and cultural warrants for racial hierarchy. Polygenist theories, craniometric taxonomies and climatic determinisms did not merely describe human difference – they organised a hierarchy of capacity, culture and destiny. Black theodicians answered these claims by marshalling Christian doctrine, republican virtue and providential history to recompose Black being as capable, cultured and chosen. Yet, in doing so, they frequently adopted the state as the form of historical vindication, respectability as the ethic of civic legitimacy and empire's map as the canvas of emancipation.

From this vantage, I propose the category of exceptionalist assimilationism to name the dialectical formation at the heart of nineteenth-century Black theodicy: extrinsically exceptionalist, insisting upon Black vocation, emigrationist nationalism or divine election, while intrinsically assimilationist, measuring success by statist sovereignty, civilisational achievement and imperial legibility through capitalist logics. The paradox is generative yet limiting. It

enabled a devastating moral critique of slavery and racial science. It also constrained radical possibility to the terms of inclusion, replication or inversion of the dominant order.

The middle sections of this chapter develop the argument through close readings of three figures. Henry Highland Garnet will appear as a theorist of providential nationalism whose call to resistance presupposes an educated vanguard capable of mentoring a people brutalised by chattel slavery. Henry McNeal Turner will exemplify a Black ecclesial internationalism in which emigration and divine Blackness converge as a political theology. Martin Delany will stand as the architect of emigrationist geopolitics whose state-centred solutions envision Black freedom via new sovereignties rather than the abolition of sovereignty's coercive logics. Each thinker constructs a powerful answer to ethnological abasement. Each, I will argue, ultimately binds liberation to statist form and imperial scale.

To clarify the twentieth-century afterlife of this formation, I then turn to E. Franklin Frazier's 1927 essays, 'Racial Self-Expression' and 'The Pathology of Race Prejudice'. Read together, they crystallise the very condescence of exceptionalism and assimilationism I locate in the nineteenth century. Frazier's sociological assimilationism absorbs exceptionalist motifs rather than negating them, yielding a modernised version of the older theodical dialectic.

Finally, I compare the nineteenth-century Black activist theodicy with Ralph Waldo Emerson's American theodicy of self-reliance. Emerson's moral voluntarism, providential confidence and activist ethic provide a revealing foil: an

inward exceptionalism whose insular self-importance mirrors the limits I chart among Black theodicians – universalist rhetoric wedded to civilisational self-authorisation and thin accounts of material transformation. The juxtaposition shows that what appears specifically Black in nineteenth-century exceptionalism also partakes of an American pattern: a theological-moral assurance that resists domination rhetorically while continuing to trust the very architectures of capital, state, empire, civilisation, through which domination is enacted.

2.2. Theodicies as Radical Philosophy in Response to Ethnology:

Exceptionalism (and Assimilationism) as Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Black American Thought

As accounted for in Chapter 1, in West's *Prophesy*, the noted philosopher explains four major traditions of Black thought (exceptionalism, assimilationism, marginalism and humanism) in response to the legacy of anti-Black racism coming out of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. This Enlightenment Age began with the Glorious Revolution, moving England from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, anticipating the rise of the Dutch William of Orange and Mary II of England to the throne of England, and ending with the storming of the Bastille in Paris on 14 July 1789 and the beginning of the French Revolution. Though couched between two consequential revolutions, this period was marked by a devolution posited as an evolution in the field of anthropology leading to harmful ethnologies at the expense of a racialised world.

In *Prophesy*, West suggests three stages of the emergence of this modern racism, in which he posits '[t]he creative fusion of scientific investigation,

Cartesian philosophy, Greek ocular metaphors, and classical aesthetic and cultural ideals constitutes the essential elements of modern discourse in the West...’,¹ in which ‘discourse rests upon a conception of truth and knowledge governed by an ideal value-free subject engaged in observing, comparing, ordering and measuring in order to arrive at evidence sufficient to make valid inferences, confirm speculative hypotheses, deduce error-proof conclusions, and verify true representations of reality’.²

The emergence of modern racism, as articulated by Cornel West, unfolds across three interrelated stages. The first stage involves the recovery of classical antiquity within the modern West, which engendered what West terms the ‘normative gaze’. The second stage, which is most pertinent to the present discussion, concerns the incorporation of classical antiquity – particularly the ideals of ancient Greece – into the foundational frameworks of scientific and humanistic disciplines such as anthropology, taxonomy and philosophy. Finally, the third stage culminates in the development of a comprehensive *Weltanschauung* that renders modern racism seemingly inevitable. For the purposes of this analysis, the second stage is especially significant, as it illuminates the ways in which classical ideals were mobilised to shape intellectual paradigms that undergird racial hierarchies. West writes:

The second stage of the emergence of the idea of white supremacy as an object of modern discourse primarily occurred in the rise of phrenology (the reading of skulls) and physiognomy (the reading of faces). These new disciplines – closely connected with

anthropology – served as an open platform for the propagation of the idea of white supremacy not principally because they were pseudosciences, but, more important, because these disciplines acknowledged the European value-laden character of their observations. This European value-laden character was based on classical aesthetics and cultural ideals.³

According to West, Johann Kaspar Lavater, a Swiss poet and philosopher, developed the ethnological pseudoscience called physiognomy, a highly regimented but woefully unscientific standard of physical attractiveness that was thought to suggest intelligence level (Lavater invented a machine that would shine a light on the wall, and based upon the appearance of someone's silhouette he would determine their cultural merit). Because Lavater 'believed that the Greek statues were the models of beauty',⁴ '[h]is description of the desirable specimen – blue eyes, horizontal forehead, bent back, round chin, and short brown hair',⁵ '[t]he common Greek ideals of beauty, though slightly distorted (to say the least)',⁶ were stipulated over time as the standard of physical appearance. To be outside this standard was to be deemed outside the norm, and thus, inferior.

Through his creation of physiognomy as a purportedly scientific process, his 'new discipline'⁷ that was 'highly influential among scientists – for example, Jean Baptiste Porta, Christian Meiners',⁸ and his friend and the father of binomial nomenclature and animal taxonomy, Carl Linnaeus⁹ – he tapped old sentiments of racialised taxonomies that were heralded and substantiated by respected men

of science that helped legitimise his views. West writes:

Johann Kaspar Lavater, the father of physiognomy, explicitly acknowledged that the art of painting was the mother of his new discipline. Moreau, an early editor of Lavater's work, clearly noted that the true language of physiognomy was painting, because it spoke through images, equally to the eye and to the spirit. This new discipline linked particular visible characteristics of human bodies, especially those of the face, to the character and capacities of human beings. This discipline openly articulated what many of the early naturalists and anthropologists tacitly assumed: the classical ideals of beauty, proportion, and moderation regulated the classifying and ranking of groups of human bodies.¹⁰

Petrus Camper, a Dutch anatomist and physiologist, who was influenced by Lavater, and who was a forerunner of the pseudoscience called phrenology (later formalised by Franz Joseph Gall), the study of skulls to determine the heights of intellect and depths of culture of a race of people, believed that 'the ideal "facial angle" was an 100-degree angle which was achieved only by the ancient Greeks'.¹¹ West notes that in the 1700s Camper 'tried to show that the "facial angle" of Europeans measured about 97 degrees and those of [B]lack people between 60–70 degrees, closer to the measurements of apes and dogs than to human beings'.¹² This is a pathology that many Enlightenment thinkers make a point of promulgating, from Rousseau to Hume, with Kant being perhaps the foremost and descriptive of them all, as communicated in his 1764 work

Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime in which he writes:

Indeed, Father Labat reports that a Negro carpenter, whom he reproached for haughty treatment of his wives, replied: You whites are real fools, for first you concede so much to your wives, and then you complain when they drive you crazy. There might be something here worth considering, except for the fact that this scoundrel was completely black from head to foot, a distinct proof that what he said was stupid.¹³

For Kant, even if a Black man is right, by virtue of his or her being Black, he is wrong, he is stupid, and thus anything that proceeds from him, culturally or otherwise, is stupid and to be disregarded.

Adolf Hitler, another notorious German language speaker, in a manner strikingly reminiscent of Kant (though deemed less acceptable) writes disparagingly of those of African descent in his 1925 nationalistic manifesto *Mein Kampf*. The Führer of the National Socialist Party of Germany, Hitler thought so little of the culture and intelligence of Black people that he did not direct the brunt of his racist vitriol of them directly to them but towards the inferior (yet cunning) Jews and their ulterior motives of inspiring those of African descent to desire equal socioeconomic footing with *Herrenvolk*.¹⁴ He writes:

The Jew uses every possible means to undermine the racial foundations of a subjugated people...Jews were responsible for bringing negroes into the Rhineland, with the ultimate idea of bastardizing the white race which they hate and thus lowering its

cultural and political level so that the Jew might dominate.¹⁵

Hitler's twentieth-century assessment of Black people and Black culture as mean and debased, a sociogeny of herdable beasts driven from one locale to another by a cleverer though still less than human race (i.e. 'the Jew'), suggests a subhumanness below a subhumanness, and it is indistinguishable in its metaphysics, epistemology and aesthetics from Kant 160 years earlier. It was during this period, according to West, during the Age of Enlightenment, that notions of physical appearance became inseparable from the heights of intellect and depths of culture of a people, and that, if you were Black, for no other reason than that you are Black, everything you could produce by way of cogitation and civilisation should be deemed stupid.

As Kant writes in one of the last published works of this period in the Conclusion of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), 'In one word, science (critically undertaken and methodically directed) is the narrow gate that leads to the true doctrine of practical wisdom, if we understand by this not merely what one ought to do, but what ought to serve teachers as a guide to construct well and clearly the road to wisdom which everyone should travel, and to secure others from going astray. Philosophy must always continue to be the guardian of this science...'^{16 17}

According to West, this is precisely what happened as philosophy in its descriptive project guarded the science by which it was guided, to the point of drawing conclusions about humanity that were unthought and uncritical in their logic. West writes:

The intellectual legitimacy of the idea of white supremacy, though grounded in what we now consider marginal disciplines (especially in its second stage), was pervasive. This legitimacy can be illustrated by the extent to which racism permeated the writings of the major figures of the Enlightenment. It is important to note that the idea of white supremacy not only was accepted by these figures, but, more important, it was accepted by them without their having to put forward their own arguments to justify it. Montesquieu and Voltaire of the French Enlightenment, Hume and Jefferson of the Scotch and the American Enlightenment, and Kant of the German Enlightenment not merely held racist views; they also uncritically – during this age of criticism – believed that the authority for these views rested in the domain of naturalists, anthropologists, physiognomists, and phrenologists.¹⁸

The hegemonic culture evinced in the Metaphysics–Epistemology problematic of scientific certainty of the Age of Enlightenment – beyond question, beyond good and evil and beyond reproach – certified an anti-Black racism that was extant then and that perdures today. The exceptionalist epistemologies espoused in the theodicies of nineteenth-century Black American Enlightenment thinkers arose in response to this European Enlightenment legacy of anti-Black philosophy and pseudoscience. The theodicy of the weak (sociological) exceptionalism of Black political leaders from 1820 to the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 makes use of a Mosaic account of sufferings, which saw Black people as Ancient

Israelites in the Egypt of America,¹⁹ an essentially integrationist political theology. According to what in his paper 'Black Theodicy: African Americans and Nationalism in the Antebellum North' Patrick Rael calls the 'unfortunate fall' thesis, Black thinkers in the ensuing decades following the American Revolutionary War posited an explanation of Black suffering *vis-à-vis* a positivist reading of the enslavement of Africans in America.²⁰ This positivist rendering of the undue sufferings of Black people under chattel slavery reckoned that God permitted such a torturous occurrence in order to expunge America's great sin in sanctioning the practice of slavery in the first place. The sociological exceptionalism of Black people, that is, how they suffered through slavery like God's chosen people, the Israelites who suffered under Pharaoh, meant that God was on their side, and not the side of their oppressors, the United States government. It is fortunate that God would allow such undue sufferings to befall Black people, yet it is unfortunate for America if it continues to keep God's people in bondage.²¹ This is the essence of the unfortunate fall thesis: If America ever wishes to become that 'city set on a hill', to ever attain unto material prosperity, Black people must go free and be fully integrated into American society.

The unfortunate fall thesis that predicated the theodicy espoused by Black thinkers of the nineteenth century, then, was a combinatory weak assimilationism and exceptionalism articulated as a philosophy of religion in which Black people's fate was tied to the fate of the American imperial enterprise. Black radicality expressed as assimilationism was an explicit feature of its theodicy, according to Rael, who writes the following: 'Black nationalism's apparently contradictory

stance toward America – its separatist message which sought inclusion in American life – may thus be restated without confusing implicit references to hegemonic American ideology: [B]lack nationalism offered a source of unity to a people seeking to share the benefits of the most progressive elements of the world economy and world political system.²² From Nathaniel Paul (d.1839) to William Douglass (1804–1862), Paul Cuffee (1759–1817) to David Walker (1796–1830), from Robert Roberts (1780–1860) to James McCune Smith (1854–1937), the theodicy of these Black cultural philosophers, largely of the Methodist Episcopal, Baptist and Presbyterian intelligentsia, that informed their ‘Black nationalism derived from American nationalism, which in turned owed large debts to romantic European nationalism’,²³ and thus did not desire an overturning of the American empire. In fact, Rael asserts that these ‘Northern [B]lack elites’ did not formulate their responses to white supremacy with terms like ‘assimilation’ and ‘integration’,²⁴ and that ‘[t]his describes nothing like [their] ideological climate’.²⁵ He writes, ‘It is not that African-American leaders did not seek complete integration into their society (some did and some did not, depending on how integration is defined), it is that they did not see themselves as integrating into someone else’s society. Notions like “assimilation” envision a cultural journey – from a pre-contact to a post-contact state, from the cultural margins to a cultural core – which most [B]lack leaders [of that day] simply did not take.’²⁶

The paradox here is striking. Black radical theologians of the nineteenth century articulated a nationalism that was so enmeshed in American imperialism that they had no conception of how thoroughly *assimilated* and integrated they

were. Even Peter H. Clark (1829–1925), probably the first Black American socialist, who was a member of the Workingmen’s Party of the United States and later the Socialist Labor Party, and who ‘declared that [B]lacks had erred in thinking “that a political millennium was coming”, ‘that God would work his will [in no other way] than through African Americans’,²⁷ and that he would ‘never...petition for a right again’ but ‘seize’ his rights, if able to do so,²⁸ never advanced an activistic theodicy that would divorce Black people from the imperial pursuits of the United States. As West notes of Black thinkers of that time, ‘The exceptionalist response to the challenges of self-image and self-determination is this: a romanticization of Afro-American culture that conceals the social mobility of an emerging opportunistic Afro-American petite bourgeoisie’.²⁹ This history reveals that while exceptionalism was the extrinsic epistemic formulation of the Black theodicy abolitionists of the nineteenth century, sociological, economic and political assimilationism underwrote their methodologies of social uplift.

2.3. E. Franklin Frazier and the Exceptionalist Foundation of Twentieth-Century Assimilationism

When Cornel West writes of the assimilationist Joban theodicy adopted by Black thinkers entering the twentieth century, in which ‘[t]he self-image of Afro-Americans...is one of self-hatred, shame, and fear’,³⁰ he maintains that this tradition of thought ‘posits Afro-American inferiority, not against everyone, but specifically to white Americans’.³¹ West posits that the ‘unchallenged theoretician of the weak assimilationist tradition in Afro-American history is E. Franklin Frazier’,³² outside of W. E. B. Du Bois, St. Clair Drake and Charles S. Johnson,

the most celebrated Black sociologist of that time. According to West, '[t]he weak assimilationist tradition under the aegis of Frazier has provided the theoretical framework for legal and political argumentation of civil rights during the past two decades',³³ wherein the messaging was plain: 'Afro-Americans have been environmentally created less equal and normal than whites, so only assimilation with whites can break the circle of political oppression and pathological behavior.'³⁴ He writes:

The Chicago school of sociology serves as the context in which his brand of weak assimilationism flourished. Borrowing from the social theory of W.I. Thomas (especially his work on Polish peasants) and Robert Parks (notably his work on urban class and status conflict), Frazier views the history of Afro-American culture as a series of devastating social shocks – the initial act of enslavement from Africa, the cruel voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, the 'peculiar institution' of slavery, the vicious postemancipation life, and the disintegration of folk culture in the cities.³⁵

West goes on to cite Frazier's 'well-known book, *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939) [in which] [he] suggests that the Afro-American culture basically amounts to superstition, ignorance, self-hatred, and fear',³⁶ summing Frazier's view that 'only assimilation can civilize, refine, and modernise Afro-American enhancement in increased interaction with whites'.³⁷ Though West (1982) suggests that '[l]ater in life [is when] Frazier began to recognize the belated consequences of his viewpoint', with his 'scathing critique of the Afro-

American middle class, *Black Bourgeoisie* (1962)',^{38 39} '[castigating] their aping of white bourgeois society, their fanciful world of status, wealth, and prestige, and their inability to take each other seriously as professionals',⁴⁰ there is evidence that Frazier began to make this epistemological turn as early as 1927.

In 1927, Frazier writes two major critiques of culture. I want to briefly examine the substance of these critiques to suggest a blurring of the line between exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicies, that I claim in the next section found its first elision in the theodicies of the nineteenth-century American Enlightenment. Here, we find a Frazier who is assimilationist, as West suggests, but who is with simultaneity engaged in an exceptionalist criticism of white culture. In his essay 'Racial Self-Expression', Frazier calls into question the function and reach of Black art.⁴¹ He avers that from the time of the Black person's forced arrival on the shores of the British Colonies, 'he has not been able to draw upon a group tradition outside of America'.⁴² Later, he makes the following claim about Black people and Black culture in relation to white people and white culture: 'If the Negro had undertaken to shut himself off from the white culture about him and had sought light from within his experience, he would have remained on the level of barbarism.'⁴³ Frazier, here, provides an exemplar for assimilationist theodicy, that is, providing a caustic approximation of Black culture in favour of an uncritical estimation of white culture. The sociologist goes on to suggest that even a Black person of this time, whom he refers to as 'the New Negro', 'seeks relief from his conflict with the white majority by a flight from the reality of the culture about him, his development will be arrested and he will

be shunted from the main highway of American life'.⁴⁴ For Frazier, emigrationism as a nationalism, which we will discuss in the next section, absconding the terror of the US empire to build a new empire in a nation abroad, was a nonstarter. Black people did not possess the requisite culture or traditions, 'no source to draw on outside of America',⁴⁵ to foundationalise a nation outside of the empire. While Frazier concludes that it is good, after the thought of Carter G. Woodson, for Black people to attempt create a cultural tradition in America, calling it a natural part of the socialising process, his concern is that Black people's isolation from white America is not increased.⁴⁶

This same Frazier would write the same year he published a text bemoaning the barbarism of Black people an essay titled 'The Pathology of Race Prejudice' (1927), an article published in *The Forum*, in which he pronounces an exceptionalist theodicy. In the text, Frazier muses about how racism is a form of psychopathology, an 'abnormal behavior' that white southerners have in relation to Black people, what Frazier calls 'the Negro complex', which 'obtrudes itself on all planes of thought'.⁴⁷ He writes:

...just as in the insane any pertinent stimulus may arouse the whole complex, so any idea connected with the Negro causes the whole Negro-complex to be projected into consciousness. Its presence there means that all thinking is determined by the complex. For example, a white woman who addresses a colored man as mister is immediately asked whether she would want a Negro to marry her sister and must listen to a catalog of his sins. How else than as the

somnambulism of the insane and almost insane are we to account for the behavior of a member of a school board who jumps up and paces the floor, cursing and accusing Negroes, the instant the question of appropriating money for Negro schools is raised?⁴⁸

Frazier advances a rigorously dispassionate and scientific account of white racial prejudice, framing it as a phenomenon amenable to systematic analysis. His objective is to demonstrate the internal coherence of his reasoning by situating racism within a psychopathological framework that renders it both intelligible and appreciable as a sociological pathology. For Frazier, the white schoolboard member who obstructs Black families seeking equitable education exemplifies this pathology. He contends that 'race prejudice involves the mental conflict, which is held to be the cause of the dissociation of ideas so prominent in insanity'.⁴⁹ In this formulation, anti-Black racism among whites constitutes a form of insanity – a pathological disruption of mental faculties at the level of an entire demographic.

By transcending the limitations of strict assimilationism, Frazier reveals the possibility of reconciling the ostensibly oppositional categories of exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicy, thereby inaugurating an early iteration of radical Black American philosophy. Moreover, his work establishes a conceptual throughline from the assimilationist tendencies embedded within exceptionalist theodicean projects of nineteenth-century Black thought, a trajectory that will be examined in the following section.

2.4. Toward Emigrationism: Henry Highland Garnet, Henry McNeal Turner and the Imperialist Logics of Black Nationalism as Activistic Exceptionalist Theodicy

In his Boston University PhD dissertation, *Black Nationalism and Theodicy: A Comparison of the Thought of Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner*, James Arthur Holmes discloses how ‘[d]uring the nineteenth century the leaders of the independent Black churches developed a Black nationalist ideology that expressed itself through five fundamental expressions: (1) racial solidarity; (2) resistance literature; (3) the Negro Convention Movement; (4) “a Black theology of missionary emigrationism and racial destiny”; and (5) the demand for political freedom, social justice, and economic parity’.⁵⁰ This last category desired by Black people of the nineteenth century, who ‘came to understand themselves as a distinctive group bound together through African descent and common experience of oppression’,⁵¹ suggests in Black consciousness a pining for equanimity with whiteness, as opposed to bringing an end to capitalist imperialism, its foundation. Whereas ‘Black Nationalism in the Black churches emerged out of a conflict perspective challenging the view that the solution to the race problem was assimilation into [w]hite culture and [w]hite churches’,⁵² I argue, though socially and culturally unassimilable, Black religious leaders acting as cultural philosophers developed modes of epistemologies of assimilationism articulated as capitalist parity, imperialist solidarity and colonialist missiology.

I. Henry Highland Garnet

For example, Holmes nominalises Garnet's theodicy as 'Providence and African-American Resistance'.⁵³ This description by Garnetian theodicy was to mitigate against 'God's failure to act during the three-hundred year reign of slavery'.⁵⁴ For Garnet, like Nathaniel Paul, David Walker and James McCune Smith, God was engaged in a historicisation project in which history had a teleology towards Black liberation. According to Holmes, 'Garnet's idea of Providence refers to "God's purpose and goal for humanity. Providence concerns itself with the way in which God attempts to accomplish God's purpose in history"',⁵⁵ because he 'believed that God's will leads to the vindication of the righteous', in this case, enslaved Black people. In short, 'God's history leads to God's ultimate which are the ideals of liberation and justice'.⁵⁶ 'God's ultimate', for Garnet was a technology for understanding Providence as a 'moral order in the universe [where] good will ultimately triumph over evil'.⁵⁷ Though, this theology was not a passive enterprise, and was possessive of an activist theodicy that was 'extremely hostile to the complacency view' that God's people 'were...to sit idly and wait for God's liberation'.⁵⁸

Not through the activist quotient but through the activity of Garnet's theodicy is its weakness revealed. Like Alexander Crummell, who vacillated between theodicean modes of domestic nationalism and emigrationist nationalism, as we shall see in Chapter 3, Garnet landed his phenomenology on the virtues of emigration. Saying, famously, in 'An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America' (1843), speaking of the Black American experience under chattel slavery, '[i]t is impossible like the children of Israel to make a grand

exodus from the land of bondage. The pharaohs are on both sides of the blooded waters';⁵⁹ at first, 'Garnet opposed the efforts of the [American Colonization Society] believing it a scheme to remove free African-Americans and strengthen the slave system'.⁶⁰ Not until the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland subsidised an excursion of Garnet's to Jamaica, Garnet being a Presbyterian minister in New York, that his position on emigrationism as a nationalism began to evolve. Of this experience, Holmes writes:

The Jamaican experience between 1853 and 1856 provided Garnet the opportunity to modify his anti-colonization views and to develop an idea of selective emigration. This was an idea to recruit skilled African-Americans for voluntary re-settlement to predominately Black cultures. Both parties benefited under the plan. The former benefited from the skills and motivation of the emigrants, while the latter were provided the chance to reach their potential, an opportunity denied to them in America.⁶¹

Garnet's move to Jamaica did not immediately mark a stark difference in his personal policy on emigration as colonisation because, to him, 'colonization was an evil idea promulgated by the ACS to rid the country of its entire Black population'.⁶² Note, here, that the point of contention for Garnet and emigrationism as a nationalism was his concern that the ACS was using colonisation as a Trojan horse of sorts to remove Black people from their native, though not autochthonous, soil, not because of a lack of allegiance to Western civilising missiology on his part. Following the end of the Mexican-American War,

which 'gave the South the opportunity to re-focus upon expanding slavery to the new territories',⁶³ in addition to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, 'mitigated by the passage of personal liberty laws',⁶⁴ coupled with the Dred Scott case of 1857, which 'declared the Negro to be property',⁶⁵ Garnet '[announced] the famous change in his colonization position'.⁶⁶ Thereafter, Garnet founded the African Civilization Society to be a kind of foil to the American Colonization Society. Holmes writes:

Garnet's emigration policy became the cornerstone for the philosophy of the African Civilization Society. Founded in 1858 by Garnet and an integrated group, the aims of the Society were in 'support of African settlements of Black missionaries to teach local natives to institute agricultural improvements and to educate them against the folly of participation in the slave-trade'.⁶⁷

Here, the activity of Garnet's theodicy, where he aids in God's providence, becomes problematised by its complicity in a missiology of apostolical capitalist logics. By Holmes' telling, in Jamaica, Garnet wanted to found a capitalistic society to rival that of the United States. Rather than bringing *Aufhebung* to the finance and industrial capital that was ruining the lives of millions of Black enslaved people, Garnet sought to compete in the free markets on a scale of global proportions with other established world powers under the federal headship of the political economy of capitalism. According to Holmes, 'Garnet held that one of the basic keys to destroying the slave trade was creating an alternative supply of cotton. Garnet would have the Society's missionaries to

teach the African leaders “better things to induce them to exterminate the slave-trade and engage in lawful commerce and in this way aid in destroying slavery in this and other lands”.⁶⁸ This collaborationist dogma, wrought by Garnet’s exceptionalist theodicy, which on one hand advocated irruptive violence against enslavers where necessary and predicated the alienation of the Garrisonians along the logics of promoting a separatism among the Convention Movement, could no truer be seen in the abolitionist’s commitment to capitalism and bourgeois politics.

Garnet seized the opportunities to speak before African-American assemblages to advocate his ideas of Black self-reliance and self-assertiveness. Both ideas were practiced by Garnet’s father and uncles who used the qualities to escape slavery. The self-reliant qualities of both Garnet’s father and uncles left a self-assertive impression on Garnet, who incorporated it into his Black Nationalist thinking. Thus, thought Garnet, if slavery was to be obliterated, then slaves had to take the major responsibility for its demise: ‘[Brothers and sisters] the time has come when you must act for yourselves...you can plead your own cause and do the work of emancipation better than others.’⁶⁹

Garnet, grandson of a Mandingo chieftain, one of the first to intellectualise militant Black nationalist thought, held on to the problematic of emigrationism as a nationalism through bourgeois liberal means. As Holmes writes, concerning Garnet’s collaborationist approaches to eliminating slavery and racial

discrimination through changing the laws of local and state governments in the North and through enacting constitutional amendments in the South, 'It is unclear as to why Garnet put so much faith in the legislative process'.⁷⁰ With David Walker's *Appeal* (1829) and Robert Alexander Young's *Ethiopian Manifesto* (1829) being inspirations for his activistic theodicy, Garnet's dysfunctional separatism, that is, a separatism from the ACS yet not from the American pursuit for capitalistic world mastery *vis-à-vis* the schema of imperialism and slavery as evidenced in his epistemological commitment to emigrationism as a form of self-determination, stifled his liberatory pursuits. Garnet's goal for enslaved Africans in America to use "every means both moral, intellectual, and physical that promised success" in breaking the yoke of slavery⁷¹ falls flat in retrospect because it is animated by a theodicy of exceptionalism in support of capitalism and not liberationism.

II. Henry McNeal Turner

When Henry McNeal Turner died in 1915, Du Bois wrote the following eulogy:

In a sense Turner was the last of his clan, mighty men physically and mentally, men who started at the bottom and hammered their way to the top by sheer brute strength; they were the spiritual prodigy of ancient African chieftains and they built the African Church in America.⁷²

Du Bois makes no exaggeration here. In fact, he may have undersold who Turner was. Born in 1834 near Newberry, South Carolina, Turner's 'maternal grandfather was an African prince captured when a boy and sold into American slavery'.⁷³

According to one biographer, Turner's knowledge of this account may have been his entrée into an interest in Africa, and, if so, the datum of his theodicy. Because of an English law that decreed that the family of an African royal could not be enslaved, Turner and his family, though deep in the South, were born free. However, thought born free, Turner, who would later become a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was barred from learning to read, '[b]ecause of the Denmark Vesey conspiracy in 1822',⁷⁴ when 'South Carolina forbade the education of African-Americans'.⁷⁵ A pair of white women, one in Newberry, another in Abbeville, where the family moved upon his mother's remarrying, taught the young Turner how to read and write, and through his first contact with the AME Church in 1857 in New Orleans, followed by a pastorage in Baltimore at Waters Chapel and a Civil War chaplaincy commissioned by Abraham Lincoln, the formidable abolitionist received his training.⁷⁶

Like Garnet, Turner's theodicy was a historicisation project. As Holmes notes:

An important element in Turner's theodicy of slavery was the fact that Whites abused God's trust in developing and maintaining a barbaric slave-system that did not provide for the means of African-American elevation. Not pleased with these abuses, God in God's absolute sovereignty abolished the slave-trade. Unlike Eternal institutions that were created by God and lasted forever, slavery was a Providential institution made by human beings and only temporary.⁷⁷

Holmes terms Turner's theodicy a 'Theodicy of Slavery'. By this, he suggests two things: (1) God's 'trust' was bestowed on white people to enact slavery modernity, even though white people broke God's trust in them. (2) God was provident in allowing whites to enslave Black Africans due to the civilising instrumentation of slavery. As in our earlier discussion of Garnet's providential outlook on God's justice, or theodicy, relative to our even earlier discussion of a blanket understanding of Black theodicean exceptionalism through homologues with the Children of Israel under slavery in Egypt, 'it was Turner's belief that God would use the misuse of God's trust by [w]hites to lift the Black race to greatness'.⁷⁸ This uplift would come through the form of a missiology, or a civilising and Christianising mission. As Holmes states, 'Turner's idea of theodicy reasoned that it was God's intention to use slavery for God's good purposes. Indeed, God used the slave-system to civilize the African and to convert them to Christianity. The slave system provided the best opportunity to facilitate the rapid transition from the slaves' state of barbarism to Christian Civilization.'⁷⁹ Though an exceptionalist in his theodicy, reckoning that the ultimate aim of suffering is for God's chosen vessels to be exalted, i.e. Black people, Turner's Black nationalism saw Black people as a recuperative project. Here, again, we are exposed to the soft demarcation between the beatification of exceptionalism and the pathologisation of assimilationism in Black radical thinking in the nineteenth century. Turner, who was the first theologian to declaim that God is Black,⁸⁰ many years before Elijah Muhammad and early Malcolm X, also believed that Africans on the continent, as well as the newly freed African slaves of America,

needed a civilising re-education. For Turner, God, through his divine providence, allowed white people, though sinful and breaking his trust by tormenting Africans by not offering them release from the suffering of slavery, to flourish so that Black people could be redeemed by the saving virtue of the Christian religion.

Turner's theodicy, thus, reads similarly to how, in the initial chapter of *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (1993), titled 'Humanistic Understanding and the Onto-theo-logical Tradition', Heideggerian philosopher William V. Spanos draws a contrast between the Apollonian and the Nietzschean. This dialectic is profound and animating in this chapter, because it underscores Spanos's view of Western liberal arts education as vivified by a recuperative assimilationist project of redeeming an erstwhile heroic genius and gentility that has been lost in Black people to the grotesqueries of a logocentric age. He writes:

To recall Derrida, they constitute 'a series of substitutions of center for center', 'a linked chain of determinations of the center', in which 'successively and in regulated fashion the center receives different forms or names'. And in each case knowledge is understood in terms of visibility and power, that is, as an agency of certitude on the basis of which 'anxiety', whether it takes the form of ontological decentering (absence of presence) or cultural proliferation (a knowledge explosion) or sociopolitical upheaval, 'can be mastered'.⁸¹

This is how Turner envisioned the Christianising project at the core of his Black nationalism as an emigrationism, as a recuperation of something that had been lost in the Black African, through a process of re-education. To wit, it is the Apollonian anamnestic self-ness, transcendently received, that is the impetus of the onto-theo-logical world differentiation and domination at the core of Europeanness/whiteness as an ideological system of negation. This is indicative of the problematic of the Apollonian quotient of the Apollonic/Nietzschean dialectic that Spanos propounds. Consider how Spanos expounds upon the concept of time. He writes:

In thus reifying time, in thus bringing time to light, as it were, thinking and the thinking subject achieve 'objectivity', the essential comportment (prior to being) of humanistic inquiry, indeed, of humanistically educated men and women; a dis-stance from the originative experience of the object which allows a thinking self to become a privileged observer, one who, from this disengaged distance, merely looks at or, rather, 'overlooks'!? synchronically the lived experience of being-in-the-world, as if it were a completed narrative. It is in thus separating the subject and object that the sedimented traditional understanding of truth as correspondence – the understanding of truth that, as I will suggest, continues to inform humanistic pedagogy – becomes static and visual.⁸²

According to Holmes, Turner appropriated this theodicy of God's Providence of Trust, or a 'Theodicy of Slavery' in creating a worldview that envisioned a God

immanently involved in all of life, in control of the universe, and a God who would set things right in God's own time. God's time, then, becomes entangled and engaged in man's time, even in the guise of whiteness functioning with impunity through capitalism using imperialist logics. Though he 'took great pains to show, however, that [w]hites abused God's trust in developing and maintaining a barbaric system of slavery that denied both African-American personhood and the means of elevation',⁸³ Turner believed that God made white people God's executors, his existential proprietors in his carnal absence. This thought is representative of the civilising missiology of education of which Spanos writes, and is central to the theodicy of Turner.

Holmes rightly calls this out as a failed attempt at Turner attempting to fit religion into the Black experience in America, yet this was, as we showed earlier, a common theodicean pursuit under Mosaic narratology of Black cultural philosophers of that day. At the founding of the predominantly-Black National Baptist Convention, USA, in 1895, when Turner expresses his view that God is Black,⁸⁴ many years before James Hal Cone⁸⁵ would articulate the same sentiment,⁸⁶ he was participating in a process of Black uplift that was part and parcel of theodicean world building among Black thinkers of the nineteenth century. For Turner, personhood was a God-given identity and a quality that could not be denied. He asked that all African Americans demand 'their inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as any other American'.⁸⁷ However, the challenge with demanding one's rights from a federal headship that does not recognise your fully and robust humanity is that it

becomes the government's say-so that you are fully human, and not a reality that you claim for yourself as a modality of self-determination.

On this point, Holmes raises some necessary questions: 'In Turner's thinking the qualities of Christianity and a degree of Civilization were positive benefits of a barbaric slave-system that could be used to redeem Africa. Because God allowed the good of redeeming Africa to come from the evil of Whites, does this mean that slavery has redemptive qualities? Why were Africans chosen to be sufferers? Could not God have accomplished the task of redeeming Africa without African suffering? Turner's Black Theology does not satisfactorily resolve these difficult issues.'⁸⁸ Thus, while I agree in Holmes's characterisation of Turner's as a 'Theodicy of Slavery', I term Turner's theodicy an 'exceptionalist theodicy of missiology'. Like Garnet, this mode of activist nationalist Black theodicy of self-reliance is too complicit in forms of colonialism and domination in the form of assimilationism. This prevents Turner's radical philosophy of Black suffering from being liberational.

2.5. Martin Delany and the Problematics of an Exceptionalist

Theodicy of Emigrationism

Often, exceptionalist theodicy of nationalism took the form of emigrationism. This emigrationism was formulated to preserve what West calls their 'self-image', and through self-governance, albeit in the capitalist system to which they pledged fealty, these Black men sought to concretise a sense of self away from the white normative gaze. This is especially true in 1849–1854 with thinkers such as Garnet and Martin Delany (1812–1885), who 'felt the same stirrings of Negro

nationalism. But they offered a different solution.¹⁸⁹ This different solution, however, would have the same imperial drive as their nationalist impetus, steeped in a Western mode of empire, whatever the costs. Delany had been born in West Virginia, 'the son of Samuel Delany, a slave, and Pati Delany, a free African-American',⁹⁰ and 'became a leader in the Black community, working with the Pittsburgh Anti-Slavery Society and the Underground Railroad',⁹¹ where he was '[e]lected a delegate to the New York Negro Convention in 1836, [and] began a close association with the influential clergypersons of the day'.⁹² After moving to Rochester, New York, '[co-editing] the "North Star" with Frederick Douglass',⁹³ from which he would soon resign in 1848 '[b]ecause the paper was unable to support two editors',⁹⁴ Delany enrolled in Harvard Medical School, where he was later dismissed because of racial discrimination. When white abolitionists failed to protest his expulsion, paired with the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Delany became a man disillusioned with the United States.

Delany's disillusionment and disappointment with America 'drove him to a room in New York',⁹⁵ and led to a secluded period of thought production including his most ardent work of seminal Black nationalism, *The Condition and Elevation Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States Politically Considered*, wherein he articulated his 'first full-length formulation of...ideas of elevation, emigration, and Black Theology'.⁹⁶ Elevation was a central tenet of Delany's Black nationalism. 'Reasoning that the African-American intelligentsia',⁹⁷ of whom he was a member, being that he was an 'Army officer, abolitionist, medical doctor, self-taught scholar, writer, and an early intellectual voice of Black

Nationalism',⁹⁸ 'were ordained to help elevate the race',⁹⁹ 'Delany proposed [for free African Americans] elevation through business success', and for slaves to 'dare to strike the first blow for freedom'.¹⁰⁰ Yet, for Delany, disillusionment grew to deeper disappointment with the white power structure in America and the leadership in the Black Church, of whom he was highly critical 'for accepting a [w]hite interpretation of Christianity that tended to thwart Black progress'.¹⁰¹ Consequently, in 1858, he travelled abroad 'to both West Africa and London seeking help for the American Abolition Movement and a place for freed African-Americans'.¹⁰² This journey abroad became the beginning of what I term Delany's Black exceptionalist theodicy of colonialism.

In his paper 'The Negro Emigration Movement, 1849–1854: A Phase of Negro Nationalism' (1959), Howard H. Bell maintains that the most significant development to emerge from the Negro Convention Movement that began in earnest in 1830 was the matter of emigration. The origins of Black radicality emerge here, yet again, as this earliest and foremost Negro convention was organised by Bishop Richard Allen of the newly formed African Methodist Episcopal Church as a strong rebuke of the American Colonization Society, and its desire to repatriate free Black Americans back to Africa.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, though the topic of emigrationism among Black people was not new by the mid-nineteenth century, having been of interest to them for decades, 'Negro leaders had not been consistent in their attitude toward the practice'.¹⁰⁴ However, '[b]y 1845...a change was becoming apparent in the Negro's attitude toward emigration, and after that date, sons of prominent anticolonizationist leaders

were often found, temporarily at least, seeking their fortunes in Liberia or Haiti or the British West Indies, or California'.¹⁰⁵ Influenced in part by the Liberian declaration of independence, by 1847, 'the National Negro Convention at Troy, New York', entertained a plan to emigrate Black folk to Jamaica; by 1848, 'A. M. Sumner of Ohio was seeking passage to Africa'; in 1851, men like Martin Delany were 'still clinging to the belief that the American Negro should not be lured away to lands beyond the bounds of the United States, not even to Canada'.¹⁰⁶

For Delany, 'editor of [the Black-owned newspaper] *The Mystery* during the 1840s', Black emigrationism did not differ from Black nationalism and, in 1852, 'he was to come forth with a fully developed plan for a colored empire in the Caribbean area'.¹⁰⁷ It was only at the outbreak of the American Civil War, when Delany 'turned in his emigration schemes for an officer's uniform in the Union Army',¹⁰⁸ that he was temporarily resigned to 'living in the land of his birth'.¹⁰⁹ Until then, Delany, whom Holmes refers to as 'the Father of Black Nationalism',^{110 111} and who, many years before Marcus Garvey, used the phrase 'Africa for Africans', would live as an emigrant. Of course, as we discussed in the previous section, another promotor of Black emigrationism as a nationalism was Garnet, a Presbyterian minister born into slavery in Maryland who came of age in New York City. Like Delany, Garnet in the 1840s was 'among [the] new champions' of emigrationism, and, though once averse to the idea, seeking to solely affront 'the strongholds of the "slavocracy"', by 1849, 'he was publicly recognizing emigration as a legitimate means to wealth and power, and...was

even willing to accept the work of the American Colonization Society insofar as it had benefited Africa'.¹¹²

Well into the 1850s, emigration as a mode of nationalism had been top of the minds of many Black leaders, having a zenith in 1853 at a second Canadian convention, and coming full circle at the National Emigration Convention of 1854.¹¹³ Of this moment, Bell writes the following:

The philosophy of the emigrationists was embodied in a lengthy report, 'Political Destiny of the Colored Race', read by Martin R. Delaney and accepted by the convention. It denied both the citizenship and the freedom of the American Negro and contended that freedom existed only where a racial group constituted a majority; it approved emigration to the Caribbean area via Canada as a way station; and it warned that the rights withheld by a majority were never freely given but must be seized..."The white races are but one-third of the population of the globe – or one of them to two of us – and it cannot much longer continue, that two-thirds will passively submit to the universal domination of this one third."¹¹⁴

Listen to how Bell describes the tenor of Delany's approved plan, first published in 1852. Delany's plan, Bell writes, 'called for temporary emigration to Canada en route to the Caribbean and a Negro empire, or rather, an empire of the colored peoples in the tropical areas of the Western Hemisphere'.¹¹⁵ Notice the allegiance to empire in the thought of these Black leaders of the nineteenth century, how nationalism coalesced with emigrationism, which in turn cohered

with imperialism, as exceptionalism coevolved of assimilationism. Indeed Black people needed a place where they could live and be free. Even if one considers the two most important dimensions of Delany's theodicy, '(1) self-help and self-reliance and (2) the idea of racial redemption',¹¹⁶ where the 'idea of racial redemption joined the power of God with the liberating activity of the oppressed to restore Black people to a position of greatness',¹¹⁷ this greatness would need to be procured at the expense of other dominated peoples and regions of the globe. The freedom of Black thought leaders of this time contained a deep desire to stay within the matrices of capitalistic dogmatics of parity with Western civilisation. For example, in further pursuit of his emigrationism, in 1858 Delany travelled abroad to both West Africa and London looking for aid for the American Abolition Movement, where he 'secured a place in what is now Nigeria for a colony and support of British officials for intercontinental trade between London and the new colony'.¹¹⁸ Additionally, in this connection, one could consider Delany's rise to political prominence, where he earned such appointments as 'Trial Justice, Customs Inspector, and Colonel in the state militia',¹¹⁹ and how he 'threw both his political support and immense popularity behind the Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Company, a business enterprise formed in 1868 to transport emigrants to Liberia'.¹²⁰ Whereas Delany always stressed the importance of voluntarism regarding his emigrationism as a nationalism and separatism,¹²¹ understanding Black people to be an internally oppressed group within America, his consideration of exiting America only to formalise a new colony in Africa is a contiguity with a Western imperialism.

There is debate within Black studies around the colour of Delany's colonialism, whether he intended colonialism as it is traditionally understood to be interpreted as it is traditionally understood. Delany writes:

When we speak of colonization, we wish distinctly to be understood, as speaking of the 'American Colonization Society' – or that which is under its influence – commenced in Richmond, Virginia, in 1817, under the influence of Mr. Henry Clay of Ky., Judge Bushrod Washington of Va., and other Southern slaveholders, having for their express object, as their speeches and doings all justify us in asserting in good faith, the removal of the free colored people from the land of their birth, for the security of the slaves, as property of the slave propagandists.¹²²

Robert M. Kahn notes that to Delany 'colonization is a white-initiated movement that would forcibly remove all free [B]lacks from the United States in order to protect the institution of slavery'.¹²³ Delany thought, however, that '[e]migration, on the other hand, is a [B]lack-initiated, voluntary movement that takes the destruction of slavery as one of its important aims',¹²⁴ with the Black nationalist writing, 'Let us apply, first, the lever to ourselves; and the force that elevates us to the position of manhood's considerations and honors, will cleft the manacle of every slave in the land'.¹²⁵ For Delany, it is the 'free man [who] chooses emigration in the belief that, by amassing political and economic strength in a nation of his own, slavery can be rendered impolitic and, most importantly, unprofitable'.¹²⁶ 'Our elevation', Delany would write, 'must be the result of self-

efforts, and work of our own hands...Let each one make the case his own, and endeavor to rival his neighbor, in honorable competition.’¹²⁷

‘Propounding a panacea that has appealed to generations of [B]lack leaders’,¹²⁸ Delany believed that work is the best way toward what Marx would call ‘primitive accumulation’, a process that would help Black people gain parity with white people. Primitive, or capital, accumulation was one of the beneficences of slavery as a political economy, largely a European effort under what Rodney called the epoch, or market, of slavery in the modern age. Later it conjoined with capitalistic colonialist pursuits of the European powers as they underdeveloped Africa to develop their own nations, in a dialectical relationship of coterminous benefits and deficits, benefits for the Europeans and deficits for the Africans. My goal in raising questions about Delany’s procedure of emigrationism as a nationalism is not to upbraid the valuable theodist thinker of the nineteenth century, to offer a totalising vision of a true Renaissance man of his time who sought ways to end the undue suffering of his people, but to call into ponderance the apparent need for parity with the political economies of the West, thereby suggesting modes of assimilationism in his separatism. Competition and emigrationism taken together sound reminiscent of colonialism, the same regime of power and domination that Delany often railed against. Kahn, a proponent of the view that Delany’s emigrationism was wholly distinct from colonialism could still admit that the radical was ‘flawed in his discussion of [B]lack destiny’,¹²⁹ though consistent in his ideals surrounding separatism as a liberational path for Black people. This researcher, however, is left wondering how emigration as an

economic procedure to elevate Black people, a mode of separatism in response to the insolubility of the Black body in American society, voluntary though it may be, is as separatist in its theoretics of Western polity as it is in its physicality of procedures.

In the preceding section, we observed how Frazier articulated modalities of assimilationism while simultaneously advancing exceptionalist theodicy, thereby pathologising both Black and white cultures within a single analytic frame. This dual capacity, to employ theodicean rhetoric while remaining tethered to the false dichotomy of exceptionalism and assimilationism, without engaging liberationism as an alternative paradigm, renders the Black experience complicit through its contiguity with whiteness. Such a posture reflects a profound failure of imagination: exceptionalism and assimilation, as dialectical constructs, possess the potential to critique 'universal domination' only insofar as domination is distributed across imperial formations, including Black African empires.

The problematic here is evident. If empire under capitalism generated the conditions for Euro-American slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, then to invoke African ancestry as a basis for replicating regimes of harm in pursuit of redemption is tantamount to a spiritual blight – counterintuitive and counterproductive to dismantling structures of domination. This logic mirrors the tragic resignation of Magdalena Beulah Brockden in Moravian Bethlehem, who submitted to enslavement by white colonists while castigating her own Blackness for its supposed wretchedness.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the emergence of a false dichotomy between exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, demonstrating how both were complicit in the logics of capitalist imperialism. Black cultural philosophers of the era – rather than articulating a third liberationist alternative – remained bound to frameworks that mirrored the imperial grammars they sought to escape. To illuminate this dynamic, we considered a biblical analogue: the Mosaic narrative of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. In this rendering, an internally colonised people, the Israelites, are liberated from Pharaoh's bondage through divine intervention, only to embark on a protracted journey toward a promised land – a land already inhabited. The conquest of Canaan, commanded by God and executed under Joshua, underscores the imperialist logic embedded in the very structure of this narrative: liberation is imagined as territorial acquisition, necessitating displacement and domination.

This analogy clarifies the homology between Israel's quest for Canaan and nineteenth-century Black emigrationist nationalism. Both construe freedom as inseparable from possession of land, and both presuppose the erasure of prior inhabitants. Such a teleology of destiny and destination compromises the radical potential of exceptionalist Black theodicy, revealing its entanglement with the same colonial and expansionist imperatives that undergirded the American Enlightenment. In short, the pursuit of liberation through emigration, far from

rupturing imperial logic, reproduces it – rendering the project less a critique of empire than a reiteration of its constitutive practices.

In sum, although I did not intend to present a totalising vision of their oeuvre, the exceptionalist theodicies advanced by Garnet, Turner and Delany, though historically significant for Black uplift, remain tethered to imperial grammars and assimilationist imperatives. Their projects, framed as emancipatory, ultimately reinscribe the liberal logic of overcoming through property, mission and colonial voluntarism. This genealogy, when read alongside Emerson's American theodicy that we briefly discussed in Chapter 1 and its Ireneausian substratum, reveals a persistent conflation of human suffering with undue suffering, a conflation that underwrites anthropodicy's celebration of pain as pedagogical. Recall, in Chapter 1, we showed that Emerson's theodical view was that 'the basic nature of things, the fundamental way the world is, is congenial to and supportive of the moral aims and progress of the chosen or exceptional people, i.e., Americans.' Such exceptionalist frameworks, whether in Emersonian optimism or anthropocenic universalism, obscure the actuarial realities of racialised harm and the contingent benefits that sustain racisms across generations.

Against these sanguine hermeneutics, liberation theodicy proposes a materialist and dispassionate account of evil – an actuarial calculus attentive to the uneven, embodied toll of racisms rather than to abstract moral or logical schemas. By shifting from universalist explanations of suffering to contingent analyses of structural violence, liberation theodicy resists the teleology of

progress and the metaphysics of exceptionalism. It thereby offers a critical methodology for naming and enumerating the variegated predicates of racial domination, situating Black suffering not as a necessary stage in human perfectibility but as a historically specific and unjustifiable cost within the global order. This move from moralism to materialism, from rationalist consolation to actuarial critique, marks a decisive rupture with theodicies of empire and opens the conceptual space for a genuinely liberatory praxis.

Therefore, the following chapter traces a regressive trajectory within Black philosophy – a throughline extending from Alexander Crummell in 1885 to Thomas Sowell in 2005. I argue that Sowell's thesis in *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (2005), situated within right-wing libertarian and Black conservative thought, exemplifies a traditional theodicy. By this, I mean a framework that interprets suffering as the consequence of misdeeds (as in Untea), the failure to actualise latent potential (as in Garnet, Turner, Delany, Frazier, Emerson and Irenaeus), or exclusion from a hedge of divine protection (as in the Book of Job). Sowell's account operates as a philosophy of religion in secular guise, deploying the epistemics of sociological and cultural assimilationism as a response to white supremacy. In doing so, it perpetuates the logic of exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicies rather than advancing a liberationist alternative.

¹ Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 53.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 56.

⁴ Ibid, 58.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 60–1.

¹⁴ On the concept of *Herrenvolk*, Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983), in contrast to Cornel West's scientific understanding of the history of anti-Black racism contingent upon nation and culture, writes of an economic understanding of the history of anti-Black racism contingent upon nation and culture, first of Europeans themselves. Robinson explains that European nationalism appeared in the nineteenth century and that, with the emergence of nationalism, which 'was again neither accidental nor unrelated to the character of European capitalism had assumed historically', that '[r]ace became largely the rationalization for domination, exploitation, and/or extermination of non-"Europeans" (including Slavs and Jews)' (Robinson 1983, 27).

¹⁵ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 1988), 393.

¹⁶ A prominent American iteration of European Enlightenment Age ethnology that helped to spur the exceptionalist tradition in Black thought is found in the writings of Thomas Jefferson, founding father, third president of the United States and enslaver: 'Comparing them by their faculties of

memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior...and that in imagination they are dull tasteless and anomalous...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' (West 1982, 62).

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Auckland: Floating Press, 2009), 259.

¹⁸ West, 61.

¹⁹ Patrick Rael, 'Black Theodicy: African Americans and Nationalism in the Antebellum North', *The North Star: A Journal of African American Religious History* 3, no. 2 (2000): 4–5.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 3–4.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² *Ibid*, 13.

²³ *Ibid*.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 14.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁹ West, 77.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 78.

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² *Ibid*, 79.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ *Ibid*.

³⁵ *Ibid*.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 78.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 79.

³⁸ In the 'Notes' section of *Prophesy*, West (1982) makes the following statement about the evolution of Frazier's thought: 'In later life, like most active minds, Frazier makes claims

inconsistent with his earlier views and engages in a fruitful exercise of self-criticism. Based on his earlier perspective, it is not surprising the black middle class dangles in a world of make-believe since white society excludes them and they abhor their own culture; Afro-American intellectuals also would be hard put to project positive self-images if Afro-American culture is what the early Frazier suggests it is. For Frazier's later essay on African American intellectuals, see 'The Failure of the Negro Intellectual', *Negro Digest*, February 1962 (164).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ E. Franklin Frazier, 'Racial Self-Expression' (1927) in *Ebony and Topaz: A Collectanea*, by Charles S. Johnson (New York: Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life), 119.

⁴² Ibid, 120.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 121.

⁴⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, 'The Pathology of Race Prejudice', *The Forum* LXXVII, no. 6 (1927).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ James Arthur Holmes, *Black Nationalism and Theodicy: A Comparison of the Thought of Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner* (Boston: Boston University, 1997), 48.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, 47–8.

⁵³ Ibid, 130.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 132.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 124.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 122.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 115.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 116.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 118.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 117.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 118.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 119.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 105.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 94.

⁷¹ Ibid, 128.

⁷² Ibid, 180.

⁷³ Ibid, 172.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 173.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 173, 175, 176.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 205.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 207, 260.

⁸¹ William V. Spanos, *End of Education: Toward Posthumanism (Pedagogy and Cultural Practice)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 21.

⁸² Ibid, 7.

⁸³ Holmes, 206.

⁸⁴ Henry McNeal Turner, "God Is a Negro" (1898),

<https://sites.miamioh.edu/empire/files/2025/05/1898-Turner-God-Is-a-Negro.pdf>

⁸⁵ Cone would call Christ Black in *Black Theology and Black Power*, originally published in 1969.

⁸⁶ James Hal Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 114.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 207.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 208.

⁸⁹ Howard A. Bell, 'The Negro Emigration Movement, 1849–1854: A Phase of Negro Nationalism', *Phylon Quarterly* 20, no. 2, 2nd qtr (1959): 140.

⁹⁰ Holmes, 71.

⁹¹ *Ibid*.

⁹² *Ibid*.

⁹³ *Ibid*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 72.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 73.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 77.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 73.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 75.

¹⁰² *Ibid*.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 63.

¹⁰⁴ Bell, 132.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 134.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁰ Holmes, 15.

¹¹¹ Robert M. Kahn (1984) notes that Sterling Stuckey 'balances' an interpretation of Delany's thought 'by pointing to (a) the impurity of Delany's brand of [B]lack nationalism, and (b) the clear historical evidence that [B]lack nationalism predates the appearance' before the Black theodist (439).

¹¹² Bell, 134.

¹¹³ Ibid, 141.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Holmes, 74.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 75.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 76.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Robert M. Kahn, 'The Political Ideology of Martin Delany', *Journal of Black Studies* 14, no. 4 (1984): 420.

¹²² Ibid, 418.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 419.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 422.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 435.

**CHAPTER 3: 1885 to 2025, Alexander Crummell to John McWhorter,
Thomas Sowell and Coleman Hughes: Retrogressive Black American
Theodicy, a Dialecticism of Exceptionalism and Assimilationism**

3.1. Introduction

Cornel West, in *Prophesy*, contends that the tradition of Black exceptionalism did not assume its most robust form until the emergence of a secular Afro-American intelligentsia. He observes: ‘Aside from occasional remarks by Alexander Crummell and Edward Blyden regarding missionary emigrationism, the early religious Afro-American intelligentsia refused to engage in any talk about Afro-American inferiority, primarily because they headed institutions (churches) around which Afro-American culture evolved.’¹ This chapter presses that claim. Specifically, I challenge the assumption that, apart from Crummell’s sporadic reflections on emigrationism, nineteenth-century Black thinkers refrained from constructing theodicies that presupposed or rationalised Black social and cultural inferiority.

To advance this argument, I begin with Alexander Crummell’s 1885 address, ‘The Need of New Ideas and New Aims for a New Era’. Delivered near the end of his life, this speech castigates Black men for aspiring to positions of formal state authority, insisting that their recent emancipation renders such ambitions presumptuous. This text exemplifies a disciplinary logic that frames political aspiration as premature and morally suspect – a logic deeply entangled with assimilationist imperatives. Building on the previous chapter’s claim that

nineteenth-century exceptionalism, often celebrated as a radical Black philosophy, was saturated with assimilationist dogma, I argue that this ideological formation persists into the twenty-first century. Contrary to Rael's assertion that assimilation was absent from the conceptual horizon of Enlightenment-era Black theodicians because they were already thoroughly integrated into the American imperial project, I demonstrate that the exceptionalist theodicy inaugurated in the nineteenth century endures in contemporary Black conservative discourse.

Accordingly, I read Crummell's speech alongside three canonical texts of modern Black conservatism: John McWhorter's *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (2000), Thomas Sowell's *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (2005) and Coleman Hughes's *The End of Race Politics: Arguments for a Colorblind America* (2024). I contend that these works exemplify a contemporary assimilationist theodicy – one that sacralises Western civilisational norms, legitimates imperial and colonial frameworks and construes racial suffering as a moral failure rather than a structural condition. In exposing the continuities between Crummell's late-nineteenth-century discourse and the ideological commitments of twenty-first-century Black conservatism, this chapter reveals the conceptual impoverishment of theodicies tethered to empire and illuminates the retrogressive trajectory of Black (neo)conservative thought.

3.2. Alexander Crummell and the Limits of Exceptionalism: The Rationalist Pechant for Misremembering History

West is right about Crummell's exceptionalist strand of American Enlightenment theodicy. I argue, however, that this exceptionalism was mainly in Crummell's

early career as an abolitionist. Toward the second half of his life, his exceptionalism began to inform/betray an assimilationist dogma. Alexander Crummell was born in 1819 in the City of New York to free parents, where he ‘enjoyed a secure, comfortable life’,² ‘received a good elementary, high school, and college education’,³ and ‘at Queen’s College in England...received the call to the Episcopal priesthood’.⁴ Crummell’s father was born in Africa, ‘[claiming] descent from the Timanee of West Africa’, being stolen from the continent when he was ‘between twelve and thirteen years old, between 1780 and 1781’. Boston Crummell, Alexander’s father, was never legally emancipated, rather he simply ‘announced his liberation to his owner, Peter Schermerhorn of New York City, and left to begin a free life in another section of town’. At this account, Crummell ‘took delight in being known as the “boy whose father could not be a slave”’. For Crummell the Younger, slavery too was anathema and opprobrious, and his hatred of the institution informed his theodicy.

Though early on in his public career ‘Crummell vacillated between support and opposition for his idea of colonization’,⁵ by 1840 ‘he opposed a resolution condemning the idea of emigration to Africa’,⁶ and ‘[b]y 1844 he had become a vigorous opponent of colonization efforts, arguing that Blacks in the United States had been brought [to the United States] by God, with the result that they had become “citizens of this land, integral portions of this republic”,⁷ an articulation of the ‘unfortunate fall thesis’ from our discussion in Chapter 2. However, by 1853, ‘Crummell made a significant shift in support of the [American Colonization] Society’,⁸ ‘[choosing] not to return to the United States but to

emigrate to Liberia under the auspices of the Society'.⁹ Crummell's wrestling with theodicies of nationalism and emigrationism further reveals the unity between these concepts that we discussed in our earlier chapter, and it demonstrates his commitment to the liberation of Black people, even though through misguided exceptionalist and imperialistic means. This is Crummell's mission in the 1840s/1850s. By the 1880s, however, he displays a convergence of exceptionalism and assimilationism through a discourse of the faculty of recollection in Black American phenomenology.

According to Holmes, Crummell's theodicy was coloured by his belief that 'God allowed African-American enslavement because of sins committed by prior African generations'.¹⁰ Holmes writes:

Crummell reasoned that God allowed African-American enslavement because of the sins committed by prior African generations. While fully aware of the person of God, God's jealous nature, and what God required, African foreparents, nevertheless, refused to worship and obey God. They went so far as to reject God completely and to push the knowledge of God further away with every succeeding generation. Because of their gross disloyalties, God withdrew God's support.¹¹

Recounting how Crummell said in a sermon that the ancestors of Black people 'wandered off further and further from the true God, and kept heaping abominations through long centuries, until the Divine patience was exhausted, and God withdrew from sires and their habitations, and extinguished "the

forbearance and long-suffering” of which is the direst wrath’,¹² Holmes suggests that Crummell’s theodicy be called the Providence and Divine Retribution-Restoration theodicy, and that its formulation has ‘immediate and obvious problems’.¹³ That Crummell would claim that ‘the Christian God is the true God and one that was rejected by West Africans during the slave-trade’,¹⁴ and that ‘God willed the slave-system’,¹⁵ thereby functionally ‘[absolving] [w]hites from their responsibility for slavery’,¹⁶ represents a Crummell whose early assimilationism West underestimates. To Crummell, God allowed Africans to be enslaved so that through the providence of Western civilisation they might be redeemed. Additionally, when one considers how the Cambridge-educated Crummell, who originated Du Bois’s ‘talented tenth’ ethos, ‘believed the gift of the English language providential’,¹⁷ his Joban-assimilationist, limited Mosaic-exceptionalist theodicy becomes clearer. Crummell writes:

...among the other providential events, the fact that the exile of our parents [sic] from their African homes to America had given us, their children, at least this one item of compensation, namely the possession of the Anglo Saxon tongue...and that it was impossible to estimate too highly the prerogatives and the elevation the Almighty has bestowed upon us in our having our own the speech of Chaucer and Shakespeare.¹⁸

Holmes reports that ‘Crummell found the native African languages “harsh, abrupt, energetic, indistinct in enunciation, meager in point of words, abounding with inarticulate nasal and guttural sounds, and passing but a few inflections and

grammatical forms”¹⁹. Thus, his epistemology is a palliative of ghetto Black culture, seeking a wholesale end to what is ultimately a culture of poor people. This is a similar view that Crummell held about Africa, where, two thousand years after Christ, ‘hundreds of millions of her souls [were] still heathen!’²⁰

Like Turner in his time, Crummell saw Black Africans as backward, needing to be saved and sanctified through a missionising emigrationism as Black nationalism. Thus, his theodicy was about self-love towards an ennoblement comparable to white European and American culture, and it was a theodicy about evangelism, one that saw Western Christianity as a salvific technology of redeeming what Sowell would later call ‘lagging cultures’. Both Crummell and Thomas Sowell, as we shall see later, would deem there to be a superior group of people who would help to elevate an inferior group. For Sowell this was done through war, or the threat of war. To Crummell, this process was purely religious, with him reasoning that ‘[i]n every instance that we know of where [people] have been morally elevated, they have always had the missions from superior people of either letters or grace as the origination of such elevation’.²¹ Crummell’s vision for Black Americans is that they would be the Black masks for the white Western procedure of civilising Africa. Crummell posited:

Black Christian emigrants...are indigenous, in blood, constitution, and adaptability. Two centuries of absence from the continent Africa have not destroyed their physical adaptation to the land of their ancestors. There is a tropical fitness which inheres in our

constitution, whereby we are enabled, when we leave this country, to sit down under an African sun; and soon, and with comparative ease, feel ourselves at home, and move about in the land as though we had always lived there. Children, too, are born to us in our adopted country, who have as much strength and vitality as native children; and soon we find ourselves establishing families right beside those of our heathen kinsfolk.²²

According to Holmes, in this same speech whence this text is excerpted, 'The Regeneration of Africa', 'delivered before the Pennsylvania Colonization Society in 1865, Crummell set forth the basic plan for his Liberian Evangelical Campaign',²³ which would be inspired by European Christian missions of the middle of the fifteenth century,²⁴ the beginning of modernity, racial capitalism and Western civilisation.

Herein lies the throughline from Crummell's limited exceptionalism to his assimilationism, pronounced differently as a rationalism in his later years, by way of a dearth of the recollection (memory) that he propounded. In that the bedrock of conservatism is often defined as a preservation of traditions and values, it becomes clear that if not for the issue of chattel slavery, epistemologically, Crummell would be considered a Black conservative of the twenty-first century, his moral distaste for the continuation of the wretched institution being overwhelming. In 1860, Crummell sought to valorise the English language as a bulwark of Western civilisation; in 1885, his love for Western civilisation is articulated through his pathologisation of Black (Southern) people and culture.

3.3. Alexander Crummell: An Archetypal Assimilationist Theodicist and Black Conservative

This love of Western civilisation may have arisen with Crummell's 'contact with upper-class [w]hites [in the American Anti-Slavery Society's New York office] [who] would lead him to identify with the upper classes and to adopt elitist attitudes such as law, order, and tradition'.²⁵ It was a love that was only rivalled by his love for Black people, a love that caused him to question the *Agape* doctrine of Christianity, that is, unconditional love for all people. Indeed, Crummell 'proposed self-love as a Christian principle that the oppressed Black race was to espouse if it were to cast off oppression and rise to equality with the [w]hite nations of the world'.²⁶ It is here that Crummell's theodicy of emigrationism, similar to his good friend Garnet's, can be seen as an extension of his view of God's will, an activist theodicy that would elevate his race as a natural historical event through a self-love that 'creates a thirst for wealth, position, honor, and power'.²⁷ Like the other prominent Black theodicists of the nineteenth century, cultural philosophers all, Crummell, though abolitionary, wanted a parity with whiteness, affirming the indispensability of Western civilisation. Indeed, Crummell's 'idea of African-American Uplift "was based upon the assumption that by the acquisition of wealth and morality attained largely by their own efforts Negroes would gain the respect of [w]hite men [and women] and thus be accorded their rights as citizens"'.²⁸

To be able to 'march on in the pathway of progress to that superiority and eminence'²⁹ which, according to Crummell, was Black people's 'rightful heritage,

and which [was] evidently the promise of [their] God',³⁰ Black people needed to assimilate to the social, cultural and economic values of Western Civilisation. According to Crummell in his 1877 address 'The Destined Superiority of the Negro', even as he is announcing the beatification of the internalised Black American nation, he suggests that the anticipated social and civilisational elevation of Black people requires the adoption of imitation as a central operative principle. Quoting Edmund Burke, Crummell recounts how 'imitation is the second passion belonging to society; and this passion...arises from much the same cause as sympathy'.³¹ For Crummell, imitation as a modality of assimilation 'forms our manners, our opinions, our lives [and is] one of the strongest links of society'.³² He writes: 'Indeed, all civilization is carried down from generation to generation, or handed over from the superior to the inferior, by the means of this principle. A people devoid of imitation are incapable of improvement, and must go down; for stagnation of necessity brings with it decay and ruin'.³³ Crummell observed the need for the sociologically inferior [Black] race to imitate the sociologically superior [white] race, and that the Black man should, 'by a strong assimilative tendency, ...[reduplicate] himself, by attaining both the likeness of and an affinity to the race with which he dwells; and then, while retaining his characteristic peculiarities, [glide] more or less into the traits of his neighbors... [such as] among Americans, [like] the keen, enterprising American'.³⁴

Moreover, Crummell's affinity for the values and virtues of Western civilisation was often articulated in his concept of recollection, i.e. remembrance, which he espoused in his 1885 speech, 'The Need of New Ideas and New Aims

for a New Era'. In this oracular moment, at an address given to the graduating class of Storer College in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, Crummell, a leader of the Black American Enlightenment in the middle to late nineteenth-century America and a member of the rising Afro-American petite bourgeoisie from the second half of the nineteenth century, offers a dialectic of the function of memory for a socially and economically downtrodden people. Here, he speaks of the specific experience of the formerly enslaved Africans in America, what he views as a cultural penchant within their ranks to focus on their past as enslaved people, to 'dwell morbidly and absorbingly on the servile past'³⁵ as an unhealthy function of memory. In this regard, the dialectics he discloses concern a distinction between memory and recollection.

Though seemingly synonymous, for Crummell these cognitive phenomena are twain, one (memory) the 'necessary and unavoidable entrance, storage and recurrence of facts and ideas to the understanding and the consciousness',³⁶ the other (recollection) the 'actual seeking of facts...the painstaking endeavor of the mind to bring them back again to consciousness'.³⁷ For Crummell – unlike pure memory – recollection, for the formerly enslaved, functioned to keep them as an oppressed group locked into their benighted past:

For 200 years the misfortune of the [B]lack race has been the confinement of its mind in the pent-up prison of human bondage.

The morbid, absorbing and abiding recollection of that condition – what is it but the continuance of that same condition, in memory and dark imagination? Dwell upon, reproduce, hold on to it with all

its incidents, make its history the sum and acme of thought, and then, of a surety, you put up a bar to progress, and eventually produce that unique and fossilated state which is called 'arrested development'. For it is impossible for a people to progress in the conditions of civilization whose thought and interest are swallowed up in morbid memories, or narrowed to the groove of a single idea or purpose.³⁸

Crummell, in the order of David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, delved into what Victor Anderson refers to in *Beyond Ontological Blackness* (1995) as racial apologetics, that is, the infusing of cultural philosophy of the day with a sense of pride and self-worth, no matter how ontologically and methodologically reductive and ethnological the core tenets of their moralism and rationalism were. Anderson writes:

Categorical racism and white racial ideology occasioned the preoccupation of African American cultural philosophy with racial apologetics. In their attempts to reassure the dignity, respect, and humanity of African peoples, African American cultural philosophers put forward a counter-discourse to white racial ideology. Their discourse exhibits common features: (1) it rejected categorical racism and white racial ideology's negative projections of [B]lacks; (2) it explained historically – not categorically – the moral failures associated with [B]lacks; (3) it positively regarded [B]lacks' racial

identity as commensurable with civic republican humanism; and (4) it advanced the groups' racial uplift as expressive of [B]lack cultural genius and civilization. If categorical racism justified white racial ideology, then [B]lack racial apologetics justified ontological [B]lackness in African American cultural philosophy.³⁹

Consequently, Crummell underestimated the tendency of Black people to remember the pangs of their enslavement because he associated *that* remembrance with *them* being associative of the lowest rung of the socioeconomic and political universe. Indeed, to Crummell, while white labourers post Emancipation maintained an 'immense system of labor, with all its intelligence and its safeguards',⁴⁰ Black labourers at the same time possessed 'sad conditions'⁴¹ with 'disorganized and rude characteristics',⁴² having an 'almost servile status'⁴³ with 'insecure and defenseless abjectness'.⁴⁴

While Crummell, writing in 1885, asserted that Black labourers in the post-slavery era were 'of necessity, crude, unskilled, and disorganised',⁴⁵ Booker T. Washington offered a markedly different perspective in 1901. Unlike Crummell, Washington was born into slavery and matured during Reconstruction in what became West Virginia after 1863. Washington emphasised the transformative potential of vocational education, citing the achievements of a Tuskegee Institute graduate who earned the admiration of local white farmers 'because he, by his skill and knowledge had added something to the wealth and comfort of the

community'.⁴⁶ Washington illustrated this point with a striking example: the graduated produced 266 bushels of sweet potatoes from a single acre of land in a region where the average yield had been only forty-nine bushels per acre.⁴⁷ This anecdote underscores Washington's belief that practical training and agricultural innovation could serve as a foundation for racial progress and economic integration in the post-emancipation South.

Additionally, Washington maintains that he knew of 'Negroes tenderly caring for their former masters and mistresses who for some reason [had] become poor and dependent since the war',⁴⁸ that there were 'former masters of slaves [who] for years [had] been supplied with money by their former slaves to keep them from suffering', and that there were 'former slaves that [had] assisted in the education of the descendants of their former owners'.⁴⁹ He writes:

I know of a case on a large plantation in the South in which a young white man, the son of the former owner of the estate, has become so reduced in purse and self-control by reason of drink that he is a pitiable creature; and yet, notwithstanding the poverty of the coloured people themselves on this plantation, they have for years supplied this young white man with the necessities of life. One sends him a little coffee or sugar, another a little meat, and so on. Nothing that the coloured people possess is too good for the son of 'old Mars' Tom', who will perhaps never be permitted to suffer while

any remain on the place who knew directly or indirectly of 'old Mars' Tom'.⁵⁰

Further, Crummell's claim that Black people post Emancipation should be '[reminded] that no new people leap suddenly and spontaneously into Senatorial chairs or Cabinet positions',⁵¹ that '[s]o narrow have been the limitations of our culture, so brief, too, the period of our opportunity, that it is impossible, if even we had the highest genius, that we should mount the high rounds of the ladder of judicial and statesmanlike capacity'⁵² is as ahistorical as it is false, and lacks proper recollection. In the Compromise of 1877, legislated into effect following the 1876 presidential election of Rutherford B. Hayes over Samuel J. Tilden, Southern aggressionists threatened violence if the federally enforced Reconstruction (1865–1877) was not ended.

Reconstruction was the successful but extrajudicially overthrown governmentally abetted social and political movement to enfranchise and promote newly freed and newly made Black men into positions of posture and influence in local, state and federal government, where more than 1,500 Black officeholders served in the United States government in varying capacities. These governmental officers ranged from John Hyman, the first African American to represent North Carolina in Congress in 1875, to P. B. S. Pinchback, the first (and most recent) Black man to serve as Governor of Louisiana, starting his term in 1872. By May of 1885, when Crummell gives this speech, the sole reason for Black people not holding

office in government was not due to their 'divorc[ing] themselves from large ideas and noble convictions',⁵³ it was that anti-Black white racists in and out of government threatened violence if the newly elected Hayes did not remove federal troops (who promised that if elected he would) who were needed to keep at bay the traitorous Redemption of their white supremacist ideology and culture during the appointment of Black men to their governmental offices throughout the South.

Of this history, Du Bois, Crummell's mentee, would write the following in 1935, in his major work *Black Reconstruction in America*:

Negroes did not surrender the ballot easily or immediately. They continued to hold remnants of political power in South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, in parts of North Carolina, Texas, Tennessee and Virginia. Black Congressmen came out of the South until 1895 and Black legislators served as late as 1896. But in a losing battle with public opinion, industry and wealth against them...the decisive influence was the systematic and overwhelming economic pressure. Negroes who wanted work must not dabble in politics...From 1880 onward, in order to earn a living, the American Negro was compelled to give up his political power.⁵⁴

Consequently, what if Crummell was wrong in his assessment of Black people practising recollection as a site and source of what he called 'arrested development' for them? What if his reading of history, a history that he indeed lived through during Reconstruction like Sowell living through Jim Crow, is

classless and rationalist (immaterialist) and thus incapable of empiricism? As Holmes notes: 'Crummell followed the Platonic school of thought that placed the priority on ideas rather than materialism'.⁵⁵ What else could account for his neglecting the clear historical data around Black political figures during Reconstruction being displaced? I argue that Crummell's exceptionalism is antiphonal of the strong (ontological) assimilationism of Magdalena Beulah Brockden's proto-Black theodicy in its rationalism/spiritualism/idealism, and that it is thus dialectical, that is, foundational as a nineteenth-century American Enlightenment theodicy, to a weak (sociological) assimilationist theodicy that is, in many ways, a progenitor to the Black conservative assimilationist theodicy of the twenty-first century. When Alexander Crummell, in his 1895 address 'Civilization as a Collateral and Indispensable Instrumentality in Planting Christian Churches in Africa', delivered near the end of his life, asserts the necessity – under the aegis of Western Christianization – for Black people to achieve 'clarity of mind from the dominion of false heathen ideas',⁵⁶ and calls instead for 'the conscious impress of individualism and personal responsibility',⁵⁷ he elevates these qualities above all other virtues. This formulation emerges even as African Americans endure the brutal onset of Jim Crow. In doing so, Crummell articulates an architectonic principle that establishes continuity between Beulah Brockden's strong assimilationist ethos in the preceding century and the strain of Black conservative thought characterised by weak assimilationism that would develop in the decades and centuries following Crummell's death in 1898.

3.4. Thomas Sowell, John McWhorter and Coleman Hughes: Black Conservative Theodicy and the Problems of Assimilation

Black conservative debates of the twenty-first century involve pathologising Black people as a mode of assimilationist theodicy along lines of sociology and economics. According to Black conservatives, Black people who suffer undue sufferings in Western civilisation have brought such sufferings onto themselves for failing to fully culturally integrate themselves into white American society. In the following section will lift up the three most prominent concepts from three of the most ardent and outspoken Black conservatives of the twenty-first century, as theorised in their major works of literature. I will examine these concepts about Black people, Black culture and race as they appear in these texts in the following order: first, I analyse the concept of 'Victimology' as proposed in *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (2000) by John McWhorter (b.1965); second, I examine the concept of 'neoracism' as propounded in *The End of Race Politics: Arguments for a Colorblind America* (2024) by Coleman Hughes (b.1996); and lastly, because he is the elder statesman of the group, whose major work represents the culmination of many decades of social and cultural theorisation, I spend the largest part of this section exegeting the concept of the 'Black redneck' and its varied implications in *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (2005) by Thomas Sowell (b.1930).

I will take a materialist approach to uncovering what I argue are rationalist (spiritualist/immaterialist/intuitionist) approaches to historical data by these three Black conservative scholars, thus insufficient for reading history aright and

understanding how it inheres on the present moment. For McWhorter, I engage his rationalism *vis-à-vis* his concept of 'Victimology' with a materialist analysis of the nature of dissent promulgated by C. L. R. James in *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* and Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*; for Hughes, I engage his rationalism via his concept of neoracism by reviewing the donnybrook over definitions of race and racism between Huey P. Newton and Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) in the mid-twentieth century and examine racism as a practice of illogic via Marxian sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, through an analysis of the economy/ecology of whiteness; lastly, for Sowell, I engage his rationalism by way of his concept of the 'Black redneck' through brief analyses of excerpts from Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and Carter G. Woodson in *A Century of Negro Migration*, comparing his assimilationist rhetorics to the theodicy of Job, consummating his thought as a lynchpin of sorts of Black intellectual conservatism no different than nineteenth-century Black assimilationist theodicy, the kind found in the thought of Alexander Crummell.

3.4a. Edmund Burke and the Mythos of Conservatism: How Nineteenth-Century Black American Radicalism and Twenty-First-Century Black Conservatism Have a Similar Ethos

Thus far, we have suggested that, if not for the issue of chattel slavery, the most prominent Black radical thinkers, the nineteenth-century American Enlightenment, the theodacists of the churchied intelligentsia, would have been classical conservatives. Briefly, I want to explain further how we come to this

conclusion, citing the debates around the thought of the Father of Conservatism, Edmund Burke. Burke (1729–1797) was a political philosopher not appreciated in his time. If Barthes was right and the life of the text begins after the author dies, then no truer was this statement that where it can be applied to the writings of Burke. Despite popular realisms of conservatism as a political orientation as ancient, ineluctable and innate, as a philosophy, it really did not begin to take shape until the period between 1885 and 1914, many decades after Burke's death.

With the transition of government from an art of ruling grounded in traditional virtues—such as wisdom, justice, liberality, and respect for divine laws and human customs—or in common abilities, including prudence, sound judgment, and the careful selection of competent advisers, to an art of governing whose rationality is defined by its own principles and its specific domain of application to the state, there emerged what came to be known as *reason of state*. This concept constituted 'the new matrix of rationality according to which the prince must exercise his sovereignty in governing men'.⁵⁸ The transition from 'art of governing' to 'sense of state' concretised in the dual developments of the rise of the middle class in 1649 and the execution of Charles I of England, effectively ending the absolute monarchy, and the rise of William of Orange to the Throne of England in 1688 with the Glorious Revolution, and the empowerment of parliament following the signing of the English Bill of Rights in 1689. This process of developing Western governmentality peaked during the Age of Enlightenment in Europe, which ended with the storming of the Bastille on 14

July 1789, routing feudalism as an economic system, giving rise to industrial capital, and its name is Liberalism. Following the treaties of Westphalia of 1648, following the Thirty Years' War, these treaties representing a 'search for European equilibrium',⁵⁹ and under the guise of the Enlightenment, liberalism took the following doctrinal formulation: 'The question of liberalism, understood as a question of "too much government", was one of the constant dimensions of that recent European phenomenon, having appeared first in England, it seems – namely, "political life"'.⁶⁰

By the end of the nineteenth century, 'modern ideologies of "C/conservatism" and "L/liberalism" were routinely traced back to the French Revolution',⁶¹ with liberalism being an umbrella term for political criticism 'of a previous governmentality that one tries to shed',⁶² 'of a current governmentality that one attempts to reform and rationalize by stripping it down',⁶³ 'of a governmentality that one opposes and whose abuses one tries to limit'.⁶⁴ Conservatism arose under the aegis of Liberalism. However, it arose out of the Leftist faction of liberalism, namely the Whig Party, of which Burke was a member. The Whigs were an anti-monarchical political party in support of a strong parliament, that very parliament that routed the absolute monarchy in England by the end of the seventeenth century. Liberals promoted 'progress, enthusiasm, and freedom of individuality',⁶⁵ and Burke would add the importance of 'the authority of tradition'⁶⁶ to that melange of political traits. This aspect of Burke's originary vision of conservatism, which he articulated late in his life in his

Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), engendered epistemic space for the blurring of Whig liberalism and Tory conservatism in British partisan politics.

The 'essence' of Burke's thought became a subject of heated debate, and it gradually but decisively became associated with the Liberal Unionists, who resurrected an anti-Jacobin vocabulary and styled themselves as Old Whigs defending the constitution. By 1893, their Conservative allies were significantly more comfortable quoting speeches which until recently had been Gladstonian territory. But this process was not merely governed by high politics: the general intellectual climate, as Morley had foreseen, was ripe for a re-interpretation of Burke's oeuvre which stressed the organic, historical, and developmental nature of his thought.⁶⁷

At the end of the nineteenth century, 'almost all of the constructions of C/conservatism'⁶⁸ were seen as having have emerged with 'the birth of modern political parties and ideas...from 1789',⁶⁹ from the French Revolution. 'This effectively recast nineteenth-century political thought as being formulated around responses to abstract "principles of 1789" (liberty, equality, fraternity – the "three-fanged serpent"), instead of the direct appeals to an indigenous English constitutional agenda which characterize so much of the nineteenth-century political debate',⁷⁰ resulting in a nebulous origin story of conservatism as a modern political philosophy. In her paper 'Conservatism, Edmund Burke, and the Invention of a Political Tradition, c.1885–1914' (2015), Emily Jones describes this process as 'the importance of the French Revolution in ideological and party

terms [being] stressed [with] Burke's Whiggishness [being] turned into "conservatism",⁷¹ that is, 'conservatism' conceptually, 'and thence Conservatism',⁷² that is, 'Conservatism' institutionally.

The fierce debate over Burke's vision of conservatism continued from 1885 and into 1897, one hundred years after Burke died. This debate continued in parliament, with 'Burke's essential consistency of principles...acknowledged equally by the Liberals Graham, Keynes, and MacCunn, and his Conservative appropriators',⁷³ and emphasised 'that Whigs and Tories, though different parties, valued similar traits of a more longstanding "Conservatism" of order, law, and tradition'.⁷⁴ These two political factions, liberals and conservatives, two sides of the same coin, agreed that 'the intellectual and political traditions of an organic historicist "C/conservatism" had come into being in 1790 with the publication of Burke's *Reflections*',⁷⁵ and differentiated 'between the tenets of the Conservative party and the "natural conservatism" which is a disposition of the human mind'.⁷⁶

The latter was especially true in the mind of Lord Hugh Cecil, a member of the House of Lords and a Tory, who, along with F. E. Smith and his text *Toryism* (1903), and Geoffrey Butler and his book *The Tory Tradition* (1914), concretised Burke as the cornerstone of conservative politics entering the twentieth century. In his text *Conservatism* (1912), Cecil identified six themes in Burke's *Reflections*, which 'permanently underlie Conservative thought'.⁷⁷ I will list them below, and, after a brief discussion, we will move forward with our comparison of nineteenth-century Black theodicean thought with twenty-first century Black conservative thought, which I will label as an epistemic retrogression:

the importance of religion and the value of its recognition by the state; the hatred of injustice to individuals committed in the course of political and social reform; the attack on the revolutionary conception of equality which suppressed the reality and necessity of rank and distinctions; the sanctity of private property and its beneficial contribution to society; the idea that human society is an organism, of which much is mysterious; and therefore, finally, the importance of continuity with the historical past and of making any change as gradual and with as slight dislocation as possible.⁷⁸

Notice the emphasis of religiosity as a significant feature of classical modern conservatism. Also, notice that this religion feature became a reifying functionary of statecraft for conservative politics. Additionally, observe the penchant for maintaining traditionalism. The leading Black American radical theodiscists of the nineteenth century, thus, Garnet, Crummell and Turner, fit squarely into this conservative description because of their focus on religion as an organising principle for liberating their enchained people, and their upkeep of traditionalism *vis-à-vis* their extolling the virtues of Western civilisation found in the nationalistic pursuits of emigrationism and separatism to maintain a Western model of statecraft. Delany alone articulated his theodicy beyond the boundaries of conventional religious traditionalism. Nevertheless, his Methodist leanings informed both his use of biblical accounts to theorise the origins of race and his conviction that religion should guide effective social activism.

A Burkean conservatism is the essence of the intrinsic assimilationist theodicy of their extrinsic exceptionalist epistemology, and why, I argue, though earnest and necessary for their time, they were not truly liberational in their radicalism. However, though politically the Black American theodacists of the nineteenth century dealt in modes of assimilationism to Western civilisation, i.e. capitalism, colonialism and missiology, theologically, they never corroborated the visions of personhood and moralism espoused by Western Christianity as a fortifying doctrine of Western civilisation.

In the following subsections, take note of how twenty-first century Black conservatives, unaware of the historicist and liberatory origins of Burkean conservatism, echo similar mystified visions of conservative thought coloured by modes of Cecil's interpretation of conservatism, that is, 'Toryism (reverence for religion and authority)',⁷⁹ 'natural conservatism (distrust of the unknown and love of the familiar)' and 'imperialism (a feeling for the unity and greatness of Britain (read nationhood or statism))'.⁸⁰ In the next subsections, Sowell, McWhorter and Hughes, sans reverence for religion⁸¹ in favour of reverence for authority, seek to maintain the traditions of Western civilisation at the expense of Black people.⁸² As we shall see, Black conservatism possesses all the qualities of the Conservative tradition as filtered through the Tories of the British context, with the added feature of an assimilationist pathologisation of Black people. While Crummell and Turner had moments of accosting certain segments of poor and uneducated Black culture(s), neither they nor Delany nor Garnet, though intimating and imitating conservative proclivities towards statecraft through their

Africa-oriented, Western-inspired nationalisms, ever engage in the pathologisation of Black culture(s) that Black conservatives do. Theirs, that is, nineteenth-century Black radical theodiscists, is an assimilationism without integrationism. Theirs, that is, the twenty-first century Black conservatives, is a wholesale assimilationism, not only in modes and methods of governmentality but also in formulations of culture, that holds no room for separatism⁸³ or Black exceptionalism, or pluralism, cornerstones of exceptionalist nineteenth-century Black radical thought.

3.4b. John McWhorter and Victimology: The Problem of Dissent

An associate professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University, John McWhorter is a Black linguist trained at Stanford who often offers social and cultural criticism of Black America. In the year 2000, he coined the term 'Victimology', highlighting what Black conservatives see among Black Americans as a penchant for avoiding accountability for their existential plight. To build out a vision of what he calls 'the cult of Victimology', what Hughes would call '[B]lack identity becoming tied to a rehearsed sense of victimhood',⁸⁴ McWhorter begins *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* with a discussion of three quotes that he uses as his epigraphs for his opening chapter:

The fact of slavery refuses to fade, along with the deeply embedded personal attitudes and public policy assumptions that supported it for so long. Indeed, the racism that made slavery feasible is far from dead in the last decade of the twentieth-century

America; and the civil rights gains, so hard won, are being steadily eroded. – Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, 1992

Tyson is the pen now. Strange fruit hanging from a different tree. Yet the strangest of all walk among us – as long as they're free, white, male, and twenty-one. The greatest of these qualities is the freedom. I wonder how it feels? I am trapped and can only say 'Nooo' and hope my scream is loud enough to discourage the monsters and keep them back until I am strong enough, powerful enough to fight my way free. Powerful enough to slip the noose from my neck and put out the fire on my flesh.—Ralph Wiley, *What Black People Should Do Now*, 1993

What more do they want? Why in God's name won't they accept me as a full human being? Why am I pigeonholed in a black job? Why am I constantly treated as if I were a drug addict, a thief, or a thug? Why am I still not allowed to aspire to the same things every white person in America takes as a birthright? Why, when I most want to be seen, am I suddenly rendered invisible? —Ellis Cose, *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, 1993⁸⁵

In an unorthodox literary move, McWhorter uses as his datum for argumentation these epigraphic statements. He calls into question the verity of the central claims of each quote, denying that, in the twenty-first century, there are any

Black people who ‘ruefully [consider] a home, a car, or a college degree – “things every white person in America takes as a birthright”’,⁸⁶ and as being ‘all but out of right for the middle-class [B]lack people we know’.⁸⁷ To McWhorter, it does not matter if anti-Black racism is ‘completely dead’.⁸⁸ Rather, all that matters is that there has been progress in the social, economic and political lives of Black Americans. His claim is that Black people have victimised themselves, that there has been so much progress since the Civil Rights Movement that any hint of Black victimisation is a fallacy that for him is anti-democratic and anti-progressive. McWhorter writes:

Without falling for the line that racism is completely dead, we can admit that these quotes reveal a certain cognitive dissonance with reality. Yet they are anything but rare, and are one of myriad demonstrations that there is, lying at the heart of [B]lack American thought, a transformation of victimhood from a *problem to be solved* into an *identity in itself*. Because [B]lack Americans have obviously made so very much progress since the Civil Rights Act, to adopt victimhood as an identity, a [B]lack person, unlike, for example, a Hutu refugee in Central Africa, must exaggerate the extent of his victimhood. The result is a Cult of Victimology, under which remnants of discrimination hold an obsessive, indignant fascination that allows only passing acknowledgement of any signs of progress.⁸⁹

For McWhorter, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a bulwark out of which emerged untold progress for Black Americans that should precipitate in them tacit acceptance of the State as legitimate authority, an entity that has their best interests in mind. He charges, without documentation, a qualitative assessment of mass Black victimhood as though quantitative fact. The distinction between qualitative assumption and quantitative analysis is absent in McWhorter's conception of self-professed and unsubstantiated Black victimhood, or Victimology, a pathology of Black people and culture coterminous in its virology to Separatism and Anti-Intellectualism. To define Victimology, he does not point to a peer-reviewed case study, or a historiography that has been canonised in the academy. Rather he presents a trilogy of personal anecdotes, 'The Story of the Bigoted Math Professor', 'The Story of the Minstrel Smile' and, for our focus here, 'The Story of the Party Shelby Steele Is At'.

According to McWhorter, '[a]ll three of these stories spring from a conviction held by many [B]lacks that foster years after the Civil Rights Act, conditions for [B]lacks have not changed substantially enough to mention'.⁹⁰ McWhorter makes one wonder whether these anecdotes, devoid of empirical data, be they statistical or historical, represent a matter of having a victim mindset or a materialist mindset that observes available data to conceptualise regimes of harm. After all, how could raising a valid critique, by any citizen of a constitutional republic, suggest that civil rights victories had not been won? He writes: 'The signs of progress are stark, relentless, and certainly cause for celebration. In

1940, only one in one hundred [B]lack people were middle class, with “middle class” defined traditionally as earning twice the poverty rate’.⁹¹

The Victimologist response here is to question whether twice the poverty rate is truly ‘middle class’. This is not the book to dwell upon that point, but for these purposes note that twelve times that proportion of whites were middle-class by that same metric in 1940. By 1970, 39 percent of [BI] people were middle-class by this metric, while 70 percent of whites were. Today, Ralph Wiley screams ‘Nooo’, but almost half of African Americans are middle class today, having increased by 10 percent since 1970 – while the white middle class has increased by only 5 percent.⁹²

McWhorter’s thesis works against his allegories, because, conceptually, it becomes clear that the Victimologist response is merely to question the legitimacy of authority and progress. Indeed, the very act of questioning the nature of Black progress by Black people is signatory of a victim mentality, or Victimology. On the one hand, McWhorter’s fallacy reveals how deeply tied to the procedures of constitutional republicanism being Black in America is. On the other hand, in an activist sense, it demonstrates the ways in which Black people are so enmeshed in the process of advancing democracy through courageous fightback, be it in the form of armed resistance or through bourgeois politics, that the violence of fascism is revealed in the ways in which their *dissent* is silenced.

Of the process of stultifying dissent, for example, C. L. R. James, in *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (1948), sees the petit bourgeois character of the rise of the middle class in 1649 England as being the same as the petty and big bourgeoisie taking reins of power following the fall of feudalism after the French Revolution of 1789 (through to early Bonapartist (1800s) France), and views this as the same as the middle classes of 117 in Russia, and in 1933 in Germany.⁹³ There is a logic in history for James, and despite all the rich and strange episodes of historical evolution, there is a consistent line that can be followed. The middle class/bourgeois/capitalist class confederacy, which led to the end of feudalism in France, which led to the Civil War there a century later, which led to the failure of a Left Opposition in pre-Nazi Germany in the 1930s, has historically exploited the interests of working-class individuals across the world, and thus is incapable of developing a class consciousness.

Indeed, in his historical analysis James notes that the Bonapartes gave opportunities to capital and bureaucrats (petite bourgeoisie), but that 'Hitlerism did more. It proposed to give the administration of the state to the people. But being bourgeois, and with the bourgeoisie in a period of decline, the only functions it would give them were the functions of the police.'⁹⁴ What James wants is similar to what I attempt to argue, that the logic of history, that is, the dialectics of a materialist account of history as a predictive heuristic, can be redemptive towards not viewing the detritus of Black suffering as fatalistic and unending perturbation, chaotically construed, but an understandable (though unjust and undue) cyclical and prevenient materialistic reality. Therefore, be it in

the telling of Marx, James or Malcolm X, the middle class has always been at odds with working-class, ordinary people. For example, when Stalin's paranoia began to manifest, leading to the Great Purge of 1936, James notes that Zinoviev and Kamenev, leaders in the Comintern and in the Central Committee in Soviet Russia, who served alongside Stalin as part of his Troika, were accused of being Trotsky sympathisers and conspirators in the murder of Kirov, Stalin's ally (whom he secretly hated). James writes:

An Opposition Circular of December 10 warned Trotskyist groups every where to be on guard against a frame-up, and it followed within a few days Trotsky was directly accused of organising the murder, Zinoviev and Kamenev were implicated, banished, confessed to 'moral responsibility' and were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Stalin feared them as old associates of Trotsky who might form a rallying centre for the militants in the masses and dissentient elements in the party. Ultimately thousands of persons were deported from Leningrad, where Zinoviev had formerly been president of the Soviet, and people could not be bluffed with lies about Trotsky and the great part Stalin had played in October. To whoever had eyes to see it was clear that the proletariat was on the march again and that the advance-guard was pressing the regime.⁹⁵

Zinoviev, head of the Stalin-usurped Comintern until 1926, when he was removed from leadership by Stalin himself, and Kamenev, were both shot to

death in Siberia in 1936 for fear that they would dissent. To be a Trotskyist meant for the Stalinist regime to be a member of the dissentient industrialised internationalists. As a concept, dissent, taken etymologically one finds that *dis*, Latin for 'against', is set against *sentient*, Latin for 'feeling' and 'percipience'. Thus, it can be asserted that *dissentient*, the adjectival form of the noun *dissent* means to be unfeeling, not able to feel, against the feeling. Taken transliterally, not being able to feel, then, becomes a matter of not being able to sense what is common, thus lacking common sense. The sense that is common in this sense would be that sense of the state (status, static [same Latin root]). Hence, the malignancy associated for a lack of common sense can conceptually be resolved in the fact of statecraft being set against change and dynamism. Thus, a lack of common sense should be advocated for as a normal and normative functioning of a healthy society. The reactionary and jingoistic desire silence. That is how repression functions. This was Lukács's analysis of the bourgeoisie in his essay on reification in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (1922).

The political state, to maintain its static character, needs silence for normal functioning through means of corporatist bureaucratic deputisation of the Estates, or the petit bourgeois, managerial and professionalistic classes of citizens. Lukács writes that the consciousness of the proletariat must become the deed, and that the instant that this consciousness arises and goes beyond what is immediately given we find in concentrated form the basic issue of the class struggle: the problem of force.⁹⁶ Force, in this case is located in the tension

between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, and only the practical class consciousness of the proletariat possesses the ability to transform things. The bourgeoisie has a problem – it cannot abide dissent. For this reason, material historicity is anathema to it as a class devoid of consciousness, because history implicates it on all sides as an exploiter of wage workers. Dissent threatens, then, the stability of the state, thus threatens the durability of the capitalist. Lukács writes:

Only under capitalism, where this stabilization means the stable hegemony of the bourgeoisie within an uninterrupted, revolutionary and dynamic economic process, does it take the shape of the ‘natural rule’ of the ‘eternal iron laws’ of political economy.⁹⁷

For the bourgeoisie there is an eternal now, an immediacy, where progress is caught in a historical vacuum that is resistant to change. In short, the bourgeois consciousness is always born yesterday. In his analysis of the species alienation caused by capitalism, Lukács famously relates his concept of *reification*, that is, how the social relations of the human subject are created through the capitalist economic system and how the human’s subjectivity has become, from its means of production, a ‘mechanised and rationalised tool’,⁹⁸ inseparable from how and what commodities it produces, where it is ‘forced into becoming the object of the process by which he is turned into a commodity and reduced to a mere quantity’,⁹⁹ and thus is dehumanised.

For instance, he claims that, while ‘the objective reality of social existence is *in its immediacy* “the same” for both proletariat and bourgeoisie[.]...’,¹⁰⁰ this does

not prevent the specific categories of mediation by means of which both classes raise this immediacy to the level of consciousness, by means of which the merely immediate reality becomes for both the authentically objective reality, from being fundamentally different, thanks to the different position occupied by the two classes within the 'same' economic process.

It is evident that once again we are approaching-this time from another angle-the fundamental problem of bourgeois thought, the problem of the thing-in-itself. The belief that the transformation of the immediately given into a truly understood (and not merely an immediately perceived) and for that reason really objective reality, i.e. the belief that the impact of the category of mediation upon the picture of the world is merely 'subjective', i.e. is no more than an 'evaluation' of a reality that 'remains unchanged', all this is as much as to say that objective reality has the character of a thing-in-itself.¹⁰¹

However, Lukács claims the possibility of reification due to the dialectical process of the historical evolution of people and property, of political economy, yet he does not yield any sizeable analysis of the possibility of that very dialectical process, a process he believes to be one that concludes in reason and enlightenment, in raising the consciousness of a *reified* people beyond being *rigidified*, making rigidity, though a characteristic attributed by Lukács specifically to the bourgeoisie, the basis of reification in the first place. He writes: 'Thus we find the subject and object of the social process coexisting in a state of dialectical

interaction; But as they always appear to exist in a rigidly twofold form, each external to the other, the dialectics remain unconscious and the objects retain their twofold and hence rigid character. This rigidity can only be broken by catastrophe and it then makes way for an equally rigid structure.¹⁰² As the proletariat is caught in the species alienating continuum of reification, the bourgeoisie is caught in their own rigidity, unable to muster a consciousness of class solidarity. This resistance to change, this rigidity, is a category of the dominating force of capitalism – the bourgeoisie. According to Lukács, while the class consciousness of the proletariat, the exploited masses of wage labourers in industrialised nations, could be raised towards their liberation, the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie, the controllers of the capitalistic modes of production who exploit (and enslave) workers to maximise profits and extort consumers to minimise losses, could not be altered because of their rigidity and their understanding of history as an immediate presentism that would implicate them if confronted with its reality. Therefore, an assimilationist theodicy, questioning the very validity of dissent as a democratic and secular process aids and abets this the demise of working peoples, in this case Black working people.

To not be able to question the status of Black progress would be to support the status quo. Victimology, then, becomes a heuristic of the state *vis-à-vis* Black conservative theodicy to quash the very concept of dissent in Black working-class people. Through its assimilationist logics, redolent of Crummellian theodicy in the nineteenth century, Black conservatism requires a Black theology of silence, as it views the notion of Black progress as inviable. This conception of

the inexorability of the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, as though those legislative and symbolic strides marked an end to race matters in America, is born of a spiritualism, a rationalism no different than Beulah Brockden in Chapter 1, except, unlike Brockden, McWhorter, writing in the year 2000, has access to reams of available public-facing data that would be dispositive of his idealism.

Yet, to McWhorter, '[m]ost [B]lack public statements are filtered through [Victimology], almost all race-related policy is founded upon it'.¹⁰³ As though rigidified in the bourgeois process of reification, as adumbrated by Lukács, McWhorter ponders, 'How many white people has this professor met in the academic/professional world who even gave any indication of thinking this way since about 1974?'¹⁰⁴ This line is in response to one of McWhorter's 'Stories of Victimology', in which he regales his reader with 'The Story of the Party Shelby Steele Is At'. This story involves a Black academic woman who bemoans the fact that 'sellout' Black intellectual Shelby Steele is at a professorial dinner party, where she claims many of the faculty at this unnamed university are 'white racists'. To this, along with his comment suggesting anti-Black racism ended in 1974, McWhorter comments, 'Can we really accept this professor's contention that white Ph.D.s [sic] and professionals in the year 2000 regularly say things remotely like this?'¹⁰⁵

McWhorter, like other Black conservatives, argues that racial primacy has ended, though they, none of them, provide a date marking this achievement. John McWhorter even cites interracial romantic relationships data at the end of the twentieth century as evidence that race no longer matters in America, that 'in

1993 the figure [of white and Black American couples] was 12.1 per cent, about four times what it was even in 1970 (2.6 percent)'.¹⁰⁶ This notion of Black parity through fraternisation with whites as significant others had been dismissed nearly one hundred and fifty years earlier by a Black radical thinker, Martin Delany. For all his programmatic assimilationist exceptionalism, Delany, in his nationalistic radical thought, reviled the notion of miscegenation. Following the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, in *The Condition of the Colored People* (1852), Delany is '[c]onvinced that resistance is impossible and repelled by miscegenation as a solution,... clings to emigration as an alternative to [B]lack degradation'.¹⁰⁷ For Delany, the 'choice between emigration and hopeless resistance [was] posing a choice between emigration and miscegenation'.¹⁰⁸ To Delany, if a Black person had to be so assimilated that he needed to destroy the physical differences between he and his white counterparts in order to be accepted that represented no freedom at all for Black people. This researcher wonders that if McWhorter would describe Delany's protestations as a qualisign of Victimology. Indeed, McWhorter expresses a realism about Black people having a knowledge of their history, writing that is nothing more than a 'mantra not directed at a quest for knowledge per se, but at knowing who did what to your ancestors and how badly, to make sure it doesn't happen again'.¹⁰⁹ For McWhorter, *Black is Victimology*,¹¹⁰ and Black people have been 'condemned by Victimology to wink and let failure pass, to choke in performance, and recreate [cause] racism where it was receding'.¹¹¹

Moreover, consider McWhorter's quotation of the old conservative bromide that Black people represent 13 per cent of the US population 'but 42 percent of the violent crimes in the country', a point that McWhorter assures his reader is a 'sad' fact but necessary to be examined. However, according to the Innocence Project, while Black people indeed make up 13 per cent of the US population, they account for nearly 60 per cent of all DNA exonerations, with 52 per cent of the people exonerated since 1989 being Black, and 75 per cent of those who were exonerated after a guilty plea being Black and brown people.¹¹² These are data that were readily available during the time that McWhorter composed his text, yet, like Black conservatives are wont to do, he builds his arguments on an intellectual intuitionism of immaterialism instead of an empirical consciousness based on materialism.

For example, when he attempts to build out his account of the '[B]lack-white scholastic gap',¹¹³ indicative of African-American self-sabotage in action, he does so around the matter of Affirmative Action, taken on the California state level, with the 1996 passing of Proposition 209. Prop 209 was legislation passed to prohibit Californian state governmental apparatuses from considering race, sex, or ethnicity in public education, contracting, or employment. According to McWhorter, after this ballot proposition was approved, in fall of 1998, 'the number of [B]lack students admitted...had fallen 43 percent from the previous year's total...'¹¹⁴ However, because of how rationalism guides his analysis about material matters, McWhorter, so obsessed with the failings of Black people and culture, through his assimilationist theodicy, favouring Western civilisation over

empirical data, was unable to see the forest for the trees. Had he adopted a materialist analysis to his rationalist speculations he may have been able to predict the ways in which, since 1998, white student enrolment in the University of California had been on a steady decline, while Black and Latino matriculation steadily increased. In fact, while white enrolment in the statewide University of California system was at 41.2 percent in 1999, by 2000, when McWhorter's book was published, it had dropped to 39.8 percent, by 2010 to 31.4 percent, and by 2020 to 22.9 percent.¹¹⁵ With simultaneity, while Black students in 1999 held at 2.7 percent of UC enrolments, by 2010, their first-year enrolment numbers were at 2.5 percent, and by 2020 their enrolment percentage was 4.5 percent.¹¹⁶ This suggests a crisis not in the Black college students of California but the white students, a fact that has recently been reported by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, which says that 'the number of white college students appears to be 'plummeting the fastest...'¹¹⁷

McWhorter's intuitionism is not a mere promulgation of his own feeling but of the feeling of others. He writes that the 'general feeling is that even if [B]lacks are arrested in proportion to the crimes they commit, that there is a bias in the severity of their sentences'.¹¹⁸ In the first case, how can McWhorter speak to the 'feeling' of the general Black American populace in 2000? Moreover, in the second case, this claim took but ten years after his book's publication to be walked down. In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), legal scholar Michelle Alexander explains that it is not that 'we ought not be concerned about violent crime in impoverished urban

communities',¹¹⁹ that we 'should care deeply, and...we must come to understand the ways in which mass imprisonment increases – not decreases – the likelihood of violence in urban communities'.¹²⁰ 'But at the same time', she writes, 'we ought not be misled by those who insist that violent crime has driven the rise of this unprecedented system of racial and social control'. Alexander avers:

The uncomfortable reality is that arrests and convictions for drug offenses – not violent crime – have propelled mass incarceration. In many states, including Colorado and Maryland, drug offenders now constitute the single largest category of people admitted to prison. People of color are convicted of drug offenses at rates out of all proportion to their drug crimes, a fact that has greatly contributed to the emergence of a vast new racial undercaste.¹²¹

Thus, as a technology of intellectual intuitionism, the essence of McWhorter's concept of Victimology, what he describes as a way to become Black,¹²² what he claims is an epistemology with 'its seductive goal [as] aimless indignation over solving problems'¹²³ is this: it requires silence as opposed to dissent to maintain the status quo and the static nature of statecraft, and it is an anti-liberationist reactionary theodicy of Black conservatism, a petit bourgeois, managerial tactic of quelling dissent.

On 24 September 2024, when Marcellus Williams, a Black man with a poverty-stricken background,¹²⁴ was executed by the State of Missouri, despite pleas by the very prosecution that sentenced him to death for the 1998 murder of Felicia Gayle to commute his sentence to life in prison without the possibility of

parole,¹²⁵ it was a veritable murder of a poor person in the normal historical functioning of a capitalist political state. In *Capital* (1867), Marx, in his historical analysis of the reproduction of the protocapitalist labour force, explains that as early as 1530 in England the Crown made being a beggar (read poor person) illegal, as a mode of creating labourers for the landed gentry (as Korsch writes, land is itself a mode of production¹²⁶). Marx writes, chronicling the legislative evolution of criminalising poverty:

Henry VIII. 1530: Beggars old and unable to work receive a beggar's licence. On the other hand, whipping and imprisonment for sturdy vagabonds. They are to be tied to the cart-tail and whipped until the blood streams from their bodies, then to swear an oath to go back to their birthplace or to where they have lived the last three years and to 'put themselves to labour'. What grim irony! In Henry VIII. the former statute is repeated, but strengthened with new clauses. For the second arrest for vagabondage the whipping is to be repeated and half the ear sliced off; but for the third relapse the offender is to be executed as a hardened criminal and enemy of the common weal.¹²⁷

Maiming, torture, and murder became tools of the state (political economy) to guarantee its labour force and to train its working classes to fear what would befall them should they ever fall into penury. While Henry VIII, as the Crown functioning as the sovereign Executive, punished poor people, in addition to

murdering them, Edward VI who succeeded him to the British Throne began to enslave the poor for no other reason than that they were poor.

Edward VI. A statute of the first year of his reign, 1547, ordains that if anyone refuses to work, he shall be condemned as a slave to the person who has denounced him as an idler. The master shall feed his slave on bread and water, weak broth and such refuse meat as he thinks fit. He has the right to force him to do any work, no matter how disgusting, with whip and chains. If the slave is absent a fortnight, he is condemned to slavery for life and is to be branded on forehead or back with the letter S; if he runs away thrice, he is to be executed as a felon. The master can sell him, bequeath him, let him out on hire as a slave, just as any other personal chattel or cattle. If the slaves attempt anything against the masters, they are also to be executed. Justices of the peace, on information, are to hunt the rascals down. If it happens that a vagabond has been idling about for three days, he is to be taken to his birthplace, branded with a red-hot iron with the letter V on the breast and be set to work, in chains, in the streets or at some other labour. If the vagabond gives a false birthplace, he is then to become the slave for life of this place, of its inhabitants, or its corporation, and to be branded with an S.¹²⁸

Marx goes on to tell how Elizabeth I, who succeeded Edward VI to become the next Tudor sovereign, in 1572 criminalised young poor people of fourteen years,

who were 'to be severely flogged and branded on the left ear unless some one will take them into service for two years', and at any age over eighteen 'for the third offence...be executed without mercy as felons'.¹²⁹ The making of slaves from the population of poor people, using terms like rascals (think Samuel A. Cartwright's 1851 ethnological concept *Drapetomania* [rascality]) to circumscribe the desire to escape from coerced servitude as pathological, has a historical and material precedent that predates 'the new Jim Crow' of mass incarceration of Black Americans to reconstitute a slave caste under the auspices of the Thirteenth Amendment (1865), which abolished slavery and involuntary servitude in the United States, except as punishment for a crime. Therefore, it is no small wonder that most people on Death Row in the United States on the state and federal levels are Black, male and poor, Williams included.¹³⁰ This is the normal functioning of the state, and through his assimilationist logics, McWhorter reinforces this procedure by denying that Black people should exact the latitude to protest their social station. At different moments in his text, he describes Victimology as a literal pathology, one that 'infects our whole culture',¹³¹ with Black people being subsumed in the epidemic.

3.4c. Coleman Hughes and Neoracism: The Problem of Racism as Merely a Form of Prejudice

On the matter of racism, Marxist critic Harold Cruse notes the following: 'we are faced with a problem in racial ideology without any means of properly understanding how to deal with it. The dilemma arises from a lack of comprehension of the historical origins of the conflict.'¹³² Consequently, in this

section, in what will be a response to Coleman Hughes's concept of 'neoracism', I want to begin with a historical analysis of the construction of race. In his book *Between the World and Me* (2015), Ta-Nehisi Coates makes the following claim: 'race is the child of racism, not the father.'¹³³ This declamation suggests that without racism there would be no such fictive socio-anthropological construct as *race*, to wit, 'bone-deep features [ascribed] to people [to] humiliate, reduce, and destroy them',¹³⁴ which individual racists used to divide the world into 'races'. In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson calls this process *racialism*, that is, 'the legitimation and corroboration of social organization as natural by reference to the "racial" components of its elements'.¹³⁵

However, while Robinson maintains that this procedure is 'hardly unique to European peoples', he notes that 'its appearance and codification, during the feudal period, into Western conceptions of society was to have important and enduring consequences'.¹³⁶ The following explores how European peoples constitutive of whiteness through their culture, that is, 'primarily, the societal machinery with which a particular society or group symbolically codes its co-identifying sense of self, with reference to which, it then acts both individually and collectively upon the world',¹³⁷ instantiated a modern hierarchy of race through epistemology and economics, and through this process of racialising others became the only race.

In 1968, during their dispute about with what radical groups the Black Panther Party should be affiliated, Huey P. Newton, Co-Founder and Minister of Defense, and Stokely Carmichael, Field Marshal (honorarily appointed on his

birthday, 29 June 1967, while acting as the Fourth Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]), engaged each other in a dialectic about racism. This dialectic about racism was so intense that it eventuated in the exit of Carmichael from Party affiliation and presaged the end of the Black Panther Party. To repeat, a dialectic between two Black men on the matter of race and racism was so intense that it previsioned certain conditions under which the BPP, as normatively constructed, would be no more. Early Carmichael, that Stokely Carmichael who, according to Newton, 'said that socialism is not the question, economics is not the question, but it is entirely a question of racism',¹³⁸ who had not yet come under the influence of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and his political philosophy, changing his name to Kwame Ture in 1969, did not believe that Black people were capable of being racist towards white people. In his book (co-written with Charles V. Hamilton) *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967), Carmichael begins Chapter 1 of his text on political liberation with an explication of what racism is, and it is supplementally phenomenal abstracted from Black predication and participation altogether. He writes:

What is racism? The word has represented daily reality to millions of [B]lack people for centuries, yet it is rarely defined – perhaps just because that reality has been such a commonplace. By 'racism' we mean the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group. That has been the practice of this country toward the black man; we shall see why and how.

Racism is both overt and covert. It takes two, closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual [B]lacks, and acts by the total white community against the black community. We call these individual racism and institutional racism. The first consists of overt acts by individuals, which cause death, injury or the violent destruction of property. This type can be recorded by television cameras; it can frequently be observed in the process of commission. The second type is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life. The second type originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation than the first type.¹³⁹

Here, in an inimitable procedure of logic, Carmichael links whiteness, culturally understood, with racism. Therefrom, he links racism with destructive acts to property and community, making whiteness aligned with racism a socioeconomic siege of power and prestige that exudes and exhibits itself both covertly and overtly. Recall, he begins his text on the topic of the politics of liberation in America by first explicating racism, suggesting that without a knowledge of racism one cannot contextualise the politics of the American empire and, therefore, cannot work toward liberation from the perdition of its institution.

For America is an institution of racism that informs individual racisms that rely 'on the active and pervasive operation of anti-[B]lack attitudes and practices'.

Carmichael continues to elucidate his logic of practice in this way:

A sense of superior group position prevails: whites are 'better' than [B]lacks; therefore blacks should be subordinated to whites. This is a racist attitude and it permeates the society, on both the individual and institutional level, covertly and overtly.

'Respectable' individuals can absolve themselves from individual blame: they would never plant a bomb in a church; they would never stone a black family. But they continue to support political officials and institutions that would and do perpetuate institutionally racist policies. Thus acts of overt, individual racism may not typify the society, but institutional racism does – with the support of covert, individual attitudes of racism.¹⁴⁰

For Carmichael, racism is inextricable to power as whiteness is inextricable to power, power understood as property (institutions [Church and State], the superstructure, the machinery of society, etc.), and it is this dearth of power that precludes Black people from participating in modes of racism because Black people, as an outgroup, cannot participate in modes of whiteness. Because of this sociological phenomenality with existential consequence, Carmichael believed that it was impossible and imprudent for Black people to politically organise with white people, for, ultimately, 'white groups tend to view their interests in a particularly united, solidified way when confronted with [B]lacks

making demands which are seen as threatening to vested interests. The whites react in a united group to protect interests they perceive to be theirs – interests possessed to the exclusion of those who, for varying reasons, are outside the group'.¹⁴¹ This view of racism I call *contextual*.

Newton did not agree with Carmichael's view of contextual racism, and rather held to a principal view of what I call *definitional* racism. In 1968, when the BPP, led by Newton, began to move in their political philosophy from Black nationalism to revolutionary socialism (with an internationalist bent), Carmichael, at the time a staunch Black nationalist, dissented that the Party had begun to lose its focus on the specific matters facing Black people in the United States and that it was becoming increasingly preoccupied with the plight of oppressed communities in the Global South. Indicative to Carmichael of this rising lack of primacy on the sociopolitical and socioeconomic woes of Black people by the Party was Newton's insistence on permitting Party affiliation with white American radical groups such as Students for a Democratic Society and the Weathermen. In *Revolutionary Suicide* (1973), Newton discloses his disagreement with Carmichael on this issue:

While I acknowledged the pervasiveness of racism, the larger problem should be seen in terms of class exploitation and the capitalist system. In analyzing what was happening in the country, I said that we would have to accept many alliances and form solidarity with any people fighting the common oppressor. He [Carmichael] objected to the Black Panther alliance with the Peace

and Freedom Party and said we should not associate with white radicals or let them come to our meetings or be involved in our rallies. Stokely warned that whites would destroy the movement, alienate Black people, and lessen our effectiveness in the community. Later, he proved right in terms of what happened to the Party, although he was wrong in principle. As a result of coalitions, the Black Panthers were brought into the free speech movement, the psychedelic fad, and the advocacy of drugs, which we were and are dead set against. All these causes were irrelevant to our work, which was concerned with deeper and more fundamental issues, in fact, survival. When these things happened, Stokely warned, whites would try to take the leadership from us.¹⁴²

Though Newton felt that Carmichael had become purblind to the inherence of class on social ills because of his fixation on race matters, that Newton admits Carmichael's ultimate rightness in predicting the downfall of the Party from within by (partial) reason of unfruitful partnerships with white radical groups is telling. While years later writing his autobiography Newton still held that Carmichael's position on white political affiliation was representative of definitional racism, that is, racism tethered to dictionary denotation and unmoored from contexts of power dynamics, he could with simultaneity admit that 'in the thirty-three months I spent in jail our leadership did falter, and serious frictions developed between the Black Panthers and white radicals'.¹⁴³

Therefore, along their dialectic, taking Newton's definitional understanding of racism as thesis, and Carmichael's contextual understanding of racism as antithesis, a synthesis that could most reasonably be drawn is that, while racism can be denotatively understood as 'prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically on that is a minority or marginalized',¹⁴⁴ contextually this definition applies most generally to white people and whiteness that has been most faithfully tied to domination, destabilisation and destruction in the world imperium on a systemic level. This tripartite threshing, this deracination, through colonialism and imperialism predicated by racism holding the scythe of race was performed by the participants in the only race that has ever existed, whiteness. Hughes overemphasises the focus of Black people and their emphasis on naming race and racism as problematics in the continuation of racism as a technology of discriminatory practices, yet he does not excoriate the function of whiteness in the world since modernity. The following, then, is a brief analysis of the emergence of whiteness and racialisation on the world stage, as a rejoinder to Hughes's conception of 'neoracism'.

Though the term *white* 'in reference to "a white man, a person of a race distinguished by a light complexion"'¹⁴⁵ was first used in 1671, the practice of whiteness has existed since the fifteenth century. In *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987), when Paul Kennedy refers to the ascendancy of the consortium of nations that would predominate the globe from 1492 to 1945 as

‘the European miracle’,¹⁴⁶ he is describing what Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism* recounts as how Europe’s cultural ancestry was emergent from but ‘small minority of thousands among the millions of the decaying state’¹⁴⁷ of the Late Roman empire. Robinson writes:

Henri Pirenne, relying on the estimates of Emile-Felix Gautier and L. Schmidt, reports that the Ostrogoths and Visigoths may have numbered 100,000 each, the Vandals 80,000, and the Burgundi 25,000. Moreover, the warrior strata of each kingdom are consistently estimated at about 20 percent of their populations. On the other hand, the Empire that they invaded contained as many as 50–70 million persons.¹⁴⁸

Robinson’s historiographical analysis maintains that ‘the vast majority of the barbarians’,¹⁴⁹ these Germanic tribes from the Scandinavian Peninsula, going down into the Low Countries and crossing the Ural Mountains, ‘came not as conquerors [as many suppose] but exactly as, in our own day, North Africans, Italians, Poles cross into Metropolitan France to look for work’.¹⁵⁰

According to Kennedy, the unlikely rise of the European powers was in the main due to other great powers of the world, far greater than those that became known as European, ‘turning in’ on themselves, either by folly or by protectionism. The Ming dynasty (1368–1644), a technologically precocious kingdom of China, which majored in bureaucracy, printing, trade and industry, paper money, an ‘enormous iron industry..., producing around 125,000 tons per

annum',¹⁵¹ had a population of '100–130 million compared with Europe's 50–55 million in the fifteenth century':¹⁵²

...its remarkable culture; its exceedingly fertile and irrigated plains, linked by a splendid canal system since the eleventh century; and its unified, hierarchic administration run by a well-educated Confucian bureaucracy had given a coherence and sophistication to Chinese society which was the envy of foreign visitors.¹⁵³

If not for the Ming's 'dislike of commerce and private capital', 'the practice of buying cheap and selling dear, the ostentation of the *nouveau riche* merchant', which 'all offended the elite, scholarly bureaucrats', along with 'the banning of overseas trade and fishing', which 'took away another potential stimulus to sustained economic expansion', the dynasty would have risen in power and influence and would have hampered Europe's predominance. In the Muslim world, 'power, prosperity, and high culture'¹⁵⁴ resurged during the reigns of Ismail I (1500–1524) and Abbas I (1587–1629), under whom 'a chain of strong Muslim khanates still controlled the ancient Silk Road via Kashgar and Turfan to China'.

He continues:

...the Hindu Empire in Java was overthrown by Muslim forces early in the sixteenth century; and the king of Kabul, Babur, entering India by the conqueror's route from the northwest, established the Mogul Empire in 1526. Although this hold on India was shaky at

first, it was successfully consolidated by Babur's grandson Akbar (1556–1605), who carved out a northern Indian empire stretching from Baluchistan in the west to Bengal in the east. Throughout the seventeenth century, Akbar's successors pushed farther south against the Hindu Marathas, just at the same time as the Dutch, British, and French were entering the Indian peninsula from the sea, and of course in a much less substantial form. To these secular signs of Muslim growth one must add the vast increase in numbers of the faithful in Africa and the Indies against which the proselytization by Christian missions paled in comparison.¹⁵⁵

However, 'the greatest Muslim challenge to early modern Europe lay, of course, with the Ottoman Turks, or, rather, with their formidable army and the finest siege train of the age'.¹⁵⁶ Under Suleiman (1520–1566), 'the superior Turkish armies' overran Hungary, 'the great eastern bastion of Christendom', 'following the battle of Mohacs in 1526...' Also in 1526, 'Babur gained victory at Panipat by which the Mughal Empire was established'.¹⁵⁷

Would all of Europe soon go the way of northern India? By 1529, with the Turks besieging Vienna, this must have appeared a distinct possibility to some. In actual fact, the line then stabilized in northern Hungary and the Holy Roman Empire was preserved; but thereafter the Turks presented a constant danger and exerted a military pressure which could never be fully ignored. Even as late as 1683, they were again besieging Vienna.¹⁵⁸

'Yet', Kennedy writes, 'the Ottoman Turks, too, were to falter, to turn inward, and to lose the chance at world domination, although this became clear only a century after the strikingly similar Ming decline'. Similarly, the Mogul decline began to materialise, as the 'brilliant courts were centres of conspicuous consumption on a scale which the Sun King at Versailles might have thought excessive. Thousands of servants and hangers-on, extravagant clothes and jewels and harems and menageries, vast arrays of bodyguards, could be paid for only by the creation of a systematic plunder machine.' Of the Mogul collapse, Kennedy explains:

Tax collectors, required to provide fixed sums alike; whatever the state of the harvest or trade, the money had to come in. There being no constitutional or other checks – apart from rebellion – upon such depredations, it was not surprising that taxation was known as 'eating'. For this colossal annual tribute, the population received next to nothing. There was little improvement in communications, and no machinery for assistance in the event of famine, flood, and plague – which were, of course, fairly regular occurrences. All this makes the Ming dynasty appear benign, almost progressive, by comparison. Technically, the Mogul Empire was to decline because it became increasingly difficult to maintain itself against the Marathas in the south, the Afghanis in the north, and, finally, the East India Company. In reality, the causes of its decay were much more internal than external.¹⁵⁹

According to Kennedy, internal failure is often the predicate of the fall of the great world powers. In Japan, '[t]he centralized rule which had existed in the fourteenth century had been replaced by a constant feuding between the clans – akin, as it were, to the strife among their equivalents in Scotland',¹⁶⁰ the four isles that comprised the nation 'lay in the hands of clan-based feudal lordships and the emperor was but a cipher'.¹⁶¹ However, 'centralized military rule could not be shaken',¹⁶² following the death of Hideyoshi in 1598 and the ascent of Ieyasu, '[i]n many respects, Tokugawa Japan possessed the characteristics of the "new monarchies" which had arisen in the West during the preceding century. The great difference was the shogunate's abjuration of overseas expansion, indeed of virtually all contact with the outside world. In 1636, construction of oceangoing vessels was stopped and Japanese subjects were forbidden to sail the high seas.'¹⁶³

All these circumstances, this faltering and flailing of the world's great powers, worked together for the good of emergent white Europeans who, through a miraculous luck of the draw, and intense technological advances hastened by internal warfare and seafaring expeditions, scaled the parapets of continental might to become the predominant economic and cultural force on the planet. Even when Ming China, led by the admiral Cheng Ho, between 1405 and 1433, set out 'hundreds of ships and tens of thousands of men, these fleets visited ports from Malacca and Ceylon to the Red Sea entrances and Zanzibar',¹⁶⁴ the fleets, rather than dominating the peoples they encountered, '[bestowed] gifts

upon deferential local rulers on the one hand[;] they compelled the recalcitrant to acknowledge Peking on the other':¹⁶⁵

One ship returned with giraffes from East Africa to entertain the Chinese emperor; another with a Ceylonese chief who had been unwise enough not to acknowledge the supremacy of the Son of Heaven. (It must be noted, however, that the Chinese apparently never plundered nor murdered – unlike the Portuguese, Dutch, and other European invaders of the Indian Ocean.)¹⁶⁶

Unlike the European powers, which at the time were steadily rising in influence and affluence, the seafarers of the great Chinese powers (i.e. the Ming dynasty) did not dominate peoples along their routes, even when their actions were distemperate.¹⁶⁷ The same could be said of Tokugawa Japan, which, in 1636, destroyed their large seagoing vessels, and opted to use boats only for local fishing, so that they could focus upon their own interior growth, not upon outward expansion and overseas domination. Yet, during their Age of Sail and Age of Discovery, European powers, through their love of private capital and greedy mercantilism, dominated the world.¹⁶⁸ As the world powers collapsed around and about them, Robinson writes that '[i]t was at this point that the merchants of Europe became bourgeois (burgenses). By the beginning of the twelfth century, these bourgeoisies had already begun the transformation of European life so necessary for the emergence of capitalism as the dominant organization of European production.'¹⁶⁹ This was not an inevitable occurrence, but one, as we

have discussed, that was contingent upon people and nation and culture.

Robinson writes:

Rather it is a historical impression, a phantom representation largely constructed from the late eighteenth century to the present by the notional activity of a bourgeoisie as a dominant class. This history of 'the rise of the middle class' is an amalgam of bourgeois political and economic power, the self-serving ideology of the bourgeoisie as the ruling class and thus an intellectual and political preoccupation-mediated through the constructs of evolutionary theory: From Darwin has descended the language of error, a language that has locked up historical thinking and imposed slovenly and imprecise conclusions even upon scholarly and sensible researchers. Words like 'growth', 'decline', 'development', 'evolution', 'decay', may have started as servants but they have ended as masters: they have brought us to the edge of historical inevitability.¹⁷⁰

For Robinson, Europe's rise to pre-eminence on the world stage is both contingent and revisable, deep-seated in economic manoeuvres informed by 'Hegel's dialectic of *Aufhebung*, Marx's dialectic of class struggle and the contradictions between the mode and relations of production, Darwin's evolution of the species and Spencer's survival of the fittest',¹⁷¹ which 'are all forged from the same metaphysical conventions'.¹⁷²

Coleman Hughes is not impressed by any of these historical renderings of whiteness as the only race because it is the only race responsible for racialisation. Indeed, Hughes does not believe that racism can be systemic.¹⁷³ Hughes is a writer who is a contributing editor of *City Journal*, the policy periodical associated with the conservative thinktank Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. He was educated at Columbia University, and notably testified before the United States House Judiciary subcommittee against reparations for slavery, where he cautioned that if reparations were paid out to Black Americans the country would only be divided further, 'making it harder to build political coalitions required to solve the problems facing Black people today'.¹⁷⁴

In his new book *The End of Race Politics: Arguments for a Colorblind America* (2024), Hughes would call this extant and persistent call for reparations from Black people a form of neoracism. Hughes would likely label my forthcoming analysis of his neoracism concept as indicative of my being a 'hard-core social [constructionist]',¹⁷⁵ calling a historical analysis of race and racism useless against the scientific construction of genomes that prefigure and determine phenotypic expressions of human bodies. Yet this subsection is an attempt to show the verity of social constructions of race and racism as a retortion to Hughes's insistence upon putting science over ethics.¹⁷⁶

Hughes offers us our first glimpse of his concept of neoracism by analysing the thought of white liberal writer Robin DiAngelo, whom he quotes as such from her book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (2018):

I strive to be 'less white'. To be less white is to be less racially oppressive. This requires me to be more racially aware, to be better educated about racism, and to continually challenge racial certitude and arrogance. To be less white is to be open to, interested in, and compassionate toward the racial realities of people of color.¹⁷⁷

His examination of this excerpt from the D'Angelo text posits her description of whiteness to be found wanting and indicative of neoracism. This is because, according to Hughes, in D'Angelo's telling, 'whiteness [is] as a range of characteristic beliefs, actions, and attitudes'.¹⁷⁸ By interpreting whiteness in such a way, Hughes is thus subtracting the materiality of whiteness. Whiteness is an ecology; it is an economy of being that does not deny individuality among those who think themselves white but relies on a material belief in which the campaign of whiteness as economic procedure produces inequalities inasmuch as it is aligned with private property. Though he writes that '[n]eoracism insists that sharp racial classifications are a necessary part of a just society',¹⁷⁹ that categories like 'Blackness' and 'whiteness' are not mere 'descriptions of skin color and ancestry'¹⁸⁰ for the neoracist, but the neoracist '[uses] those terms to encompass all kinds of stereotypes...about thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, habits, and character',¹⁸¹ he is misunderstanding the historical weight of material belief as a set of habits and practices. In his text, Hughes attempts to demonstrate, for example, comparably, how 'anti-Semites in Europe often viewed Jews as cold but competent – that is, cunning, devious, and intelligent enough to run the world, yet also morally corrupt',¹⁸² that this is 'the way neoracists view white people'.¹⁸³ I

want to show how wrongheaded this is through a discourse of the materiality of belief.

As mindless and unexamined traditionalism, Pierre Bourdieu reads practice as ritual. Pascal and his Wager allow that ritual as practice is able, through one's actions, to materially have faith *for oneself*. This is not religious faith described as the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Rather, it is faith contingent on the materiality of actional rituals through practice. Thus, this practice as ritual functions as religion. Religion, therefore, becomes an ecology of deportment and practice that may be embodied without acknowledgement or consciousness, but affirmed by the faith of one's actions. This is the essence of white supremacy/whiteness as religion. This is how 'well-meaning' white people can claim to be distanced from white supremacy, because, as a practice, it contains no interior logics, while by their actions they verify their adherence to it as a ritual practice. The religion of white supremacy/whiteness stipulates and is substantiated by the desiderata and destruction of the Black body. Whiteness, here, like all racial categories, fictive though real in its socioeconomic and sociopolitical consequence, is conjoined with white supremacy as a single and unifying religion that has no interior logics, or logical logics, just like ritual practice. My unique reading of white supremacy/whiteness as a singular practice, as a rejoinder to Hughes's concept of neoracism, stems from how whiteness, by the actions of its participants, lives into an ecology of white supremacy as a religion.

Why religion? Why that stilted terminology to describe an ideology of racial superiority? Surely there must be other ways of describing the phenomenon of white supremacy, ways that do not seem to insist on the sensational. Yet this is no sensationalist appeal or alarmist demagoguery; this description is rooted in the tangible facticity of white supremacy. White supremacy is a highly systematised, ritualised programme of being, filled with dedication and devotion (like that found in the adherents of world religions like Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Shintoism, Taoism, Sikhism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Protestant Christianity, etc.) that is reminiscent of a faith-based tradition and instituted by greed, routinised by policy and emboldened by quietly radicalised participants.

Is it truly implausible to contend that, within this nation, there persists a religion grounded in the conviction that Black people are subhuman – a religion that continues to affirm the logic of the three-fifths compromise, reducing Black existence to the status of perpetual servitude? This ideological framework explains why contemporary uprisings in so-called inner-city spaces are routinely characterised as ‘riots’, and why young Chicagoans are scapegoated as emblematic of an alleged Black proclivity for destructiveness and savagery. This phenomenon is not jihadist Islam, nor is it anti-balaka Catholicism in the Central African Republic. Rather, white supremacy functions as a religion – one that is neither aberrant nor reducible to the actions of isolated extremists divorced from the historical forces that animate present realities.

Although my argument acknowledges socioeconomic dimensions, it diverges from George D. Kelsey’s interpretation of racism as ‘an idolatrous

religion and an abortive search for meaning',¹⁸⁴ which he describes as having 'emerged as an ideological justification during slavery so that powerful entrepreneurs could continue their political and economic control',¹⁸⁵ thereby rendering racism a mere artefact of 'idol worship'. What I propose is more expansive: white supremacy as a religious system constitutes a coherent worldview, deeply embedded in the nation's moral and cultural fabric, and not simply a contingent ideological instrument of economic exploitation.

Rather, it is an ecology of the prescription of whiteness as economic and sociological power that has strengthened and encouraged many to live into its promises of exceptionalism, and that has alienated and isolated many by their millions for no other reason than that they were and are of a different skin colour. This is where white supremacy as ritualistic ecology/economy begins to diverge from mere ritual into religion because if it were only ritual all would have potential to participate in it. Religion does not often operate thus. Ritual as religion disallows anyone from being converted into Zoroastrianism. Recall the New Testament (Christianity) scripture and its Old Testament (Judaism) counterpart and forbear:

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you,

...¹⁸⁶

Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD. For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go

by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your reward.¹⁸⁷

As Marx remarked in *Capital*, 'The religious world is but the reflex of the real world'.¹⁸⁸ Religion by its very nature is exclusionary. Framing it, white supremacy in this way allows us to see how devout America as a nation of the world has been to this anti-secularism as an adherent to a religion, observant of ritual and practice, whereby, as Laborde writes, 'dominant groups use state power to affirm and entrench hegemonic identities (white, male, Protestant) as normal, and...construe and disparage minority identities as deviant'.¹⁸⁹ The English term religion derives from the Latin term *religare*, which, when translated literally, means 'to bind again'. White supremacy is a religious tradition that seeks to enchain those who were once bound and binds those who participate in it. Therefore, the notion that a liberal democracy requiring a strict delineation between church and state is untenable and unjust (when considered under the auspices of white supremacist theology as both privilege and power) is not a salient thesis. Laborde echoes the sentiments of critical religion theorists, suggesting that 'religion is not a natural category of social and ethical experience...but the category of religion itself [was] invented and formalized in the process of consolidation of modern states'.¹⁹⁰

However, white supremacy is the religion of America, and of the Western world more broadly, constitutive of environmental liturgics, and it is highly theocratic in its dimensions:

Here the dimension of religion that is targeted by the liberal secular state is the theocratic dimension of religion: the claim by churches to rule not only the private but also the public sphere – to enact coercive rules and norms for society as a whole. Instead, the modern state worked to locate religion within the private sphere of individual conscience, voluntary association, and the family – but the precise contours of the boundary between public and private have been fluid and historically contested.¹⁹¹

Thus, it is in the tension of this fluidity where what is most cumbersome about viewing white supremacy not as an aberrant machination of evil but as an intentional religion, possessing its own liturgical structures of practice that allow its adherents to either passively or actively participate in it, with dire and deleterious consequences, projects itself twofold: First, a religion as such would not be operable officially in close proximity to the state because that would stipulate and certify the degradation and humiliation of non-white denizens, thus being, in effect, racist, limited thus by that myopic and claustal scope, thereby making the state litigiously culpable in the oppression of some of its citizenry. Second, in a liberal democratic society, it would reveal the nation that practices such a religion to be confederate with endorsing a religion (which, as I will discuss, is indeed both extant and injurious), and, moreover, not in keeping with

Laborde's innate state secularism, which is the commonly accepted view of a liberal society.

What is challenging about setting out to demonstrate white supremacy is a religion is that, in doing so, one must rejoiner a reverse anamnesis of sorts extant today, a misremembering, wherein scholars deny the existence of deliberate systems of anti-Black racism that aids the systematised religiosity of white supremacy. Next, I will examine structures of embodied living that will help substantiate the ritualistic functionality of whiteness.

Pierre Bourdieu in his *The Logic of Practice* (1990) describes this phenomenon of people's participation in practices only so much as the field of practice allows. The materiality that acts in the stead of faith is engaged as religious faith apart from and independent of actual belief on the part of the participant in the ritual. He writes:

Practical faith [that] is the condition of entry that every field tacitly imposes, not only by sanctioning and debarring those who would destroy the game, but by so arranging things, in practice, that the operations of selecting and shaping new entrants (rites of passage, examinations, etc.) are such as to obtain from them that undisputed, pre-reflexive, naïve, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field, which is the very definition of doxa.¹⁹²

Bourdieu goes onto suggest that '[p]ractical belief is not a "state of mind", still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and

doctrines (“beliefs”), but rather a state of the body. Doxa is the relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between the *habitus* and the field to which it is attuned, the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense.¹⁹³ The habitus is the comportment to and deportment within the sociological mooring (field) where one has inhabitation, substantiated by normative expressions unconsciously adopted and adapted through the process of socialisation.

On the habitus, Bourdieu writes:

The *habitus* is the principle of a selective perception of the indices tending to confirm and reinforce it rather than transform it, a matrix generating responses adapted in advance to all objective conditions identical to or homologous with the (past) conditions of its production; it adjusts itself to a probable future which it anticipates and helps to bring about because it reads it directly in the present of the presumed world, the only one it can ever know.¹⁹⁴

In Bourdieu’s work, the *habitus* and *field* work in conjunction with *capital*, while, as he explicates in his essay ‘Symbolic Capital’ the capital in discussion of the Berber peoples of North Africa and their customs and culture is not economic:

In an economy which is defined by the refusal to recognize the ‘objective’ truth of ‘economic’ practices, that is, the law of ‘naked self-interest’ and egoistic calculation, even ‘economic’ capital cannot act unless it succeeds in being recognized through a

conversion that can render unrecognizable the true principle of its efficacy. Symbolic capital is this denied capital, recognized as legitimate, that is, misrecognized as capital (recognition, acknowledgement, in the sense of gratitude aroused by benefits can be one of the foundations of this recognition) which, along with religious capital...is perhaps the only possible form of accumulation when economic capital is not recognized.¹⁹⁵

However, for my purposes here and in the ensuing monograph, capital as tied to the religion of white supremacy relative to its contiguity with capitalism is purely economic. This is because, as I shall later argue more in depth, whiteness/white supremacy is tied to capitalism, a function of the predominant political economy in the industrialised world. Bourdieu derives from Marx his analysis of capital (social, cultural, symbolic, economic). He offers some epistemic metaxology as a leeway into interpreting his use of symbolic capital as economic capital through my hermeneutical break, a turn towards Bourdieu's Marxian inspiration, here:

Whatever conscious or unconscious efforts are made to regulate the routine of the ordinary course of events through ritual stereotyping and to reduce crises by producing them symbolically or ritualizing them as soon as they arise, the archaic economy cannot escape the opposition between ordinary and extra-ordinary occasions, between regular needs, which can be satisfied by the domestic community, and the exceptional needs, both material and symbolic, for goods and services, which arise in special

circumstances economic crisis, political conflict or simply the urgency of agricultural work – and which require the voluntary assistance of a more extended group.¹⁹⁶

Since Bourdieu does not appear to prize ‘exceptional needs’ either ‘material or symbolic’, one above the other, and my purposes here are purely material, material belief, material conditions, material responses to conditions, I transpose Bourdieu’s view of ‘archaic economy’ through to being economic capital, for the sake of argument *vis-à-vis* concretising a more perfect definitional understanding of what practice is. According to Bourdieu, this is, nonetheless, the natural process of capital as an expression of habitus.

Economic and symbolic capital are so inextricably intertwined that the display of material and symbolic strength represented by prestigious affines is in itself likely to bring in material profits, in a good-faith economy in which good repute constitutes the best, if not the only, economic guarantee.¹⁹⁷

In ‘Symbolic Capital’, Bourdieu performs a case study of the Kabyle, a North African tribe of Berbers, in which he examines their various forms of capital. He is interested in how in their culture, ‘[a]ctivity is as much a duty of communal life as an economic imperative’.¹⁹⁸ According to Bourdieu, among the Kabyle, ‘[w]hat is valued is activity for its own sake, regardless of its strictly economic function, inasmuch as it is seen as appropriate to the specific function of the person who performs it’.¹⁹⁹ In this understanding of inhabiting an economy (ecology), as whiteness is an economy (ecology) of being, ‘[t]he distinction

between productive and non-productive, or profitable and non-profitable work, is unknown. It would destroy the *raison d'être* of the countless minor tasks intended to assist nature in its labour'. Here, in this economy in partnership with the natural world, the field in which practice is engaged, is what is most important, for 'the peasant does not, strictly, work, he "takes pains"'.²⁰⁰

'Give to the earth and the earth will give to you', says a proverb.

This can be taken to mean that, in accordance with the logic of gift exchange, nature gives her fruits only to those who bring her their toil as a tribute. The heretical behaviour of those who leave to the young the task of 'opening the earth and ploughing into it the wealth of the new year' provokes the older peasants to express the principle of the relationship between men and the land, which could remain unformulated so long as it was taken for granted: 'The earth no longer gives because we give it nothing. We openly mock the earth and it is only right that it should pay us back with lies.' A self-respecting man should always be busy doing something: if he cannot find anything to do, 'at least he can carve his spoon'.²⁰¹

Bourdieu claims that '[n]o one would think of assessing the technical efficiency or economic usefulness of these inseparably technical and ritual acts, the peasant's version, so to speak, of art for art's sake, such as fencing the fields, pruning the trees, protecting the new shoots from animals, or "visiting" (*asafqadh*) and watching over the fields, not to mention practices generally regarded as rites, such as actions intended to expel evil (*as'ifedh*) or to mark the coming of

spring...'²⁰² Here, the rites (with the shared etymological root as the term *ritual*, both from the Latin word *ritus*, meaning '(religious) usage' through the Latin *ritualis*) embody religious practice, activity that makes men part of an economical (ecological) group:

[A]ll the social acts which the application of alien categories would define as unproductive, such as the tasks that fall to the head of the family as the representative and leader of the group – co-ordinating the work, speaking in the men's assembly, bargaining in the market, reading in the mosque. 'If the peasant were to count', runs a proverb, 'he would not sow'.²⁰³

This inhabited sphere of the ingroup is established by behaviours considered not to inhabit 'alien categories', which are known by their unproductivity as opposed to their activity. Ritual action, therefore, becomes, along with habitus, certain behaviours emergent from one's cultural formation in the field, i.e. nature, subsumed as economism, definitive of practice. As aboriginal labour activity would not risk 'disenchanted of a natural world reduced to its economic dimension alone', I suggest that whiteness as a natural ecology and white supremacy as a conjoined practice, a concomitant of that ecology is one that will not of its own accord evade that practice out of fear of bringing ruination to its environs. Thus, Bourdieu's logic of practice could be exemplified in the following formula: [(habitus)(capital)]+field=practice. I quote Bourdieu at length:

Economism is a form of ethnocentrism. Treating pre-capitalist economies, in Marx's phrase, 'as the Fathers of the Church treated the religions which preceded Christianity', it applies to them categories, methods (economic accountancy, for example) or concepts (such as the notions of interest, investment or capital) which are the historical product of capitalism and which induce a radical transformation of their object, similar to the historical transformation from which they arose. Economism recognizes no other form of interest than that which capitalism has produced, through a kind of real operation of abstraction, by setting up a universe of relations between man and man based, as Marx says, on 'callous cash payment' and more generally by favouring the creation of relatively autonomous fields, capable of establishing their own axiomatics (through the fundamental tautology 'business is business', on which 'the economy' is based).

Economy, in this way, operates as ideology, creating its own systematics of universal relations, one that, through abstraction, distanciates its participants from its practice under the subsumption of various forms of capital, creating and subverting new social relations, supplanting previous understandings of religion towards a new philosophy of religion, one in which social relations are captive and rigidified, exclusive and circumscribed. This religious and ethnocentric character of capitalism has been forged in the cauldron of American exceptionalism.

Žižek, in his discussion of the materiality of belief evinced as religious practice, as he reads ‘the Althusserian notion of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) that designate the material existence of ideology in ideological practices, rituals, and institutions’,²⁰⁴ suggests:

Religious belief...is not merely, or even primarily, an inner conviction; but the Church is an institution and its ritual (prayers), baptism, confirmation, confession...which far from being a mere secondary externalization of the inner belief, stands for the very mechanism that generates it.²⁰⁵

Žižek here exegetes how Althusser reads Blaise Pascal, explaining how ‘how the “external” ritual performatively generates its own ideological foundation’.²⁰⁶ Here, ritual as religion is ideology, ‘[t]he externalization of some historically limited condition, the act of discerning some higher Necessity in a contingent occurrence’,²⁰⁷ ‘[t]he senseless contingency of the Real is thus “internalized”, symbolized, provided with meaning’.²⁰⁸ Ideology, thus, as ritual and religion can conceal what is contingent truth (revisable and changeable) versus what is Necessity (philosophic certainty and historical fixity). It is here that religion functions as a “regression” into ideology at the very point where [people] apparently step out of it’,²⁰⁹ ‘the point at which power inscribes itself into the body directly, bypassing ideology...’²¹⁰ Therefore, though one may not believe that one is racist, because one inhabits the ecology of white supremacy as a religion concealed by the function of ideology, and though the government itself may not believe itself to be racist, the ritualistic rigour with which it has and continues to

enact certain policies and actions (the developing of voter suppression laws [both archaic and modern], repealing Affirmative Action, etc.), chooses a racist distinction for both the self and the State. Moreover, even if one does not readily subscribe to racist policy overtly, in substance, by being confederate in systems governmentally that disenfranchise/d and marginalise/d some while exalting others, i.e. slavery, lynching, Jim Crowism and mass incarceration, there is a keeping with past commitments to racialised oppression that perpetuates itself. This mindless perpetuation of past practices is what Bourdieu (borrowed from Eric Havelock) calls *practical mimesis*:

A practical mimesis...has nothing in common with an imitation that would presuppose a conscious effort to reproduce a gesture, an utterance or an object explicitly constituted as a model...[instead][,] the process of reproduction [takes] place below the level of consciousness, expression and the reflexive distance which these presuppose...What is 'learned by the body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something one is.²¹¹

It is here that Martha Nussbaum in her book *The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis* (2018) begins to language the specific racist aggressions extant in the observed Laborde system of liberal political description, of which Vasko, quoting Massingale, suggests that there is little deliberateness and blatancy, calling this space a monarchy of fear that is filled with disgust. Yet this is the phenomenon that permits the white racist and white

supremacist policy to exist, ‘fueling what psychologists call “implicit bias” – bias that shows up on empirical tests, even though the biased person is not aware of having it’.²¹²

This procedure is what allows the white racist to avoid complicity of recognition of action, because he or she is simply acting out what has been done before him or her in a ritualised system tantamount to a religion in the ‘practical world that is constituted in the relationship with the *habitus* [a produce of history, [producing] individual and collective practices – *more* history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history], acting as a system of cognitive and motivating structures...a world of already realized ends – procedures to follow, paths to take – and of objects endowed with a “permanent teleological character”, in Husserl’s phrase, tools or institutions’.²¹³ It is what is learned in the body, which Bourdieu likens to a game:

The earlier a player enters...the less aware of the associated learning (the limiting case being, of course, that of someone born into, born with the game), the greater is his ignorance of all that is tacitly granted through his investment in the field and his interest in its very existence and perpetuation and in everything that is played for in it, and his unawareness of the unthought presuppositions that the game produces and endlessly reproduces, thereby reproducing the conditions of its own perpetuation.²¹⁴

Practice is like a game, which is likened unto the belief system that is learned and held in one’s body. The habitus as a ‘principle of a selective perception of the

indices tending to confirm and reinforce it rather than transform it, a matrix generating responses adapted in advance,²¹⁵ thus lacks, in the field of deportment, the ethical dimensions necessary to critique racist behaviour. This is why it is so easy for well-meaning white people (given an ostensive reference to 'well-meaning') to live in white supremacy as an ecology, or field of the habitus, because they have no inkling that they are doing so (and through their actions they reinforce and enliven its structures and substructures and superstructures); thus, through passive participation, they simply mimic behaviours that were generated generations long before they came to exist.

Consider how quickly Darren Wilson killed Michael Brown, firing twelve shots at him, hitting him six times, within just ninety seconds of encountering him. When he killed the unarmed Brown, with the speed of instinct, Wilson played the role of his habitus in the field of practice, no thought necessary, no theological system of beliefs needed. As one could read Pascal in *Pensées* (1670), belief arises in the metaxological realm, between the participant in the religion (white racists) and the ritual itself (white supremacy as a religion). For Pascal's rationalism, belief has a material property all its own that is embodied by action that redounds, in substance, to faith. This is not the faith that Søren Kierkegaard calls 'objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness, which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree'.²¹⁶ Rather, this is dispassionate faith, using Pascal's famous Wager, here summated thusly: 'If God exists and you do not believe you will be cast into the everlasting fires of hell. But, even if you do not really believe, what do you have

to lose by acting as though you believe? Let your actions believe for you, and what have you lost? Upon your death, or at the end of days, if God is not real, your circumstances will not have changed. If God is real, by your actions you have gained eternal glory in heaven.²¹⁷ One does not have to admit that one is racist, because one's racist actions believe for oneself, no different than rituals believing on the behalf of the participant of a religion, a point that Bourdieu affirms:

In contrast to logic, a mode of thought that works by making explicit the work of thought, practice excludes all formal concerns.

Reflexive attention to action itself, when it occurs (almost invariably only when the automatism has broken down), remains subordinate to the pursuit of the result and to the search (not necessarily perceived in this way) for maximum effectiveness of the effort expended. So it has nothing in common with the aim of explaining how the result has been achieved, still less of seeking to understand (for understanding's sake) the logic of practice, which flouts logical logic.²¹⁸

If we take Bourdieu here at face value, it can be broadly construed that practice, particularly that of ritual or rite, is not only what believes *on behalf* of a person, according to our reading of Pascal, but is done without any inherent or innate system of logics of its own. Thus, it is both unthinking and unlearned, even of its own history, of its own origin or of its own purpose for being carried out. Ritual just continues as it is, as it has been for years, for decades, for centuries.

This longevity is but a symptom of its functionality, that is, how it can conceal its religiosity and free it from all mystification and magics, restoring 'its reason and *raison d'être*, without converting it into a logical construction or spiritual exercise'.²¹⁹

To give an idea of the complexity of this network of circuits of circular causality, by the material conditions apprehended by agents endowed with schemes of perception that are themselves determined, negatively at least, by these conditions (translated into a particular form of the relations of production), it is sufficient to point out that one of the functions of rites – especially those accompanying marriage, ploughing or harvesting – is to overcome in practice the specifically ritual contradiction which the ritual taxonomy sets up by dividing the world into contrary principles and by causing the acts most indispensable to the survival of the group to appear as acts of sacrilegious violence.²²⁰

A central, unifying tenet of ritual as practice is that it embeds itself into a cultural milieu, making the religiosity of the ritual to appear not to be what it is. To maintain the practice and to obscure its harms is what ritual often does, and this explains the challenges in confronting the religion of white supremacy. The obscuring quality of ritual has its roots in its passivity of practice. The passive (benign) practices (functions) of 'bad' actors and the State to govern the populace suggests deep ideological commitments that often conceal domination. Žižek writes:

...one cannot avoid the uncanny feeling that Mussolini had read Althusser! The direct denunciation of the Fascist notion of the 'community-of-the-people' (*Volksgemeinschaft*) as a deceptive lure that conceals the reality of domination and exploitation fails to take note of the crucial fact that this *Volksgemeinschaft* was materialized in a series of rituals and practices (not only mass gatherings and parades, but also large-scale campaigns to help the hungry, organized sports and cultural activities for the workers, etc.) which performatively produced the effect of *Volksgemeinschaft*.²²¹

This practice, rooted in what Walter Benjamin called 'mythic violence', 'the fundamental violence that sustains a "normal" functioning of the state'²²² is part and parcel of beneficence as performativity, which is beneficence as fascism. Of fascism, the political theorist and political prisoner George L. Jackson held that 'fascism exists in more than one form'. He writes:

In fact, historically it has proved to have three different faces. One 'out of power' that tends almost to be revolutionary and subversive, anticapitalist and antisocialist. One 'in power but not secure' – this is the sensational aspect of fascism that we see on screen and read of in pulp novels, when the ruling class, through its instrumental regime, is able to suppress the vanguard party of the people's and workers' movement. The third face of fascism exists when it is 'in power and securely so'.²²³

If Jackson is correct, that fascism is multifaceted, though its various forms represent a state of power that is in flux, it is a political posture that is no less in power. For the fascist, insecurity is not a qualisign of powerlessness – even if it appears that the fascist is out of power, Jackson warns that he is in power through alternative means, ‘subversive, anticapitalist, and antisocialist’. This is a kind of quiet violence that conceals the normal functioning of the State and its reality of exploitation and domination. The concealment of domination at the heart of fascism is at the heart of the practice of white supremacy as a religion is what allows white people to ‘live with evil...but lie about its existence’.^{224 225}

Hughes would rather deal with the issue of racism in a *de facto* manner, when it should really be looked at in a *de jure* way. It is a perpetual transcendental monologue that does not recognise a materialist reality of winnowed economics for the American individual as a normative functioning of statecraft, especially if one is Black. Richard Rothstein makes a similar materialist argument in his well-researched text *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (2017). In it, he plays on the concepts of *de facto* and *de jure* in terms of racial segregation in the United States. *De facto* segregation is the incidental procedure of point-of-fact segregation by race, that is by chance, that is accidental, and his thesis is that most Americans believe that housing segregation is *de facto* and not *de jure* (codified and written into law) and that this intuitional and baseless belief has caused racial segregation to ossify. Rothstein maintains, however, that racial (and racist) housing segregation (that perdures in America) was highly

intentional, that it is *de jure*, that it was created and abetted by the federal government itself, decimating the economic possibility for generations of Black people since the creation of the Federal Housing Administration in 1934:

If segregation was created by accident or by undefined private prejudices, it is too easy to believe that it can only be reversed by accident or, in some mysterious way, by changes in people's hearts. But if we – the public and policy makers – acknowledge that the federal, state, and local governments segregated our metropolitan areas, we may open our minds to considering how those same federal, state, and local governments might adopt equally aggressive policies to desegregate.²²⁶

Rothstein reveals how all public institutions that continuously delimit the existential potential of Black people are strictly intentional, and he uses the housing sector as an entrée into this arena of argumentation. He finds that 'young African Americans (from thirteen to twenty-eight years old) are now ten times as likely to live in poor neighborhoods as young whites – 66 per cent of African Americans, compared to 6 percent of whites'.²²⁷

What is even more striking is how Rothstein's data (stemming from statistics of wealth generation accrual from housing equity) show that there is virtually no mobility of wealth in American society at large, that 'intergenerational wealth mobility is even less [here] than intergenerational income mobility'.²²⁸ In America, 'no matter how wealthy your parents'²²⁹ are, you indeed have a chance of landing somewhere on the national wealth distribution. However, currently,

'nearly half (41 percent) of children born to parents in the least wealthy fifth of American families remain in that lowest quintile as adults'²³⁰ and that '25 percent make it to the next-lowest quintile, meaning that only one-third of children born to the least wealthy American families make it as high as the middle quintile'.²³¹ If you are Black, this economic reality is even more dire because fewer 'than one-fourth of African American adults whose parents were in the bottom wealth quintile make it to the middle wealth quintile',²³² and almost 'twice as many (42 percent) white adults whose parents were in the lowest wealth quintile mark make it that far',²³³ a point that, like Hughes, McWhorter also denies.²³⁴

For example, Pruitt-Igoe was a housing complex in St Louis that was funded by the United States Housing Act of 1949. The act funded cities money to 'clear slums, redevelop urban space, and build affordable housing'²³⁵ for underprivileged and underserved residents. The acme of this 'housing experiment' was found in the Pruitt-Igoe complex, which was comprised of 'thirty-three towers that rose eleven stories high'.²³⁶ It was a bastion, a veritable monument to governmental architectural and economic might, but when it failed it became a perceived testament to its tenants' (mainly poor Black people's) inferiority. These tenants were made to suffer under conditions that exploited their poverty, 'making their rent and food more expensive than the mortgages and groceries paid by suburban whites',²³⁷ and their perceived failure to respond triumphally to shoddy construction and exorbitantly escalating rent costs became 'a symbol for Black pathology and a catalyst for the consolidation of white power, a consolidation achieved through zoning laws, among other things, that would

prevent the construction of other Pruitt–Igoes and protect the racial integrity of white suburbs'.²³⁸ The failure of Pruitt–Igoe, as characterised by Katharine G. Bristol, was a result of 'institutionalized economic and racial oppression'²³⁹ and it is what pushed Black people from the housing tenement to the largely white suburbs of St Louis, such as Normandy, Jennings, Wellston, Bellefontaine Neighbors and Ferguson. This Black flight caused white fright, which, in turn, predicated white flight, in which the former white residents of those areas 'moved further north but retained their control of law enforcement and municipal government in those areas',²⁴⁰ which compounded the condescension of 'white authority and myths of Black inferiority',²⁴¹ stemming from the recent perceived cultural failure of Pruitt–Igoe. It is in this environment that Michael Brown was forced to exist, which exposed him to what Nussbaum calls the monarchy of fear, in which she posits perhaps it would be fruitful for white people, and those members of society who have been otherised, marginalised by whiteness, to live together, to inhabit the same environs, to be exposed to one another as a means of ending white supremacy.

The failure of Pruitt–Igoe (which was eventually demolished in 1972) is what catapulted Michael Brown, as well as many other Black people, towards Ferguson, and they are what hurtled him towards Canfield Drive to be shot six times, killed by an officer who had sworn to protect him, his rights, his liberties, his body left humiliated there in the middle of the street for over four hours. This is what allowed Officer Wilson to live in the ecology that is white supremacy as a religion; this is what enabled him, participating in the field through his *habitus*,

within ninety seconds of arriving on the scene, to confront Michael Brown and Dorian Johnson in the street, shoot Brown six times, killing him. Wilson had been called to Canfield Drive in response to a baby having breathing problems; this is what allowed 'the police chain of command to permit Officer Wilson to go into hiding without being questioned or having to file a comprehensive written report explaining the shooting';²⁴² this is what empowered the 'Ferguson Police Chief Thomas Jackson to release a video to the press in an effort to smear the reputation of the deceased Brown';²⁴³ this is what allowed 'the chief to lie that he was required to release the video because of a Freedom of Information Act request when in fact none had been filed'; this is what led 'Ferguson and county police officers to attack demonstrators and reporters';²⁴⁴ this is what allowed 'the county prosecutor [to turn] the grand jury process into an exercise in exculpating Officer Wilson and [mount] a public relations campaign on his behalf by repeatedly leaking secret testimony';²⁴⁵ this is what made acceptable 'white people with no real factual knowledge about the incident [to collect] more than \$500,000 from sympathizers for a fund for Officer Wilson (who had been charged with no crime and made no appeal for a legal defense fund)';²⁴⁶ this is what led to the eventual Brown/Wilson case to result in a wrongful death lawsuit that was settled out of court in 2017 – a clear dearth of governmental secularism conducive to an abetted religion. This is no mere monarchy of fear, as has been supposed – this is a deliberate system of systems in which ritual becomes practice, practice becomes faith, faith becomes God, and the dreadful liturgy of white supremacy ambles on.

In the 'Appendix A' section of *The End of Race Politics*, Hughes further enumerates his concept of neoracism. He recounts how racism is not scientific, and how it would be more useful to give a serious consideration to population genetics, even though it 'is among the most controversial areas of scientific inquiry'.²⁴⁷ Hughes explains:

In chapter one, I made the following claim:

Although each of us is genetically unique (barring identical twins), each of us also belongs to clusters of similar genomes whose similarity stems from the major out-of-Africa migrations that occurred tens of thousands of years ago. These clusters are not sharply separated from one another. They overlap a great deal, and therefore the boundaries between them are blurry. Using standard statistical tools, the strength of these genome clusters can be measured.

Here I want to expand in detail on exactly what I mean, for those who are curious.²⁴⁸

While this researcher was curious about what form an amplification of his position might take, I was also disappointed, though not surprised, in the content of his elucidation. Hughes provides quantitative methods for how a neoracism could be exposed through a tiered analytical exposition of population genetics via data clusters. For his thought experiment, Hughes is concerned with data clusters using the following criteria: '(1) Does the data form clusters? (2) How

many clusters should the data be divided into? (3) How strong are the clusters?’

This quantitative thought experiment takes the form of three scenarios.

Scenario A: Imagine a room full of people. Your task is to measure their height (inches) and weight (pounds), and plot the data on an x–y coordinate graph. But here’s the twist: the only people in the room are NFL linebackers and preschool children. Your graph will contain two visible clusters that do not overlap at all.

Scenario B: Now imagine performing the same experiment, but this time the room is filled with one thousand college freshmen. Your graph will not contain any noticeable clusters. You will simply find a mess of data from the shortest and lightest at one end, to the tallest and heaviest on the other.

Scenario C: Now imagine performing the test again. This time, the room is filled with three groups: seventeen-year-olds, fifteen-year-olds, and thirteen-year-olds. When you plot the data, you faintly perceive that there are three natural clusters, but you don’t know where you would draw the line between them. The borders are messy rather than sharp. There is significant overlap.²⁴⁹

Hughes wants us to consider if ‘the data [form] clusters’, and if so ‘[h]ow strong are the clusters’,²⁵⁰ explaining that ‘[t]he answer to the final question can come in the form of a clusteredness score’²⁵¹ that will be ‘a number between 0 and 1 (though it can also be measured from –1 to 1) that represents the strength of the clusters in the data’.²⁵² He argues that, because of the ‘[sequencing] of the

human genome in 2003, [when] it became theoretically possible to apply a cluster analysis to all of humanity (or to a representative sample)',²⁵³ '[i]nstead of dealing with two variables (like height and weight), this analysis would deal with locations in the human genome that vary from individual to individual – where you might have one allele of a gene or another'.²⁵⁴ This, for Hughes, these clusters represent an ethnogenesis that 'broadly [matches] our lay concept of race',²⁵⁵ because 'researchers found...that the genomes of human beings do indeed form clusters'.²⁵⁶ For example, '[t]hey found anywhere between five, six, or seven clusters that correspond with the largest out-of-Africa migrations tens of thousands of years ago'.²⁵⁷ According to Hughes, '[w]hen they measured the strength of these clusters using a few different methods, they got numbers ranging from about 0.6 to 0.8',²⁵⁸ which 'puts humanity firmly in scenario C'.²⁵⁹ This leads Hughes to hold that, over time, 'those clusters bleed into one another significantly',²⁶⁰ meaning 'that at least hundreds of millions of us are more genetically similar to the members of *another* cluster than we are to the members of "our own" cluster'.²⁶¹

Considering Bourdieu's earlier insights on the nature of practice as ritual having no logical logic, Hughes's quantitative analysis of the relation of race to the human genome is linear in the interior syllogism of its own logics yet unconvincing in light of our earlier discussion of how history inheres on the present formulation of how race is perceived. This accounts for why Black men are instinctively seen by white people as threats²⁶² and magnetised towards their bullets simply because they are Black, and how the names of Black people

evoke among white people a sense that the Black individual is bigger, more gruesome, more terrifying and animalistic than spiders and snakes.²⁶³

This is not racism as a personal aberration of race prejudice. Recall that Darren Wilson and Michael Brown were only ten years apart in age and they were the same height, both 6'4", though Wilson, to rationalise his shooting of Brown, would go on to describe the teen as a 'demon' and 'Hulk Hogan-like'. The only appreciable characteristic that separated the two young men was that, while Brown was Black, Wilson, an actor and agent of the state, is white. In his discourse on neoracism, Hughes provides an account of traffic cameras instituted in Chicago, that cameras could not be racially biased, and that when 'it turned out that [B]lack and Hispanic drivers were receiving more tickets than white drivers',²⁶⁴ he used this example to suggest that it was dispositive of systemic racism in America. Citing thin, rare exemplars of dispassionate and rote surveillance techniques as proof of a dearth of systemic racism is the unempirical tactics of the Black conservative assimilationist, that we will later see with Sowell. It is an intellectual intuitionist goal of the assimilationist theodicist, to disregard the historical moorings of social situations.

In this subsection I tried to demonstrate a view ecstatic from Hughes's and inclusive of his view of the individuation of racism as its overarching description. According to Hughes, the neoracist '[wants] to reject the philosophy of colorblindness, but they also want to condemn the injustice of anti-[B]lack racism'.²⁶⁵ In his discourse on colorblindness, for example, Hughes suggests that

colorblindness was ‘the motivating principle behind the anti-racist activism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’.²⁶⁶ However, as I have shown in our previous chapter, the nineteenth-century Black activistic theodocists were men mindful of race, who fit squarely in what McWhorter refers to as ‘the Cult of Separatism’, and who were men that wanted their people, Black people, to be free, under a myriad of conceptualisations of freedom, liberty and race. Hughes misinterprets Garnet’s activistic theodicy by averring that the abolitionist’s goal was one of ‘common humanity’ against liberation of the *Black race*, as though Garnet was not the one who said that there are ‘Pharaohs on both sides of the blooded waters’, a clear acknowledgement of the plight of being Black-in-the-world.

Hughes claims that the neoracist ‘[endorses] a type of de facto race supremacy’,²⁶⁷ comparing the neoracist to the white supremacist, writing ‘[w]hite supremacists and neoracists might disagree about the details (who is superior and why), but they share a common racist anatomy’.²⁶⁸ Hughes’s definitional approach to racism is pure ideology, and, therefore, in my rebuttal to his neoracist concept, I showed that anti-Black racism is embodied *materially* in the individual and in the structural. Hughes’s safe employment of Ibram X. Kendi’s statements on antiracism and his refusal to engage with any Black studies scholars, whose work represents a much surer cornerstone of Black phenomenology around race matters, reveals a dearth of knowledge around how race functions in the world.

In his discourse on neoracism, Hughes enjoys quoting Martin Luther King, Jr,²⁶⁹ as though the civil rights leader was an expert or theorist on race matters.

He also, as I have noted, chooses to quote Robin DiAngelo, as though she is a thinker that the swath of Black studies scholars, from Africana philosophers to Black theologians, would consider to be a bastion of thought around race. Outside of a misuse of Henry Highland Garnet, where he tries to suggest that Garnet's motivation was to move towards a colourblind society and that it was not to liberate his Black people, Hughes never does cite any Black thinker of any regard: no Fanon, no Césaire, no Newton, no Ture, no Garvey, no Cruse, no Wynter, no Spillers, no Wilderson, no Moten, no Curry, no Haywood, no West, no Anderson, no Harris (Leonard), no Williams (Eric), no Robinson, no Rodney, no Du Bois, no Kelley, not any remarkable scholar of race that has had any discernible influence on the philosophical foundation of Black studies in the past century. This represents an assimilationist affinity for Western civilisational authorship on racism and a dismissal of a non-integrationist approach to Black thought. Therefore, when Hughes claims that the 'neoracist road leads to a grim world in which whites and minorities eternally swap the roles of the oppressor and the oppressed',²⁷⁰ he is describing a world that is unrecognisable to me. In what world have Black Americans, for example, developed traditions that returned an 'eye for an eye' for the wrongs done them for centuries by white Americans? In American history, there has yet to be formed a Black equivalent of the Ku Klux Klan.

In this chapter, I chose to give explanations of whiteness and white supremacy as a singular ritual, and racism as a technology of whiteness/white supremacy towards biopolitical subordination and statecraft. In a move like

Sowell's where he describes American slavery for anti-Black racism,²⁷¹ Hughes describes neoracism as being responsible for the continuation of racism in the body politic. Yet, instead of describing modes of being 'committed to race supremacy',²⁷² as Hughes suggests his neoracist is, I attempted to describe the contours of whiteness as it exists in a singular practice with white supremacy.²⁷³ For Hughes, as for other Black conservatives—each functioning as an assimilationist theodist—disagreements with their rhetoric have rarely been attributable to variations in the operationalisation of quantitative metrics as evidentiary mechanisms for the extrapolation or validation of the ideological claims. For example, Hughes noting of his analysis, for example, that '[b]ecause this cluster analysis has so many variables, the math is more complicated in practice'.²⁷⁴ Rather, in the main, it is their underemployment of qualitative data, i.e. a systematic and reasonable apprehension of how to read history aright, which I have attempted to argue is fuelled by their rationalism, that has been a point of disagreement for this researcher.

3.4d. Thomas Sowell and the Black Redneck: The Problem of Misreading History and Culture

A former contributor to the conservative thinktank the Heritage Foundation, one of the most prominent public policy organisations in America and publisher of Project 2025, a 920-page, far-right mandate for President Donald Trump, whose column was 'the first to syndicate him',²⁷⁵ Thomas Sowell, who contributed articles for the Creators Syndicate imprint of the Heritage Foundation for 'a quarter of a century',²⁷⁶ has been instrumental to the development of twenty-first

century neoconservative conceptions of race matters through modes of racial escapism, majoring in mendacity with facts. While eight pages form the 'References' section of McWhorter's *Losing the Race*, eighty pages of *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* is devoted to notes, index and bibliographic information for a collection of essays that reads like a veritable playbook on how white culture absconds any culpability in the creation of pernicious systems that have perdured since the Age of Europe (1492–1945), and persist in causing the sufferings of Black people. As introduced in his first chapter, Sowell's theodicean position is ensconced in his epistemological commitment to the view that Black people who suffer social perils the most, whom he refers often to as 'ghetto blacks', are the sole proprietors of their sufferings. The thesis of his book can be found in the following statement issued at the beginning of the first chapter:

Southern whites not only spoke the English language in very different ways from whites in other regions, their churches, their roads, their homes, their music, their education, their food, and their sex lives were all sharply different from those of other whites. The history of this redneck or cracker culture is more than a curiosity. It has contemporary significance because of its influence on the economic and social evolution of vast numbers of people – millions of blacks and whites – and its continuing influence on the lives and deaths of a residual population in America's black ghettos which has still not completely escaped from that culture.²⁷⁷

In this section, Sowell proceeds in his theodicean worldbuilding from the ideology that it is the ghettoised Black person and they alone among the array of Americans who has not evolved beyond what he calls 'redneck culture'. Sowell claims that '[m]ore is involved here than a mere parallel between [B]lacks and Southern whites. What is involved is a common subculture that goes back for centuries, which has encompassed everything from ways of talking to attitudes toward education, violence and sex – and which originated not in the South, but in those parts of the British Isles from which white Southerners came.'²⁷⁸

This rigid thetic belief contours the central and unifying position of each of the major claims of his text: (1) Black people have received a facinorous and invidious culture from early poor white immigrants from the British Isles. While the descendants of these early whites have doffed this 'cracker culture', Black people have clung to its modes of being and adulated its baseless beneficence at their own peril;²⁷⁹ (2) As a minority of the populace, Black people are without excuse for their socioeconomic laggings when ethnic Jews have been reviled across Europe through generations as petit bourgeois middlemen and still have gained material success;²⁸⁰ (3) The plaintive decrying of Black people about the evils of the Mid-Atlantic Slave Trade (1526–1867) is unfounded and inconsistent because Western European nations were but engaging in a centuries-old practice of enslaving other groups as nearly every other culture has in history, and that not focusing on slavery as a world historical phenomenon that perdures to the present suggests the presence of a victim mentality and a dearth of appreciation among Black people for the West ending (in *de jure* fashion) a time-

honoured though insidious tradition;²⁸¹ (4) Drawing homologies to white America (and the larger Western civilisation) and its centuries of chattel slavery of Africans, Germans, because of the cumulative merit of their storied and glorious history, should not be relegated to the one aberrant moment of their national chronology, that is, Hitler, Nazism and the Third Reich, when the crop of the Germanic timeline has been one of peace, justice and prosperity;²⁸² (5) White liberals and the Black intelligentsia seize on school racial segregation under Jim Crow engendering the regressionism of laze and complacency among Black people through the forced integration incipient of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), where, since, Black people have achieved much less in education, economics, and culture;²⁸³ (6) Scottish and Japanese cultures emblazon examples for Black people of the verity and expedience of assimilationism, these cultures having humbled and submitted themselves before superior cultures (white English and white American, respectively) and, thus, learning from these superior cultures, have met or surpassed them in education, economics and technology.²⁸⁴

According to Sowell, before the Scottish Enlightenment (1739–1790), the period at the end of the European Enlightenment where the Lowlands of Scotland saw revolutionary, world-changing advancements in science and technology, education and economics, literacy and quality of life, white immigrants in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries began to arrive *en masse* in the land that would soon become known as America. These immigrants were often poor and uneducated, missing the educational and

economic reforms of the Scottish Enlightenment by just a few decades. Consequently, these unenlightened white immigrants from the British Isles, who emerged mostly from Ulster County (present-day Northern Ireland), Wales, Northern England and the Scottish Highlands, brought with them a distinct culture that developed into what Sowell refers to as 'cracker culture' or 'redneck culture'. This redneck culture settled in the Southern colonies, removed from the more educated and pious culture of the Puritan Northern colonies. It was an uneducated and unsophisticated culture of the 'advertising of one's willingness to fight and even to put one's life on the line', as an 'at least plausible means of gaining whatever measure of security was possible in a lawless region and a violent time'.²⁸⁵ Sowell maintains that this 'rough and tumble' yet indolent culture was common among Southern whites from the 1700s through the late 1800s. To illustrate the exigent and virulent nature of this redneck culture, a culture that emerged from a people who lagged far behind others whence they came, as those from the Scottish Highlands lagged behind those from Edinburgh and the Lowlands,²⁸⁶ Sowell gives the following account of a fight that took place between two rednecks in the antebellum South: 'A crowd gathered and arranged itself in an impromptu ring. The contestants were asked if they wished to "fight fair" or "rough and tumble". When they chose "rough and tumble", a roar of approval rose from the multitude.'²⁸⁷

While he admits that 'only circumstantial evidence is possible on the connection between cultural characteristics of Southern rednecks or crackers in the past and those ghetto [B]lacks today',²⁸⁸ Sowell's characterisation of white

redneck culture as violent, virulent and voracious is homologous to what he calls Black redneck culture. Black redneck culture is that segment of the Black populace that refuses to assimilate to broader forms of evolved white culture *qua* American culture writ large. It can be observed in the hip-hop street ethic of rappers and Black folk living in the so-called 'inner-city', who, producing no culture of their own, simply '[echo] the violence, arrogance, loose sexuality, and self-dramatization common for centuries in white redneck culture',²⁸⁹ in the urban centres of the United States throughout its history, a pernicious culture of those who are lagging behind the dominant and redemptive and evolved culture of white America. 'Lagging behind' as a term is thematic for Sowell, in terms of constructing his theodicy of Black suffering *vis-à-vis* Black people's unwillingness to assimilate into the hedge of protection of white culture, and it vivifies his understanding of Black people and their suffering.

Sowell, here, stipulates that the lowest part of culture should be representative of the whole (McWhorter, in his castigation of ghetto Black people and culture, has a chapter of his text titled 'How Can We Save the African-American Race?'). As Sowell posits, 'Racism was the result, not a cause, of slavery'.²⁹⁰ He explains that, while slavery existed as a peculiar institution for thousands of years, in the American context, where there was a constitutive governmental Declaration of Independence that proclaimed that all men were created equal, 'the only way to justify slavery was by depicting those enslaved as not fully men'.²⁹¹ Therefore, according to Sowell, '[a] particularly virulent form of racism thus arose from a particularly desperate need to defend slavery against

telling attacks that invoked the principles of the American republic'.²⁹² Thus, during the period of American slavery, when '[the] small number of [B]lacks who were free in colonial times were joined [in the North] over the generations by increasing numbers of [B]lacks who were either released from bondage or who escaped on their own',²⁹³ this new, growing and 'largely unacculturated population – "fugitives in the rough", in the words of [B]lack historian Carter G. Woodson – in Northern cities during the first half of the nineteenth century brought both social barriers and discriminatory laws barring [B]lack children from schools and [B]lack adults from equal access to public accommodations'.²⁹⁴ ²⁹⁵

Though Sowell quotes from his text *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (1915), Woodson, who writes in another text *A Century of Negro Migration* (1918), that '[r]ace prejudice [is] the fatal weakness of the Americans',²⁹⁶ would not agree with Sowell's theodicy, which suggests that Black people are the cause of their own social ills. His theodicy will not allow Sowell to properly make use of Woodson, a scholar who clearly states the reason for the aforesaid 'increasing numbers of Blacks' from the South to the North was to escape the 'terrorism and lynching considered necessary in the South to keep the Negroes down',²⁹⁷ that '[t]he maltreatment of the Negroes will be nationalized by this exodus',²⁹⁸ and that 'poor whites of both sections [North and South] will strike at this race long stigmatized by servitude but now demanding economic equality'.²⁹⁹ Woodson, whom Sowell quotes to solidify his epistemic commitment to exonerating white people of Black suffering, while condemning Black people for their immiseration,

describes this Great Migration (1910–1970) as a result of trenchant violence visited upon southern Black people by southern white people.

Yet Sowell, purposive to his pursuit of a traditional theodicy, of a people decrying bad things happening to them instead of being activist in their liberation, which Black people have been, formulates here through his misuse of Woodson's scholarship an epistemology of the racial escapism of mendacity, using facts to excuse the malice of the racialising ingroup, in this case, white people. *Black Rednecks* is a text that quotes early Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier and far-right conspiracy theorist and recently convicted felon Dinesh D'Souza in the same chapter. Sowell goes to great and ironic lengths to grant irenic escapism to white people and white culture from any culpability in the sufferings of Black people. He makes the following *pro tanto* argument for the irremediableness of the redneck cultural artefact of lynching while excusing white people for this insidious behaviour:

The violence for which white Southerners became most lastingly notorious was lynching. Like other aspects of the redneck and cracker culture, it has often been attributed to race or slavery. In fact, however, most lynching victims in the antebellum South were white. Economic considerations alone would prevent a slaveowner from lynching his own slave or tolerating anyone else's doing so. It was only after the Civil War that the emancipated [B]lacks became the principal targets of lynching. But, by then, Southern vigilante violence had been a tradition for more than a century in North

America and even longer back in the regions of Britain from which crackers and rednecks came, where “retributive justice” was often left in private hands”. Even the burning cross of the Ku Klux Klan has been traced back to “the fiery cross of old Scotland” used by feuding clans.³⁰⁰

Never mind that following Reconstruction from 1877 to 1950 over 6,000 Black men, women, and children were summarily executed in lynchings by white American citizens throughout the United States for no other reason than that they were Black. Sowell would rather soften the misdeeds of white culture to express a theodicy filled with facts and factual penury, explaining away the brunt of brutality with the false equivalencies of racial escapism. The majority race of America (white) murdering *en masse* members of that majority race via summary public executions does not equate to them murdering masses of the minority race (Black), because in one instance the matter of race is present and in the other instance it is absent. Sowell wonders if ‘the advancements of [B]lacks are helped or hindered by redneck culture’.³⁰¹ That white redneck culture has become Black redneck culture suggests that Black people are too pathological in their sociology to develop their own unique cultural mores and artefacts, and too hebetudinous to break away from that which so easily besets them. The weak (sociological) assimilationist view is theodicean because it blames Black people for their suffering, yet renders them incapable of forging paths of redemption for themselves thus making them a feckless, listless genre of people subject to the invisible hand of the judgement of bad things happening to them. Assimilationist

theodicy, then, is a synecdochical rendering of culture where one part, the worst part, represents the whole, and this is the site of pathology.

Sowell writes an explanation of historical fact but fails to include why Black people left the South to begin with. In addition to escaping the vitiating feudal system of sharecropping, a primary reason that Black people escaped the South is that they were being terrorised, not by other Black people, but by white people who were killing them by their thousands, not due to their ghetto culture, but because they were Black. By neglecting these historical data, Sowell negates the negatives of white culture by neglecting to cite how a mass of white people of the southern states of America lynching Black people is indicative of a pathology of whiteness and white culture. Weak assimilationism is a philosophy of religion that robs Black people of their autonomy while making them responsible for all that ails them. This process can be seen in how Sowell extends the racial escapism of white culture from lynching traditions to policing practices as he makes the following motion:

When the police arrive on a scene of crime or violence in black communities, whatever they do is likely to be categorized later as either having let the situation get out of hand or as having used excessive force. Any force sufficient to prevent the situation from getting out of hand is almost certain to be called excessive force by white liberals in the media so that – by definition – the police will have acted badly, no matter what they did or failed to do.³⁰²

Yet police act badly towards Black people because they are engaged in a

centuries-old practice that has no interior logics, that the logic of practice flouts logical logic, that practical logic is a logic in itself without conscious reflection or logical control, a contradiction in terms.³⁰³ This helps explain why it was so easy on the night of 6 July 2024, for Officer Sean Grayson of the Sangamon County Sheriff's Office to shoot and kill Sonya Massey, a thirty-six-year-old Black woman, in her home near Springfield, Illinois. In the moment in which Massey called Grayson to her home because she thought that it had been invaded, two theodicies were at work: one theodicy pathologised the Black body, thus making it beholden to the whim and wont of phenomena, and the other theodicy was activist, a self-determinant philosophy of religion that rebuked the former in the name of Jesus.³⁰⁴ This dialectic saw the former theodicy, that most associable with a traditional theodicy of bad things (just) happening to good people, win out, with Massey being victimised.

Therefore, the theodicy that I propose, a theodicy of liberation, is not complicated by the fact that, for example, Michael Brown was not a saint. Unarmed and untried, his unsaintliness did not warrant his killing. On 9 August 2014, in another, earlier instance of a white police officer killing an unarmed Black person, when the eighteen-year-old Brown is gunned down, he is alleged to have reached for Officer Darren Wilson's service weapon. This allegation has often been the basis for the justification of Wilson shooting Brown. He deserved to die because he reached for an officer's gun during his pending arrest. As a philosopher, I deal with concepts in the world of ideas, hold them in tension, formulate a synthetism, a convincing outcome that raises questions perhaps not

before considered. This concept that Brown's death was his deserts because he reached for Wilson's gun has always eluded me. Here is a teenager, a young man, by all accounts a lovable prince of his neighbourhood who also had roguish proclivities towards criminal activity. The day he and his friend Dorian Johnson were confronted in the street by Wilson, who had been called to the suburb of Ferguson, Missouri to investigate an infant struggling to breathe, Brown is said to have robbed a local convenience store. Does this act, unbeknownst to Wilson at the time, who, acting on behalf of Emerson's transcendental American State from Chapter 1, shot Brown six times, call for an unarmed man's summary execution? This is how Emerson sees theodicy in relation to culture: culture for him as ever aiding the human in the efflorescence of his being.

In 'Prudence' (1838), one of his lectures on human culture, 'treating successively higher states of the soul',³⁰⁵ to be paired with his lectures 'Heroism' (1838) and 'The Over Soul' (1838), Emerson, like Sowell, too describes culture as active in its influence, yet not oppressive in its wake. He writes, for example: 'Those who have listened to the preceding lectures of this Course will have perceived that their burden has been that all right steps in Human Culture are made by listening to the voice of the Eternal in the heart of the Individual.'³⁰⁶ Emerson, the rationalist transcendentalist, believed that culture works in tandem with the human subject to uplift and beatify the human being, that culture 'does not exist for itself but has a symbolic character'.³⁰⁷ This symbolic character of culture, immense and immanent, for Emerson, is but for the *telos* of making humankind better. He avers in his lecture: 'But culture revealing to man the high

origin of all this apparent world, Culture aiming ever at the perfection of the Man himself as the end, imperiously demands that conveniences of every sort, even health and bodily life, shall not be sought for themselves, but in a rigid subordination to the higher nature.³⁰⁸ This transcendental view of culture is idyllic but unlike hegemonic culture, which deigns to be inevitable in its iterations, it is draconian in its demands and abstracted from criticism. The human soul is the only force in the world that is constant, that has eternity and that exists immortally. However, Brown's unfitted genre of being, his Black body, precluded the possibility of his living into Emerson's theodicy. In truth, he was dead when he woke up that morning.³⁰⁹

The problem of evil, in this sense, is not justificatory, purificatory or rectificatory,³¹⁰ not explanatory of a theodicy of cataphatic colonial dogmas regaling the sufferings of sinners as being perfecting processes of refinement through fiery encumbrances. Rather, undue suffering is a mere matter of refusing assimilation, of not entering under the hedge of protection of white culture *vis-à-vis* Western civilisation. Sowell, who attempts to edulcorate and sanitise the brutality of the irruptive processes of colonialism, euphemistically referring to the colonised nations of the world, imperialised from the metropolises of Europe, not as colonies but as 'European offshoot nations',³¹¹ underestimates the role of violence as it relates to power and how the violence of colonial power shaped the political economy of the known world. This view is reflective of Burkean conservatism, which 'came to symbolize relatively vague concepts, such as hostility to constitutional change (including the critique of abstract ahistorical

thought in politics, and the need for balance in the constitution), and support for private property, religion, historicism, and the organic nature of society'.³¹² Because of an upholding of a Burkean 'authority of tradition' under conservatism, however, the historicism conservatives engage in is one that stipulates that while one cannot apply today's standard to the past, through the authority of traditionalism, one can apply the past's standard to today. This process is one of historical sanitisation, one that is incapable of denouncing the harms of European colonisation because that would mean being critical of a foundational aspect of Western civilisation. Sowell writes the following, attempting to escape white Europeans of the West of any culpability for the suffering of the Global South:

The stark contrast between the slave and the free which made slavery a moral issue in the Western world in modern times was simply not there for most societies and for most of history in most of the world. In hierarchical societies, where people were born into their stations in life, ranging through many gradations from royalty to bondage, slavery was simply the bottom rung on a ladder based on the accident of birth – one notch below the serf, who was bought and sold with the land, instead of individually.³¹³

Here, Sowell recounts the increasing distaste for slavery, for example, that became 'common throughout Western civilisation – and only in Western civilization'³¹⁴ at the end of the nineteenth century, while failing to mention King Leopold II of Belgium and his excursion into the heartlands of Africa to plunder ivory, only to settle for rubber tree plants, goring the limbs of native Congolese

when they failed to meet production quotas.^{315 316} This horror enacted by a European power was a confluence of slavery and colonialism and it was an exemplar of the civilising (assimilating) mission of Western civilisation. Sowell explains how ‘attempts to abolish slavery in the non-Western world provoked armed uprisings within the Ottoman Empire’.³¹⁷

In the final movement of *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*, Sowell suggests that ‘lagging’ cultures should humble themselves and submit themselves before the superior culture. He cites Scottish and Japanese cultures as examples of this assimilation process. He tells of how after centuries of warring ‘the English invaded Scotland – first the lowlands and then the highlands’, ‘[conquering] Scotland both militarily and culturally’.³¹⁸

Scots ‘were conscious to a painful degree of their backwardness, their poverty, their lack of polish, their provinciality’. Scots began to speak English, usually with a heavy accent. A society ‘for promoting the reading and speaking of the English language’ was formed, and lectures on the subject drew hundreds, including James Boswell. Even such an intellectual giant as David Hume took lessons in English pronunciation and he warned fellow Scots against using peculiarly Scottish expressions, a warning repeated both in his letters and in *Scots Magazine*.³¹⁹

Poco a poco, little by little, the Scots, by reason of their crushing military defeats against the English, began to conform to English ways of being in the world. They sacrificed many aspects of their culture to assimilate to the culture that

dominated them – no matter how many of their number were killed, no matter how their customs were reviled by their captors, no matter the potential of their collective identity being lost. They sunk their singularity into the abyss of domination. 'Back in Scotland', Sowell writes, 'lowland Scots copied the English and highland Scots copied the lowland Scots. Scottish farmers even used an English plow that was completely unsuitable for the soil of Scotland.'³²⁰ But Sowell holds that it is this assimilationist theodicy, this descriptive and prescriptive response to the bad things happening and therefrom consigning one's dominated culture to the culture of the dominating, was necessary from a strictly evolutionary, materialist conception of history, mechanical, dispassionate and callous. Its non-consequentialist means-to-an-end epistemology excuses the violence and plunder of domination for the patina of progress. An adoption of the maintenance of practice, practice as religion, would see the annihilation of the dominated culture towards what Haywood would call 'the monopolist drive for world mastery'.³²¹

Sowell, however, does not mind hitching his wagon to brutality if it means achievement. For the Scots, when 'the spread of the English language, beginning in the lowlands, opened a whole new world of literature in numerous fields',³²² '[e]ducation [in these indigenous Gaelic speakers] caught on so widely...that they had compulsory education before England did and developed the most extensive system of schools in Europe'.³²³ The end of the beginning of the powerful Tokugawa Shogunate's mandate of 1636 that saw the destruction of seafaring ships, and from '1638 to 1868, emigration from Japan was forbidden, on pain of

death, and foreigners and foreign trade and foreign cultures were kept out'.³²⁴

According to Sowell, it was when the American 'Commodore Matthew Perry entered Japanese waters in 1854 and demanded that Japan open its ports to the outside world'³²⁵ that this era in Japan's history came to an end. Japan's helplessness before the might of American warships meant that its 'weakness and backwardness, before its own people and before the world', could only be curtailed by assimilating into the culture that dominated them:

Japan's leaders in that era held up the West in general, and the United States in particular, as examples to be emulated. Western technology was imported and Japanese students were sent to study in the West. The English language began to be taught in Japanese schools and there was even a suggestion at one point that English be made the national language of Japan. Textbooks issued by the Japanese government held up Abraham Lincoln and Benjamin Franklin as models for the young to imitate, even more so than Japanese heroes.³²⁶

The resultant of this submission to humiliation of the Japanese was that 'a century later, Japan would produce its own "bullet train" that surpassed anything available in the United States'.³²⁷ To Sowell, this was possible only because 'the Japanese recognized their own initial backwardness and were determined to overcome it'.³²⁸ However, Japan's determination to overcome their backwardness did not emerge from within, but Sowell celebrates that it was based in a theodicy

of assimilationism that looked outside itself for answers to ameliorate its own social ills.

When Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) the hortatory plea to the African diaspora to entrust the destinies of our countries to the Europeans, that ‘they will do a better job than the best of us’, that ‘if we want humanity to take one step forward, if we want to take it to another level than the one where Europe has placed it, then we must innovate, we must be pioneers’,³²⁹ he is calling for a new human being to emerge by the might of self-determination. Sowell would have submission after humiliation, conformity after ignominy, an anti-humanist theodicy. He never ceases to provide the white European a way of escape, giving just one line of text about the imperialist conquest of the world executed by European powers, before he promptly submits the rationalisation that all prominent colonisers had been invaded external nation(s) at some point:

While European imperialism has been dominant in the past 500 years, in the preceding centuries Europe was itself subjected to foreign conquests. It was invaded from Asia by the Mongols to whom the Russians paid tribute. It was invaded from the East by the Ottoman Empire, whose armies reached the gates of Vienna in the sixteenth century. Europe was invaded by North Africa and the whole Iberian peninsula was subjugated for centuries by the Moors. There was nothing peculiarly European about either conquering or being conquered – or about changing from one of these roles to the other in the course of history.³³⁰

This statement falls flat in contrast, for example, to Walter Rodney's materialist analysis of the British crusade against world systems of slavery. Rodney writes 'The British took special self-righteous delight in putting an end to Arab slave trading, and in deposing rulers on the grounds that they were slave traders. However, in those very years, the British were crushing political leaders in Nigeria, like Jaja and Nana, who had by then ceased the export of slaves, and were concentrating instead on products like palm oil and rubber.'³³¹ I contend that Sowell's assimilationist epistemology – conceived as a form of theodicy – operates through a rationalist framework grounded in spiritualism or immaterialism, which ultimately impedes his capacity to interpret historical data accurately. Sowell's failure to engage with what Walter Rodney identifies as the epoch of slavery – a period inextricably linked to capitalism as its enabling structure – reveals a critical lack of differentiation. This omission precludes Sowell from advancing a materialist and historically rigorous account of the ways in which past events continue to shape contemporary social suffering.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter has interrogated the assimilationist epistemologies advanced by contemporary Black conservative thinkers – McWhorter, Sowell and Hughes – each of whom frames Black suffering through distinct yet convergent rationalist paradigms. For McWhorter, the persistence of racial grievance constitutes a self-fulfilling prophecy, reifying oppression through what he terms 'Victimology'. For Sowell, white liberal interventions in race politics from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century disrupted Black cultural development, producing a decline

he interprets as symptomatic of 'Black redneck' pathology. Hughes, by contrast, laments the failure of colourblind idealism to take root, arguing that sustained attention to race has entrenched racism within the body politic. Despite their differences, these positions share a common commitment to assimilationist theodicy – a framework that locates suffering in cultural deficiency rather than structural domination.

Such theodicies operate as instruments of reactionary biopolitical control. Victimology castigates dissent as pathological; neoracism reframes systemic racialisation as mere prejudice; and Sowell's 'Black redneck' thesis pathologises the cultural margins while occluding the structural violence of white nationalism, economic precarity and carceral expansion. Sowell, in particular, emerges as the archetypal assimilationist theodacist: a figure whose intellectual trajectory – from Jim Crow North Carolina to the Hoover Institution – culminates in a rationalist idealism that extols Western civilisation while disavowing materialist analyses of racial capitalism. His failure to account for the political economy of Black dispossession – deindustrialisation, austerity, punitive urban policy and mass incarceration – renders his account not merely incomplete but disingenuous.

Sowell, for me, represents the archetypal assimilationist conservative Black theodacist, much as Crummell stands as the prototypical exceptionalist, and at times assimilationist, conservative Black theodacist. Both exemplify how rationalism and idealism function as petit bourgeois philosophies of governance, designed for management, subordination and domination, as noted in Chapter 1 through James's critique of Christian humanism.

Despite access to extensive historical data, Sowell's rendering of Black suffering bears the mark of disingenuity. Writing in the early 2000s, had his analysis been materialist rather than rationalist-idealist, he might have acknowledged the structural transformations that devastated Black communities: between 1970 and 1987, Black male employment in industrial sectors plummeted from 70 per cent to 28 per cent; during the Reagan era, federal funding for drug abuse programmes fell from \$274 million to \$57 million, and education funding from \$14 million to \$3 million.³³² These cuts paved the way for accelerated underdevelopment under Clinton, who in 1994 slashed \$17 billion from public housing – a 61 per cent reduction – while allocating \$19 billion to prison construction, a staggering 171 per cent increase.³³³ These policies entrenched what Foucault terms the 'carceral circle', and what Michelle Alexander later theorised as a racial 'undercaste'.³³⁴

For Sowell, the Black American emerges as a hapless *tabula rasa*, absorbing the worst of white culture while eschewing its purported virtues, thereby producing no redeemable cultural artefacts of its own. His prescription is assimilation: Black people must adopt the norms of white culture to escape suffering – lynching, socioeconomic discrimination, apartheid, health disparities, high mortality rates and police violence. In this respect, Sowell's posture recalls Zophar the Naamathite in the Book of Job,³³⁵ the paradigmatic text of traditional theodicy. Job, the righteous man of Uz, loses his children, wealth and health after God permits Satan to test his fidelity by removing the 'hedge of protection'. Job's three friends – Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar – visit him, each articulating a distinct

theodic logic: Eliphaz imputes sin to Job (Job 4, 15, 22); Bildad implicates his kin (Job 8, 18, 25); and Zophar exhorts repentance as the sole path to restoration (Job 11, 20). Zophar's insistence that suffering signals estrangement from divine providence mirrors Sowell's assimilationist theodicy: both construe suffering as self-inflicted and prescribe conformity – whether to God's law or to white cultural norms – as the condition for relief. Like Satan's accusation and Zophar's confirmation, Sowell imputes culpability to the oppressed, disavowing structural violence while demanding cultural capitulation.

The continuity between Sowell and Crummell underscores a regressive arc in Black thought: from nineteenth-century exceptionalism to twenty-first-century assimilationism, both grounded in rationalist metaphysics that valorise Western norms while subordinating Black working-class realities. These frameworks, like Dugald Stewart's monogenist ethnology, eschew ontological claims of racial inferiority, yet reinscribe sociological hierarchies through prescriptions of 'civilization'. A professor at the University of Edinburgh, Stewart was a leader in the pseudoscientific aesthetic theory of ethnology, a branch of anthropology that was a rationalistic procedure of racialising differently bodied human beings, as we discussed in §3 of Chapter 2. Stewart was not a polygenist ethnologist, that is, one who believed that each race had originated from different species of humans, a view that would become increasingly popular among enslavers in the Americas in the nineteenth century, some of whom would be inspired by Stewart. Rather, Stewart was a monogenist ethnologist, meaning that he believed that humankind descended from a single human ancestry.

To Stewart, 'Africans were inferior to Europeans because they were less civilised, or "savage", but that this could be altered with time and assistance'.³³⁶ Taking inspiration from his fellow ethnologist Samuel Stanhope Smith, a president of Princeton University, and 'his idea that "field slaves" in America retained their native customs and character longer, while "Domestic Slaves [...] see more of polish[ed] life & are better informed" and therefore became civilised and even started to more closely resemble Europeans',³³⁷ Stewart '[repeated] some of the harshest verdicts of his contemporaries on non-European races, and especially Africans, by propagating their ideas about racial inferiority, while noting that they could eventually rise to the level of Europeans through "civilisation"'.³³⁸

This line of reasoning sounds much like the Black conservative assimilationist theodicians of the twenty-first century, who, never making ontological claims of Black inferiority, make sociological and cultural claims of it, thus hastening a need for adopting formulations of Western civilisation into their social milieu to avoid sufferings. In this sense, Black conservative theodicies replicate the logic of ethnological assimilationism, positing cultural conformity as the price of liberation. Against this backdrop, the chapter has advanced an anti-rationalist critique, exposing assimilationism as an elitist and empirically untenable posture that perpetuates undue suffering under the guise of progress. This critique prepares the ground for the constructive task ahead: articulating a liberationist theodicy capable of resisting imperial grammars and grounding freedom in non-domination rather than cultural mimicry. In addition to Sowell's examples of the Scots and Japanese submitting themselves culturally and

economically to superior nations, McWhorter, for example, calls for hybridicity with whites over tribalism in order for Black people to progress,³³⁹ suggesting that ‘cultural hybridization...under any name...is as inevitable as it is marvelous.’³⁴⁰ For McWhorter, in order for Black Americans to be saved sociologically (educationally and culturally) and economically, they must run into the hedge of protection of Western civilisation and assimilate.

Therefore, the next chapter will further demonstrate that exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicies have always constituted a false dichotomy, obscuring a third and enduring alternative within Black American intellectual history: liberationist theodicy. Drawing on Harry Haywood’s rhetoric of self-determination in *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question* (1958), I will advance liberation theodicy as a conceptual and political framework that repudiates parasymphetic assimilationism and integrationism, even when assimilationism masquerades under the dialectical guise of exceptionalism, as in nineteenth-century formulations. Liberation theodicy calls for a radical psychical and political rupture from the economic world-system of American capitalism, rejecting the metaphysics of progress and the rationalist idealism that have historically underwritten both exceptionalist and assimilationist projects. In so doing, it seeks to reconfigure theodicy as a praxis of non-domination rather than a theology of accommodation.

¹ Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 78.

² James Arthur Holmes, *Black Nationalism and Theodicy: A Comparison of the Thought of Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner* (Boston: Boston University, 1997), 69.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 69–70.

⁹ Ibid, 70.

¹⁰ Ibid, 163.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 164.

¹³ Ibid, 167.

¹⁴ Ibid, 168.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 165.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, 147.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 148.

²³ Ibid, 146.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 137.

²⁶ Ibid, 145.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 158.

²⁹ Alexander Crummell and J. R. Oldfield, 'The Need of New Ideas and New Aims for a New Era.' In *Civilization and Black Progress: Selected Writings of Alexander Crummell on the South* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 50.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Holmes, 121.

³⁶ Ibid, 123.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on Religious and Cultural Criticism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 52–3.

⁴⁰ Crummell, 128.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1990), 202.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 14.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Crummell, 125.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 123.

⁵⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1888* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), 692–3.

⁵⁵ Holmes, 153.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 152.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 68.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 69.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 77.

⁶¹ Emily Jones, 'Conservatism, Edmund Burke, and the Invention of a Political Tradition, c. 1885–1914', *Historical Journal* 58, no. 4 (2015): 1138.

⁶² Foucault, 75.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Jones, 1132.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 1116.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 1138.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 1130.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid, 1135.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, 1130.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 1132.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 1139.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 1134.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 1135.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 1134.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ In his text, Hughes does briefly consider the rise of irreligiosity around limited Christianity among 'liberal white Americans and young [B]lack Americans' in his analysis of what he calls 'neoracism', in which he suggests that 'the resulting vacuum has given neoracism – a far more racially divisive ideology – a place to settle' (Hughes 104–5).

⁸² While Sowell, one of Hughes's paragons, for example, does not divorce understandings of race from a racialised people's culture, Hughes (2024) makes this distinction (124), which I would argue is picayunish and unconvincing.

⁸³ Of separatism, McWhorter, for example, explicitly writes 'Separatism is a direct product of Victimology. The sense that whites are an eternally hostile presence has encouraged a conception of [B]lack America as a sovereign entity...Separatism may appear to be a simple matter of self-protection, but in practice it narrows horizons, holding [B]lacks back from being the best that they can be. Briefly stated, Separatism both concretely and metaphorically keeps [B]lack people in the ghetto' (McWhorter 2000, 51). What McWhorter fails to acknowledge is that it is very possible, for example, for a Black scholar to be familiar with the Western canon, and still hold politically separatist views. McWhorter is more concerned about 'white eyes', which sees 'Separatism [as] parochial' (McWhorter 2000, 212). He writes: 'Separatism starts as a healthy reclamation of identity and is then distorted by Victimology into what is felt to be a necessary battle posture...Paranoid, parochial, and dumb: This is how much of white America perceives us on some level' (212).

⁸⁴ Coleman Hughes, *The End of Race Politics: Arguments for a Colorblind America* (New York: Thesis, 2024), 189–90.

⁸⁵ John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: Harper, 2000), 1.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 6.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid, 7.

⁹³ C. L. R. James, *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1948), 177.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ C. L. R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1986), 369.

⁹⁶ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 178.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 241.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 166.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 150.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, 165.

¹⁰³ McWhorter, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Kahn, 434.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 438.

¹⁰⁹ McWhorter, 43.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 49.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² 'Race and Wrongful Conviction', The Innocence Project, <https://innocenceproject.org/race-and-wrongful-conviction/>.

¹¹³ McWhorter, 174.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 164.

¹¹⁵ University of California, 'Fall enrollment at a glance',

<https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/fall-enrollment-glance>

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Katherine Mangan and Brian O'Leary, 'Where Are the White Students?', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 10, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/where-are-the-white-students>

¹¹⁸ McWhorter, 13.

¹¹⁹ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010), 102.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² McWhorter, 42.

¹²³ Ibid, 9.

¹²⁴ *Williams v. Roper*, 695 F. 3d 825-Court of Appeals, 8th Circuit 2012, <https://case-law.vlex.com/vid/williams-v-roper-no-886821162>.

¹²⁵ Death Penalty Information Center, 'After Attorney General's Request for Execution Date, St. Louis County Prosecutor Files Motion to Vacate Marcellus Williams' Death Sentence', 1 February 2024.

¹²⁶ Karl Korsch, 'What Is Socialization? A Program of Practical Socialism', *New German Critique*, no. 6 (1919), 60–81.

¹²⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1867), 520.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 521.

¹³⁰ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'Death penalty disproportionately affects the poor, UN rights experts warn', 6 October 2017.

¹³¹ McWhorter, 35.

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- ¹³² Harold Cruse, 'Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American' in *Rebellion or Revolution* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1968), 81.
- ¹³³ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (London: Text Publishing Company, 2015), 7.
- ¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ¹³⁵ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 2.
- ¹³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹³⁷ Sylvia Wynter, 'We Know Where We Are From: The Politics of Black Culture from Myal to Marley' (Stanford: Stanford University, 1977), 3.
- ¹³⁸ Huey P. Newton, 'On the Middle East: September 5, 1970', in *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 193.
- ¹³⁹ Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America, with New Afterwords by the Authors* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 5.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴² Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 108.
- ¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 109.
- ¹⁴⁴ 'Racism', *Oxford Dictionary of English* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- ¹⁴⁵ 'Inventing Black and White', 2 August 2016, *Facing History & Ourselves*, para 11.
- ¹⁴⁶ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500–2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), 16.
- ¹⁴⁷ Robinson, 11.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵¹ Kennedy, 6.
- ¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 9.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 10.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 13.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 14.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 7.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ The Mongol invasion of Java in 1293 was a naval campaign waged by the Yuan dynasty under Kublai Khan into modern-day Indonesia. However, this campaign (along with the Mongol invasions of Vietnam in 1258 and the Mongol invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1281) were because of tributary relations the Yuan established with these nations, thus were retaliatory in nature, and, though violent, paled in comparison with the globally imperious colonising measures the European powers would take in the coming years, and were wrought by the Yuan, a dynasty generally not considered to be a great power relative to the Ming.

¹⁶⁸ The Umayyad Caliphate (661–750) enacted one of the largest slavery rings of all time, in which non-Muslim captives of wars were enslaved, many of whom were Africans, brought in by ships along the Red Sea, and by crossing the Sahel into Sub-Saharan Africa, was not included in this historical analysis of race and power, as the peak of its enslaving practices was before the formation of European nations and it was not global in its reach and impact and not foundational to the capitalist system of the West. Moreover, in this section, my analysis is of the modern age from 1492 to 1914.

¹⁶⁹ Robinson, 14.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 19.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Hughes, 51.

¹⁷⁴ Jesse Naranjo, 'Slavery Reparations Issue Gets Rare Hearing on Hill', *Wall Street Journal*, 19 June 2019.

¹⁷⁵ Hughes, 200.

¹⁷⁶ Karl Kautsky, *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1906), 153.

¹⁷⁷ Hughes, 32.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 34.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 34–5.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid, 47.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Katie Cannon, 'Racism and Economics: The Perspective of Oliver C. Cox', in *Katie's Canon: Womanism and Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 145.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 145.

¹⁸⁶ 2 Corinthians 6:17–18(a), King James Version.

¹⁸⁷ Isaiah 52:11, King James Version.

¹⁸⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1909), 51.

¹⁸⁹ Cécile Laborde, *Liberalism's Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 95.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 171.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 68.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 64.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 118.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 119.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 116.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 117.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 116.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Slavoj Žižek, 'The Spectre of Ideology' in *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), 7.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 7–8.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 8.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Bourdieu, 73.

²¹² Martha Nussbaum, *The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 109.

²¹³ Bourdieu, 53.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 67.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 64.

²¹⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. D. F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 540.

²¹⁷ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Mount Vernon, NY: Peter Pauper Press, 1946), 171–2.

²¹⁸ Bourdieu, 91.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 97.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Žižek, 9.

²²² Slavoj Žižek, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism* (London: Allen Lange, 2014), 247.

²²³ George L. Jackson, *Blood in My Eye* (New York: Random House, 1972), 143.

²²⁴ George Lipsitz, 'From *Plessy* to Ferguson', *Cultural Critique* 90 (Spring 2015): 129.

²²⁵ This section on the materiality of belief and white supremacy/whiteness as a religion, pp.154–73, is mostly borrowed from my Boston University School of Theology master's thesis, titled 'Toward a Ritual to Die For: How America's Religion Cost Its Soul' (2019).

²²⁶ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017), 198.

²²⁷ Ibid, 187.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ McWhorter, 12.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2017), 5.

²³⁸ Roderick A. Ferguson, 'Michael Brown, Ferguson, and the Ghosts of Pruitt-Iggoe', *Cultural Critique* 90 (Spring 2015): 141.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Lipsitz, 125.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Hughes, 195.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 196.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 197.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 198.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid, 198–9.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 199.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² S. Trawalter, A. Todd, A. Baird and J. Richeson, 'Attending to Threat: Race-based Patterns of Selective Attention', National Library of Medicine, 1 September 2008.

²⁶³ Colin Holbrook, D. Fessler and C. Navarrete "Black"-sounding name makes people imagine a larger, more dangerous person', *Science Daily*, 7 October 2015, originally from University of Southern California.

²⁶⁴ Hughes, 51.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 45.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 58–9.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 45.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ For Hughes, King is a kind of cudgel. He uses the civil rights leader and martyr to pronounce a virtue ethics of colour-blindness, but fails to quote a King who is squarely in the nineteenth century Black theodocist radical tradition, that included Garnet, Delany, Crummell and Turner.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 191–2.

²⁷¹ Sowell, *Black Rednecks*, 128.

²⁷² Hughes, 49.

²⁷³ Ibid, 115–20.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 45.

²⁷⁵ Jessica Chasmar, 'Thomas Sowell says "farewell" in final column', 27 December 2016, *Washington Times*.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Sowell, 2.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 1.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 1–64.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 65–110.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 111–70.

²⁸² Ibid, 171–202.

²⁸³ Ibid, 203–46.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 247–92.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 6.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 8.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 62.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 58.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 128.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid, 45.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Even Crummell, Sowell's intellectual conservative progenitor, reasoned that 'the persistence and pervasiveness of racism blocked African-Americans from becoming members of mainstream society' (Holmes 1997, 159).

²⁹⁶ Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (New York: Project Gutenberg, 2004), 76.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Sowell, 15.

³⁰¹ Ibid, 51.

³⁰² Ibid, 53.

³⁰³ Bourdieu, 91–2.

³⁰⁴ John O'Connor, 'Deputy who shot Sonya Massey thought her rebuke "in the name of Jesus" indicated intent to kill him', 6 August 2024, Associated Press.

³⁰⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Volume II (1836–1838)*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher, Wallace E. Williams and Robert E. Spiller (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1964), 308.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 310.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 311.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 312.

³⁰⁹ Lewis Gordon, 'Race, Theodicy, and the Normative Emancipatory Challenges of Blackness', *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2013): 725, 733.

³¹⁰ Bryan Green, 'Colonial Theodicy and the Jesuit Ascetic Ideal in José de Acosta's Works on Spanish America', in *Exploring Jesuit Distinctiveness: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ways of Proceeding within the Society of Jesus*, by Robert Aleksander Maryks (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016).

³¹¹ Sowell, 132.

³¹² Jones, 1123.

³¹³ Sowell, 128.

³¹⁴ Ibid, 132.

³¹⁵ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso, 1972)

³¹⁶ Georgina Rannard and Eve Webster, 'Leopold II: Belgium "wakes up" to its bloody colonial past', 13 June 2020, BBC News.

³¹⁷ Sowell, 132.

³¹⁸ Ibid, 258.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Harry Haywood, *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question* ([1958] 2018) <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1956-1960/haywood02.htm>.

³²² Sowell, 258.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid, 259.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid, 260.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 308–9.

³³⁰ Sowell, 268.

³³¹ Rodney, 163.

³³² Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 50–1.

³³³ Ibid, 57.

³³⁴ This brief paragraph is included in my Boston University 2019 master's thesis.

³³⁵ Book of Job, King James Authorised Version (Swindon: Bible Society, 2011).

³³⁶ Tommy Curry, Nicola Frith, et al., June 2025, *Decolonised Transformations: Confronting the University of Edinburgh's History and Legacies of Enslavement and Colonialism*, 40.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ McWhorter, 262.

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 258.

CHAPTER 4: Harry Haywood and the 'Negro Question': Toward a Liberation Theodicy

4.1. Introduction

This chapter interrogates the dominant theodicean frameworks, exceptionalism and assimilationism, that have historically shaped Black religious, political and philosophical thought. These paradigms, often presented as liberatory, were deeply entangled with statism and the imperial logic of capitalism, rendering them complicit in the perpetuation of Black suffering. In response to this impasse, I propose a new conceptual lens: *liberation theodicy*.

Liberation theodicy raises a critical question: *How can a theodicy oriented toward liberation take an activist form?* To explore this, I turn to Harry Haywood's pamphlet *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, written during the era commonly referred to as the Second Reconstruction. Haywood's analysis of Black poverty – particularly among Black farmers in the 1950s – offers a radical rejoinder to the conservatism of figures such as Thomas Sowell. Although Sowell lived through this period, much as Alexander Crummell lived through the First Reconstruction, his writings exhibit a striking amnesia regarding the depth of Black poverty before and after the Civil Rights Movement. Haywood, by contrast, foregrounds economic dispossession as a central axis of racial oppression.

By now, it is evident that the theodicies advanced by Sowell, McWhorter and Hughes reject the notion of Black victimhood, dismissing its material and

social reality. Haywood's intervention is significant because it insists that victimisation – economic, political and social – is not illusory but structural. From this insight emerges liberation theodicy, which I define as follows: the hunted Black body, marked by death yet sustained by dignity, carries within its generational resilience the possibility of escape for humanity and a path of return for lost souls.

This formulation departs from the exceptionalist and assimilationist philosophies of religion that have long dominated Black thought. While exceptionalism, reinforced by assimilationism, once functioned as a strategy for liberation, its allegiance to statist and capitalist logics rendered it inadequate and complicit. Liberation theodicy, therefore, is not a prescriptive programme but a heuristic, a critical lens for exposing the limitations of colonised American theodicies. In the preceding chapters, we have traced how figures such as Garnet, Turner, Delany, Crummell and early Frazier blurred the line between exceptionalism and assimilationism. Building on this critique, the present chapter advances a theoretical formulation of liberationism through self-determination as an activist theodicy, offering a radical alternative to the dominant paradigms of Black religious thought.

4.2. Groundwork for a Liberation Theodicy: Harry Haywood and the Communist International

In his pamphlet *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, Harry Haywood, born Haywood Hall to formerly enslaved parents in Omaha, Nebraska, suggests that like faulty notions of realising a Negro liberation movement in

America through ‘imminent, direct integration’,¹ what he calls ‘bourgeois assimilationism’ is ‘the subordination of the rights and culture of the Negro people to the interests of the U.S. monopolist drive for world mastery’.² Haywood, according to Cedric Robinson, ‘alone advocated the position of “self-determination” for American Blacks’³ at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in the Soviet Union in 1928, because the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) would not recognise the socioeconomic problems of Black Americans.⁴ Along with James P. Cannon and Leon Trotsky, John Reed, for example, a celebrated journalist ‘who headed the Communist Labor Party’s delegation’,⁵ argued that ‘[t]he Negro...does not demand national independence’,⁶ that ‘[t]hey [sic] consider themselves first of all Americans and feel entirely at home in the United States’.⁷ ‘Against Lenin’s proposal [to link the American Negro to the new focus of the Comintern explicitly – and at once]’,⁸ ‘Reed asserted the traditional view of American socialism: “the only proper policy...is to consider the Negro first of all as a laborer”’.⁹ This common view among American communists was anathema to and outside the realm of reality for Haywood and his comrades, and beyond the boundary of the political theory Lenin had formulated in his ‘Theses on the National and Colonial Question’ (1920),¹⁰ where he ‘called upon the adherents of revolutionary Marxism to transcend their historic European frame of reference’.¹¹ However, even as late as 1925, in Moscow, when Lovett Fort-Whiteman, ‘the first African American sent to Moscow to prepare for an African assignment’,¹² ‘who continued to focus on “this racial revolutionary sentiment”, was called to task by the Executive Committee of

the Communist International for seeming to suggest that racial divisions might have an independent social force',¹³ "[r]ace antagonism", he was admonished...., "is a product of a society divided into classes...and...will only disappear when the proletariat is victorious".¹⁴

Notice the conceptual rejection of the internal colonisation of Black people by the Comintern. Prior to Haywood in 1928, the flamboyant Fort-Whiteman had gone to Moscow in 1924 to advocate that Black people in America were not 'discriminated against as a class, but as a race'.¹⁵ However, Fort-Whiteman's greatest contribution, in addition to being a forerunner of sorts for Haywood's later more stringent internal colonialism advocacy with the Comintern, is that he proposed, 'among other things, that the Party "exploit to the full" the "agricultural movement" which seemed to be developing in the South...the first such proposal of which there is a record since Lenin's suggestion of 1920'.¹⁶ It was Fort-Whiteman who first contended that '[t]he negroes...are destined to be the most revolutionary class in America'.¹⁷

What I propose here is that Fort-Whiteman embodies a race-conscious dimension of Haywood's philosophy of self-determination, albeit with a relative underemphasis on its class component. Nevertheless, Fort-Whiteman remains firmly situated within the orbit of genuine Leftist politics. Haywood's advocacy, for instance, was instrumental in prompting the Comintern to designate the Negro population of the Black Belt as what Lenin had earlier described as a 'subject nation',¹⁸ thereby capable of generating a 'national revolutionary movement'.¹⁹ In

response, the Comintern 'ordered the American Party to give work on the Negro question a high priority'.²⁰

Indeed, because of Haywood's activism, 'the interplay between African American militants, American Communists, and the Communist International...led to the 1928 directive that effectively made Negro civil rights a major issue of American politics',²¹ thereby settling the so-called 'Negro Question' – the question of Black self-determination – within both the Comintern and the United States. This became the substance of Haywood's 'Black Belt Nation thesis'.²² Consequently, the Sixth Congress of the Comintern adopted the principle that 'regardless of race, every nation had the right to self-determination, including the right to separation from any oppressor state or nation'.²³ By 1930, the Comintern's resolution noted that '86 percent of the African-American people lived in the Southern states, 74 percent of that number lived in rural areas, and over one-half of that 74 percent lived in the Black Belt [and] inside the Black Belt, the African-American people constituted over fifty percent of the population',²⁴ thereby substantiating Haywood's claims of a Black nation within a nation, out of which a groundswell of revolutionary activity would percolate.

The active being-participation of self-determination of Black people is observable here as against the passive being-participation of receiving calamity upon themselves, traditional theodicy versus liberation theodicy.²⁵ Like Fort-Whiteman, a member of the African Blood Brotherhood, 'a left-wing breakaway from the Socialist Party'²⁶ (founded in 1917 by Caribbean-originated Cyril Briggs, Richard B. Moore and Otto Huiswood), Haywood and this Black nationalist,

socialist and anti-imperialist bloc 'stressed the theme of [B]lack self-determination in the United States and anticolonial movements in Africa'.²⁷ Berland notes:

In December 1921, as a fraternal delegate from the Brotherhood, Briggs attended the founding convention of the Workers Party – the legal face of the underground Communist (Unity) Party into which Comintern pressure had induced the Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party to merge.²⁸

Though Haywood broke from the early left-wing politics of his socialist cadre, with West referring to him in *Prophecy* as 'the father of right-wing Marxism in Afro-America',²⁹ he and Fort-Whiteman both represent obverse sides of the same coin of Leftist political orientation, that is, a politics divorced from the mainstream duopolistic factions of the same business class of corporatist interests, i.e. conservatism and liberalism. Therefore, though Whiteman's proposition to the Comintern, set amid the rising race consciousness of Black Americans, aligned with the burgeoning Harlem Renaissance, that 'had awakened a new interest in the Negro among white liberals',³⁰ was considered 'outside the realm of Marxian social thought'³¹ by being in the African Blood Brotherhood, Whiteman himself was set squarely in the Marxist-Leninist tradition, and thus outside the spectre of liberal/conservative bourgeois politics like many Black radical thinkers that preceded him.

4.3. Marxian Leftism and Rightism: A Contrast with Mainstream Bourgeois Politics

This subsection explains Haywood's position in the broader Marxist philosophical milieu. According to West in *Prophesy*, in his theological analysis of the Marxist tradition, where he attempts to find a mutuality between Marxism and Black theology, the Leftist political strain that is Marxism exists outside the realm of bourgeois politics, yet contains its own Right–Left spectrum. West writes:

There are six major streams in the Marxist tradition: the Bernsteinian, Leninist, Stalinist, Trotskyist, Councilist, and Gramscian streams. These diverse streams all adhere to the broad tenets of Marxism: commitment to the dialectical method for understanding social reality, viewing class struggle as a central dynamic of the historical process, and affirming socialism as a desirable social arrangement. To employ a Marxist analysis – despite the stream one opts for – is first and foremost to understand the present capitalist order as a concrete totality and momentary stage in a historical process, a totality and stage wrought with various levels of overdetermined contradictions, cleavages, and conflicts within which a new order is immanent and, by means of collective praxis, a socialist society is realizable.³²

This is a metred and accurate description of the various major strands of Marxist philosophy by West, who goes on to give the following features to the various strands of Marxist thought emergent at the end of the nineteenth century, which I will summarise here: Though they could never agree on organisational questions

of Russian social democracy, or on strategies and tactics at the delineation of reform and revolution through Marxian socialism,^{33 34 35} Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin could both agree that Eduard Bernstein was a revisionist.^{36 37} One of Engels's mentees, Bernstein's approach to Marxism was that the evolutionary process of human development, that is, the materialist conception of history, was too mechanical, too determinist. His famous observation that the materialist is a Calvinist without God,³⁸ found in his text *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation* (1899), is followed by his ponderance of a 'belief in the inevitableness of all historical events and developments'.³⁹ To wit, Bernstein's major question was if that which is inevitable without irruptive '[elements] of force or...factors of force', 'speak the decisive word', on which 'part in history falls to the share of nature, of political economy, of organisations, of ideas'.⁴⁰

For bringing into question the determinist elements of Marxism, after which he quotes Marx, determining that it is 'the material productive forces and the conditions of production among men at the time'⁴¹ that decide the development of political economy, Bernstein was called a revisionist. Bernsteinism became the predominant variation of Marxist philosophy at the founding of the Second International of the International Workingmen's Association in 1889. By 1891, with Karl Kautsky, Bernstein drafted the Erfurt Program, an initiative that centred the collective ownership of the means of production and participation in partisan politics rather than direct political action or revolutionary violence. As the old labour aristocracy was on the decline, Bernstein reflected a liberal capitalism that followed the succeeded Proudhonist

and Bakunist forms of state capital, a form of liberal capital that held that 'socialism can arise through legislation and bourgeois electoral politics'.⁴² In *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, and Lenin* (1948), C. L. R. James enumerates Bernstein's effect in the transition from the Marxian socialist/anarchist split of the First International in 1872, to the prevailing form of Marxism at the dawn of a new century and before the rise of the Communist International (Comintern) following the Russian Revolution(s) of 1917. He writes:

- (1) The changes in the categories of the International.
- (2) The changes are from a proletarian ideology of 1889 to a capitalistic ideology of say, 1900, without however losing its proletarian identity.
- (3) The proletariat violently changes this and creates a new concretization.
- (4) We seek and find an objective basis for Bernsteinism.
- (5) We now have a concept broader, deeper, and richer than in 1889. We put it in order, organize it in thought.
- (6) We find that the objective has changed. The proletariat now is itself at divided object. Categories of the proletariat assume an importance they never had. 'Thus by 1919, the foundation of the Third International has a new armoury of weapons and a new set of objects. We also have new "directions", i.e., new perspectives. Let us organize them backwards and forwards.'⁴³

Bernstein saw the advancements of capitalism coming into the twentieth century, how it was not quite the evil and rapacious system of exploitation that early scientific Marxists, classic socialists and anarchists considered it to be, and, therefore, '[claimed] that Marxists should invest their time and energy in parliamentary political parties, either those of the bourgeoisie or their own'.⁴⁴ According to West in *Prophesy*, Bernsteinism was based on 'an emasculated version of Friedrich Engels's Introduction (1895) to *Marx's Class Struggles in France* in which Engels seems to endorse an anti-insurrectionist, pro-legalist road to political power', thus 'promoting reformist and peaceful means to socialism'.⁴⁵ This bourgeois sensibility at the heart of Bernsteinism led to increasingly violent and profound attempts by the masses of workers to break through the development of the antagonistic elements in the labour movements in constantly higher stages of sharper conflicts,⁴⁶ leading to the rise of the Third International, or the Comintern.

Where Luxemburg advocated a ground-up approach to socialist organisation, a prefigurativism in which workers would rise to levels of revolutionary activity as they were ready,⁴⁷ Lenin, the leader of the Third International, who also differed with Bernstein's reformist sensibilities, believed in taking direct political action as a means to bring about communism through capitalism, and the importance of a centralism of a professional revolutionary vanguard party, a top-down socialist approach, which he borrowed from Karl Kautsky.⁴⁸ However, of the three Marxist philosophers, Lenin, Luxemburg and Bernstein, only Bernstein would be labelled a revisionist, because it was only

Bernstein who championed the perspicacity and utility of using bourgeois politics for socialist means *and* because Bernstein dared to question the validity of a materialist conception of history.

Of these major strands of Marxist philosophy entering the twentieth century, these three, represented in the writings of Luxemburg (Councilism), Bernstein (Bernsteinism) and Lenin (Leninism [also called Marxism-Leninism]), demonstrate a Leftism, Centrism and Rightism in Leftist politics, i.e. Marxian socialism. The Leftist Marxist political position is ensconced in Councilism, at times referred to as classic socialism, advocating an industrial autonomy, or workerism, and was propounded by the Polish Luxemburg, the Dutch Anton Pannekoek and the German Karl Korsch. The Centrist Marxist political position is embedded in Bernsteinism, which rejected traditional Marxist impossibilism, that is, that bourgeois politics and co-operatives and labour/trade unions were compatible with Marxian socialism, and, through a mutualism of economic visions, blended forms of capitalism with socialism. The Rightist Marxist political position is enmeshed in Leninism, which, unlike Councilism, which promoted a bottom-up approach to Marxism, advocated a top-down approach, with a professionalised revolutionary class, or vanguard party leading the proletariat, or industrialised, working masses, *vis-à-vis* a central committee that often has a dictatorial leader.

The other three predominant streams of Marxism are Gramscianism, Trotskyism and Stalinism. Named for Italian political theorist and prisoner Antonio Gramsci, Gramscianism is a blending of Councilism and Leninism, '[leaning]

toward progressive or left-wing Marxism, but [remaining] tied to regressive or right-wing Marxism owing to its avowed neo-Leninism'.⁴⁹ In *Prophecy*, of Gramscianism, West writes, '[t]he Gramscian stream emanates from Antonio Gramsci's "Worker's Democracy" (1919) and "The Modern Prince" (1933–34)',⁵⁰ in which 'Gramsci combines the Leninist and Councilist viewpoints in a unique manner',⁵¹ ultimately holding that 'a Leninist-like vanguard party should emerge and lead, though he conceives of the vanguard party in a more democratic and fluid way than did Lenin'.⁵² Trotskyism, named after the former head of Lenin's Red Army Leon Trotsky, is a variation of Leninism that attempted to restate Lenin's economic and political principles after the rise of Joseph Stalin in the early 1920s, following Lenin's death in 1924. On Trotskyism, West writes, 'The Trotskyist stream is based on Leon Trotsky's *The New Course* (1923)'⁵³ where 'Trotsky presents essentially a Leninist position which is adamantly anti-Stalinist',⁵⁴ '[rejecting] the Stalinist conception of Leninism as a body of authoritative party doctrine and instead views Leninism as a tentative yet acceptable program of revolutionary praxis'.⁵⁵ Finally, Stalinism is a branch of Leninism that made a vulgar reading of Lenin's interpretation of Marx's concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', making himself a dictator, keen on using violence as a principal tool of direct action. According to West, in *Prophecy*, Gramscianism represents 'the center right and center left of the Marxist tradition'.⁵⁶ Of Stalinism, West writes, 'The Stalinist stream flows from Joseph Stalin's *The Foundations of Leninism* (1924) and *On Lenin and Leninism* (1924)',⁵⁷ and consists of Stalin '[vulgarising] Lenin's position by precluding

disagreement and debate on major issues, [trivialising] the diverse makeup of the central committee by requiring a uniform outlook, and gives decision-making powers to one dictatorial figure'.⁵⁸ Politically, while Trotskyism is Rightist, though with some concessions to forms of state capitalism, and thus not as far right as Leninism, Stalinism represents far-Rightism.

For our purposes here, the strand of predominant and progressive Marxism we are most interested in is Rightism, since it involves Haywood, himself a Leninist, or Marxist-Leninist. Of this strand, in *Prophesy*, West writes: 'The Leninist...[stream][is] much more progressive than the Stalinist one, but still [remains] a part of what I call regressive, or right-wing, Marxism.'⁵⁹ Here is where the point emerges. Mistakenly referred to as communism, Marxism-Leninism, Haywood's political inclination, though Rightist in its Marxist orientation, is still politically left of mainstream, bourgeois liberal leftism or liberalism. It is a conservatism that is not beholden to the economic model that fortified a Romanov dynasty in Russia for 300 years, or feudalism and proto-capitalism, and that collaborates with the imperial and colonial pursuits of the American empire and Western civilisation more broadly. It is not even Western Marxism, that brand of European Marxism propounded by the likes of Korsch and Lukács. It is a Russian variation distinct from orthodox Marxism and Western Marxist philosophy in its political orientation.⁶⁰ Sowell's is a conservatism that claims to be libertarian, without any material analysis of the possibility of a libertarianism, that is, the socioeconomic capacity for an individual to make their life what they will, under the regime of harm that is capitalism.

However, there is a critique to be had about Haywood's involvement in the Comintern, an international political organisation that according to James, following the death of Lenin, was usurped by Stalinists until its fall in 1936, leading James to refer to members of the Comintern as 'Social fascists'.⁶¹ Yet I claim, because of its divorcement from American bourgeois liberalism, that is, a politics of a corporatised duopoly, a politics in which 'the candidate with fewer votes wins and his success is regarded as legitimate and democratic',⁶² a politics 'established under the cover of false democracy',⁶³ a dictatorial system wherein 'it is evident that they falsify genuine democracy',⁶⁴ Haywood's Marxism-Leninism is much more progressive than Sowell's conservatism, which holds an allegiance to the statist aims of capitalism as an imperial enterprise.

Therefore, Haywood differed in his conservatism from Sowell's neoconservatism. I use the term neoconservative here as C. L. R. James does in the 'Glossary' section of *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, where he likens Christian humanists, i.e. Catholic clerical Stalinist collaborationists, with "Corporatist" efforts to reconcile Capital and Labor'.⁶⁵ In this way, neoconservatism is not a sophisticated twenty-first century political orientation but a mid-century collaborationist and reactionary ideology with dire historical precedents. While Haywood's theodicy is one of self-determination for Black people, Sowell's is a theodicy that would see Black people relinquish the benthos of their being into the broader melange of Western civilisation, to disappear themselves, all that they are and will be, because to be Black is to be automata ever supine and susceptible to the whims of phenomenal change and suffering.

Sowell's theodicy, for example, is incapable of imagining such an ameliorative procedure as a liberation theodicy. As previously stated in the last chapter, his epistemology is a palliative of ghetto Black culture, seeking a wholesale end to what is ultimately a culture of poor people. Be reminded that as of 2023, while white Americans have a poverty rate of 7.7 per cent, Black Americans have a poverty rate of 17.9 per cent.⁶⁶ Yet Sowell's, like McWhorter's and Hughes's, is a theodicy that blights the souls of Black folk, no different that the proto-conservative theodicy of Brockden in the eighteenth century, all undergirded by assimilationist rhetoric.

4.4. Haywood, Poor Black Farmers and the Liberation of Self-Determination

The anti-poor-people sentiment at the heart of Black conservative theodicy militates against Haywood's liberation theodicy, which rails against the Black conservative position that poor people are pathological, not victimised. In fact, unlike McWhorter, Haywood does not mind using the term *victim* in his work, to describe those Black folk affected by Dixiecrat lynch terror, the Scottsboro Boys, or most apropos of this line of reasoning, the mid-twentieth-century Black farmer. This leads Haywood to cite the following objection *vis-à-vis* the 'rapid acceleration of land concentration and monopoly':⁶⁷ 'all Census farms of 1,000 acres or over, though comprising only 2.7% of all Census farms, marketed over one fourth of all cotton sold in the U.S.'.⁶⁸ 'The main victim, of course', Haywood would write of this 1954 data, 'is the Negro farmer'.⁶⁹ This is relevant because Sowell maintains that Black Americans possessed more empowered economics

prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He writes:

Fortunately, in the decades before this mindset fixed, most [B]lacks had become better educated and had lifted themselves out of poverty at a rate higher than that after the civil rights revolution of the 1960s. For example, more [B]lacks rose into professional and other higher-level occupations in the years preceding the Civil Rights Act of 1964 than in the years following its enactment.⁷⁰

In toto, on economic grounds, Haywood disagrees with this statement. He focuses on the Black labour movements of the early-to-mid-twentieth century in his analysis of the economic woes of Black America, in a period that Sowell would have his reader believe Black people prospered. For Sowell, before the integrationist efforts of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Black Americans fared much better than in the succeeding years: a claim that McWhorter would not make, writing, 'In 1960, 55 percent of the [B]lack population lived in poverty – that is, every other [B]lack person and then some',⁷¹ while Sowell writes that 'although the greatest reduction in poverty among [B]lacks occurred before the civil rights revolution of the 1960s',⁷² Haywood's pamphlet shows that pre-1960 Black economic advancement is conceptually false.

Haywood and several others of the African Blood Brotherhood cadre, founded in 1919, 'were absorbed into the American Communist Party',⁷³ and 'it came to be accepted that in both the United States and Africa, the Brotherhood would act as an ideological, organizational, and military vanguard'.⁷⁴ In 1928,

however, it was Haywood who ‘appears to have provided the Party the immediate ideological stimulus for the development of the Comintern’s position after 1928 that Blacks constituted a “national question” in America’.⁷⁵ This national question was one of the self-determinative rights of Black people in America towards socioeconomic freedom. Like Sowell, Haywood too believed in the merits of anti-integration but for the reason of opposing assimilationism, which he saw as a great deficit to working-class Black Americans. Standing astride Sowell’s 1954 (*Brown v. Board of Education*) and 1964 (Civil Rights Act of 1964) periodisation of economic prosperity for Black people, in 1958 Haywood opposed the Black epistemological commitment to weak assimilationism rife within large Black liberal organisations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP):

The key question involved in projecting a solution for the Negro question is the universal problem of reform or revolution. The reformist position on the Negro question claims that it is being solved on the basis of gradual, progressive gains within the framework of the existing monopoly-dominated system. There are variations on this theme, ranging from the Southern ‘liberal’ gradualists to the assimilationist line of the NAACP, the most recent variant of which is solution of the Negro question through ‘full integration into every aspect of American life’.⁷⁶

To Haywood, the monopoly-dominated capitalist system operable in America was too toxic for the working-class Black person to ingratiate, immerse

and integrate himself. 'The U.S. monopolist drive for world mastery' required a bourgeois assimilationism that not only pathologized Black culture (and the people that produced the culture, nominally working-class/working-poor Black folk), but also it was 'a rejection of all things Negro, a complete acceptance of the values of the white ruling class'.⁷⁷ According to Harold Cruse, Haywood's was 'a belief that the upper-class Negro leadership was "motivated solely by their desire for cultural assimilation", and that they "banked their hopes for Negro equality on support from the white enemy"'.⁷⁸ As Haywood critiqued the Communist International at the Sixth Congress in the Soviet Union, in addition to the Black bourgeoisie and the NAACP, so I critique Sowell's self-depleting immersion of cultural being that would see the 'full integration into every aspect of American life' for the Black person.

Executive Secretary of the NAACP Walter White had a solution, according to Haywood, suggesting that Black people in mid-century America, if they want to get ahead via integration, 'must "shed rustic mannerisms...methods of dress...the chip on the shoulder" and all other impediments to integration'.⁷⁹ Haywood refers to White's methodology of integrationism, informed by Lester Grainger's 1951 *Crisis* article titled 'Does the Negro Want Integration?', as his 'chemical solution',⁸⁰ meaning that like any solute liquefied into a solvent, Black Americans should predicate their emulsion into a homogeneous mixture where the whole of their substance is dissolved into another substance, i.e. white culture. This is exemplary of a traditional theodicy that passively participates in being, and this is the crux of the Negro question. Haywood avers:

The mobilization of the white workers for the struggle for Negro rights is a pre-condition for freeing the Negro workers from the stifling influences of petty-bourgeois Negro nationalism with its ideology of self-isolation. Only thus, the program pointed out, can the historic rift in the ranks of American labor be breached, and a solid front of white and Negro workers be presented to the common enemy – US monopoly capitalism.⁸¹

According to Haywood, 'in spite of the mechanization of cotton picking and the diversification of crops, the basic labor force on the MECHANIZED, DIVERSIFIED plantations is STILL the Negro sharecropper'.⁸² Consequently, self-determination is the activistic theodicy of the oppressed masses of working-class/working-poor people that would cling to a rigour of self-possession before it deigns to integrate the quintessence of its cognition into the confidence of another's being. It is like that theodicy that '[emphasises] the revolutionary essence of the struggle for Negro equality arising from the fact that the special oppression of the Negro people is a main prop of the system of capitalist-imperialist domination over the entire working class and masses of exploited people'.⁸³ As Haywood notes, 'This means that the Negro workers have benefited least from prosperity; they have received merely the crumbs of prosperity, while suffering to a greater extent from inflation, slum conditions and exorbitant rents, and job security'.⁸⁴

In Haywood's view, this process would look quite militant and hinged upon two movements: '1) The movement must derive its main strength from and base

itself progressively on the masses of the most oppressed classes and strata – the workers and the peasants. Their activity is to be the main characteristic feature of the movement. 2) Organizations consisting of the most militant, most conscious, most self-sacrificing elements from among the fighting masses themselves must be created for conducting the struggle. These organizations must sustain activity among the masses, constantly educating and organising them and developing mass initiative. Instead of reliance on spontaneity, the movement must be extended into new areas and among new classes in a planned way.’⁸⁵

As Marx notes in *The German Ideology* that ‘Hegel himself confesses at the end of the *Geschichtsphilosophie* that he ‘has considered the progress of “the concept only” and has represented in history the “true theodicy”’,⁸⁶ the organised militancy of the right-wing Marxist Haywood was, as all political philosophy is, a response to a precise moment in history and a pressing need. The pressing need was that contrary to Sowell’s narrow view of history, the Black working class, the largest sector of Black life in America, before 1964 faced dire economic challenges. For example, following Reconstruction, and the rise of sharecropping as an American form of neoslavery, ‘the basic labor force on the mechanized, diversified plantations [was] still the Negro sharecropper’,⁸⁷ and the ‘social relics of slavery which have long since been adapted to the needs of monopoly capitalism’⁸⁸ were still active and at play:

The rapid upsurge of industrialization in the South and the mechanization of agriculture, the shift of cotton production to the

West, the increased yield per acre due to technological advances, crop diversification and the spread of dairy, poultry, and beef production – all of these developments in Southern agriculture, accompanied by the government program of acreage cutbacks and lowering price supports, have accentuated the chronic Southern agrarian problem and the accompanying ruin of the Negro farmer. The Negro farmer has been particularly hard hit by the chronic crisis which has plagued the South's agriculture since the end of World War I, and which has sharpened in the recent period.⁸⁹

This socioeconomic phenomenon led Haywood to opine: 'The shadow of the plantation proscribes strict limits for the development of the neighboring Negro tenant and owner, keeping him ever at the disadvantage in relation to the white competitor. As renter or as owner he is restricted to inferior land, denied equal commercial and banking services.'⁹⁰ Though it is evidentiary that, according to Haywood, that 'Negro wage and salary income [rose] sharply since 1940',⁹¹ he avers that this is 'only one side of the picture',⁹² writing, 'According to U.S. Department of Commerce figures, the annual median wage or salary income of white workers exceeded that of non-whites by \$592 in 1939, by \$1,113 in 1948 and by \$1,552 in 1955. Thus the wage differential is presently three times larger than in 1939!'⁹³

Here, Haywood formulates that the wage differential along the Black–white binary (BwB) in 1958 was *three times* larger than in 1939, despite Sowell's assimilationist theodicy. Indeed, the 'changes of the war and post-war boom

period is this relative decline in the economic position of the Negro workers which [laid] the groundwork for a devastating absolute decline in their economic status in the rapidly approaching economic crisis'.⁹⁴ What is more, '[e]ven before the current downturn in the economy, the national unemployment rate for Negroes of 8.5% was more than double that of whites (4%)'.⁹⁵ 'With the onset of mass unemployment', Haywood enjoined, 'we...expect greater proportions of unemployed Negro workers due to the inroads of automation on the categories in which Negro workers are most heavily concentrated'.⁹⁶ 'Here', Haywood remarks, 'is an "economic trend" which the "direct integrationists" [his opponents] overlooked'.⁹⁷ Did Haywood's opponents overlook these phenomena, or were they direct integrationists, those white and Black liberals and conservatives in favour of weak assimilationism, engaged in epistemologies of race akin to the racial escapism of mendacity? While Sowell, and the other Black conservative thinkers of the twenty-first century, observes the value of assimilating into the broader white American culture, Haywood sees an activistic theodicy of self-determination.

Harry Haywood's advocacy for the recognition of African Americans in the US South as a colonised nation by the Communist International reflects a self-deterministic political philosophy aimed at securing national liberation through autonomy. This theoretical framework, articulated in his 'Black Belt' thesis, contributed to significant, albeit uneven, advances in both domestic and international political arenas.

In contrast, Coleman Hughes elevates the integrationist perspective of NAACP executive director Roy Wilkins, who famously characterised the Black Power movement as ‘a reverse Mississippi, a reverse Hitler, a reverse Ku Klux Klan’.⁹⁸ Yet Haywood’s Marxist-Leninist orientation, which anticipated the later synthesis of Marxism-Leninism and Fanonian thought within Black Power ideology, proved influential through his work with the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and the Comintern. Notably, through Haywood’s leadership, the Comintern’s intervention in the Scottsboro Boys case – where nine African-American youths were falsely accused of raping two white women in Alabama – was arguably more effective than the NAACP’s efforts during the same period.

As Oscar Berland observes in ‘The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the “Negro Question” in America: 1919–1931: Part Two’ (2000), ‘international concern with the fate of the “Scottsboro Boys”, after decades of inattention, gave new force to the issue of racial justice in America’.⁹⁹ This pattern of external pressure shaping domestic racial policy reemerged in the Supreme Court’s 1954 school integration decision, which laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights Movement. In that case, the US State Department, acting partly to enhance America’s image among newly independent African nations, participated as *amicus curiae*. The Comintern’s intervention in Scottsboro may thus be situated within a broader historical trajectory wherein global political considerations catalysed domestic racial reform.

However, Haywood, thirty years after his (and Otto Hall [Haywood’s older brother], Cyril Briggs, Otto Huiswood, and Haywood’s friend Nasanov’s) stance

on 'the Negro Question' at the Sixth Congress of the Third International (Comintern) and its wide ramifications, did not waiver in his opposition to being conjoined with the vampiric domineering enterprise that is the American empire, a utopian eschatology of purificatory oneness. What is not utopian, as we know from Cruse, as he reads Haywood, is 'that Negro nationalism is an invalid ideology for Negroes to have in American life, or that the nationalist ideas of economic self-sufficiency or the "separate Negro economy" are unrealistic'.¹⁰⁰ By 1958, years after the fall of the Comintern in 1937–1943, Haywood, still brooding over the Negro question, regards the prospect of being part and parcel of the American monopolistic drive for world mastery to be an assimilation through integration incompatible with the material wellness of Black people. Integration and 1954, then, become an affront to self-determination, to true libertarianism, against Sowell's right-wing variation of the same, to be resolutely resisted.

4.5. Conclusion

Haywood occupies a complex position as a conservative within the spectrum of Marxist thought, a 'right-wing Marxist', yet his Rightism diverges sharply from Sowell's. Both critique integration, but their analyses pivot on fundamentally different axes. Sowell, as an assimilationist theodocist, contends that Black Americans fared better economically prior to integration, which he characterises as a liberal stratagem to 'score points' – a concept that Sowell attempts to elevate to a theoretical and sophisticated process, but remains unconvincing. In his view, integration eroded the Black work ethic and vitiated cultural integrity.

Haywood, by contrast, eschews such attenuated reasoning; his critique is grounded in materialist analysis rather than rationalist dogmatics.

Unlike Sowell, Haywood never utopianised pre-integration conditions for Black working-class people – the overwhelming majority of Black Americans – because empirical data refuted such claims. Distrustful of liberal and bourgeois organisations, whether Black or white, Haywood subjected entities like the NAACP to rigorous critique, not out of ideological antipathy but because evidence demonstrated persistent economic suffering among Black communities even after desegregation. As Haywood observed, following *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the widening ‘economic gap’ imposed ‘tremendous social pressure upon the Negro family, increasing the number of workers holding down two jobs, and families with more wage earners’.¹⁰¹ He writes:

The burden is particularly heavy on Negro women. In 1955, 44% of all Negro women, as compared to 34% of white women were in the work force. The median income for Negro women was \$1,465, compared with \$2856 for white women. (US Census Bureau, ‘Employment of White and Nonwhite Persons, 1955’)¹⁰²

Haywood’s inclusion of gendered labour disparities in 1958 – five years before the Equal Pay Act (1963) and fourteen years before Title IX (1972) – underscores his vanguardism and deep solidarity with the most marginalised. His analysis anticipates liberation theodicy’s materialist orientation: a socioeconomic rejoinder to capitalist logics of accumulation and domination, attentive to the plight of Black wage labourers across occupational strata. While his immediate

focus was agricultural labourers and sharecroppers, Haywood extended his critique to encompass all Black working-class people.

Because the 'Communist International dissolved itself on June 10, 1943',¹⁰³ and 'the various parties attached to it were no longer obligated to fight for its various rules, regulations, and resolutions',¹⁰⁴ as Harold Cruse noted in his 1962 essay 'Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American', the Communist Party USA had abandoned the principle of 'self-determination' in the Black Belt and evaded the question of Black national character.¹⁰⁵ Against this retreat, Haywood's advocacy at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern for recognising Black workers as a 'subject nation', an internal colony within the expanding US empire, remains significant. Like Fort-Whiteman before him, Haywood theorised Black Americans as a distinct nation within a nation, inseparable from the American social fabric yet capable of severing ties with what he termed the US 'drive toward world mastery'. This imperial calculus, which conscripted Black labour into the machinery of global domination, demanded a radical alternative. Liberation theodicy, as proposed here, functions as a heuristic for reimagining resistance to tacit complicity in empire. It exposes how nationalist modes of radical theory, however sincere and incisive, often fail to achieve revolutionary rupture, precisely because they remain tethered to capitalism as the organising principle of statecraft.

¹ Harry Haywood, *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question* ([1958] 2018).

<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1956-1960/haywood02.htm>

² Ibid.

³ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 223.

⁴ Oscar Berland, 'The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the Negro Question in America 1919–1931: Part One', *Science & Society* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1999/2000).

⁵ Ibid, 417.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 416.

⁹ Ibid, 417.

¹⁰ This pamphlet is also called *Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions*.

¹¹ Ibid, 415.

¹² Ibid, 426.

¹³ Ibid, 428.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 426.

¹⁶ In 'Thesis 9' of his *Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions* (1920), Lenin expresses differentiation from the Western Marxism of the Second International and the bourgeois 'democracy' of Liberal nations by explicitly stating his solidarity in leading the Comintern in '[rendering] direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations (for example, Ireland, the American Negroes, etc.) and in the colonies' (Lenin 1920, 144–51).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 411.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 412.

²² This concept is also called the 'Black Belt thesis'.

²³ James Forman, 'History and Politics of the Black Belt Nation Thesis from 1928 until 1945', in *Self-Determination: An Examination of the Question and Its Application to the African American People* (Greensboro, NC: Open Hand Publishing, 1990), 32.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 33.

²⁵ In *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (1990), Robin D. G. Kelley specifies, 'In 1930, the resolution was altered to account for the differences between North and South. Northern blacks, the new resolutions argued, sought integration and assimilation, and therefore the demand for self-determination was to be applied exclusively to the South' (p.13).

²⁶ Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 138.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 139.

²⁸ Berland, 418.

²⁹ West, 139.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 427.

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² West, 135.

³³ Rosa Luxemburg, *Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy* (1934).

³⁴ C. L. R. James, *World Revolution, 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1937), 151, 153.

³⁵ Even though the term *soviet* is Russian for 'council', the Council Socialists, including Luxemburg, Pannekoek, and Korsch, rejected the elitist formulation of 'the council' as propounded by Lenin and his allies.

³⁶ Rosa Luxemburg, *Social Reform or Revolution* (Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2020), 6.

³⁷ Vladimir, Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?' In *Lenin's Collected Works, Volume 1*, by Vladimir Lenin (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 127.

³⁸ Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1909), 16–17.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 17.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² West, 135.

⁴³ C. L. R. James, *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1948), 61.

⁴⁴ West, 135.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ James (1948), 61.

⁴⁷ West, 136.

⁴⁸ This is a cherry-picked rendering of Kautsky's thought by Lenin, who quoted the new draft programme of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party that Kautsky wrote. Lenin would never agree with the orthodox Marxist Kautsky apart from this instance (Lenin 1914), where Kautsky, always in favour of science, maintained that it was 'not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia...' (Lenin 1902, 22–3) that would lead the masses of workers into their thought life and political life in the revolution.

⁴⁹ West, 137.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 135.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 136.

⁶⁰ Walter Rodney ([1969] 2001) notes in *The Groundings with My Brothers* that 'The Russians are white and have power, but they are not a colonial power oppressing [B]lack peoples. The white

power which is our enemy is that which is exercised over [B]lack peoples, irrespective of which group is in the majority and irrespective of whether the particular country belonged originally to whites or [B]lacks' (18).

⁶¹ James (1937), 360.

⁶² Muammar Gaddafi, *The Green Book* (Internet Archive.com, 2020), 8.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ C. L. R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1986), 136.

⁶⁶ Emily A. Shrider and Christina Bijou, 'Poverty in the United States: 2024', 9 September 2025, United States Census Bureau.

⁶⁷ Haywood ([1958] 2018).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (New York: Encounter Books, 2005), 262.

⁷¹ John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: Harper, 2000), 6.

⁷² Sowell, 56.

⁷³ Robinson, 217.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Haywood ([1958] 2018).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Harold Cruse, 'Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American', in *Rebellion or Revolution* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1968), 87.

⁷⁹ Haywood ([1958] 2018).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Karl Marx Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Paris: Foreign Language Press, 2022), 22.

⁸⁷ Haywood ([1958] 2018).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Coleman Hughes, *The End of Race Politics: Arguments for a Colorblind America* (New York: Thesis, 2024), 73.

⁹⁹ Oscar Berland, 'The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the Negro Question in America: 1919–1931, Part Two', *Science & Society* 3, no. 4 (Spring 2000), 215.

¹⁰⁰ Cruse, 95.

¹⁰¹ Haywood ([1958] 2018).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Forman, 46.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Cruse, 87.

Conclusions: Against Moral Relativism, Homogeneity and Consensus

In his racial escapism of the European deracination of indigenous Americans, in which he describes the massacre of 'American Indians' as the resultants of mere 'battles', and 'being forced from their land by the westward movement of invaders from Europe',¹ Sowell suggests that his historical analysis of this moment is not a matter of moral relativism.² He suggests that Native Americans, had they had the shipbuilding technology to do so, would have colonised the globe in the same way the European powers had, because there is evidence that their tribes had been waging war on each other for thousands of years in schemes of conquering.³ The problem with Sowell's theory, of course, is that he does not take into consideration how culturally formative religious tradition is. In fact, in *Black Rednecks*, Sowell, even in his talk of how Jews are a model middleman minority that Black Americans should use as an example of being persecuted on every continent but still gaining material success, religion seldom pierces the consciousness of his discourse beyond categories of description. He does not deal with religion as an animating force for European expansion and Western colonising missiology. That Sowell believes Indigenous American nations would mobilise a global colonising effort had they the technology, without remarking substantially on how the European powers used Christianity as a religious pretext for subduing the New World, the religion that says 'Go ye into all the world and make disciples',⁴ a religious tradition that Native Americans did not have, represents that he is engaged in moral relativism.

Though this is an understandable pitfall of Sowell's thought, his rationalist theodicy being strongly against historicism, even though, as we have discussed, Burke, the founder of C/conservatism, emphasised historicism as a core tenet, it is nonetheless inexcusable for reasons of moral relativism. In his PhD dissertation, *Ethics, Historicism, and the Marxist Tradition* (1980), to expose the danger of moral relativism, West is in conversation with not only Marx himself and his major works (*Capital Vols I and III*, *Theses on Feuerbach*, *The German Ideology*) and minor works ('The Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law' and *The Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*), but also with the early scientific and orthodox Marxist philosophers Friedrich Engels, Karl Kautsky and Georg Lukács and their major works, *The Anti-Duhring* (1877), *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History* (1906) and *History and Class Consciousness* (1922–1923), respectively. In the text, West's contention is that Marx possessed an ethological commitment along an is/ought dialectic, that is, that facts about what *is* can be universalised into what should *be*. According to West, '[Marx's] commitment to the Hegelian is/ought opposition and to the moralistic conception of philosophy as the rational guiding element in activity that mediates between what is and what ought to be, philosophy as moral judgment on the evolving present',⁵ and was the site of his ethical dimensions of not describing the world and its cognised objects but changing the world, revealed by his increasing 'uneasiness with the Hegelian position, owing to his exposure to the mundane world of politics and power'.⁶

As Marx himself writes in 'Thesis XI' of his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it',⁷ and, in West's view, the early Marxists, Engels, Kautsky and Lukács, among others, missed his deep ethical codification. To West, this was due in large part to these thinkers' emphasis on philosophic certainty as a central feature to Marxism.⁸ West's final analysis of the matter is that Marx himself differs from these most prominent and consequential early Marxist philosophers because 'Marx discards any notion of philosophic necessity after he adopts the radical historicist viewpoint'.⁹ He writes:

Of course, he continues to talk about necessity (or, better yet, inevitability) in his later works but his necessity is no longer philosophic necessity (which serves as the basis for valid knowledge claims or true representations of reality), but rather historical necessity always subsumed under his theoretic formulations or within his value-laden description of historical reality and its projected tendencies.¹⁰

It is this proclivity of mounting philosophical claims on 'historical necessity always [being] subsumed under...theoretic formulations...within...value-laden description[s] of historical reality and [their] projected tendencies' that is the bulwark of what West calls radical historicism. West's novel reading of Marx is that he was a thinker who was obsessed with the opposition of what is and what ought to be, a characteristic evident even in his personal letters to his father about his girlfriend, Jenny.¹¹ According to West, Marx writes his now famous

letter to his father while a law student at the University of Berlin, expressing through Romantic poetics a love that is both real and unreal, 'real in that he feels it deeply', 'unreal in that it remains unfulfilled, unrealized, unconsummated'.¹² Even in an informal epistolary, by working through an is/ought dialectic of what is 'his love and her absence', and what ought to be 'his love and her presence',¹³ the young philosopher is already wrestling with the proposition of overcoming what is and instantiating what ought to be. Though, admittedly, finalised by a 'solution to [this] is/ought opposition with unregulated imagination, intense subjectivity, capricious arbitrariness, and fanciful illusions',¹⁴ as any love affair is wont to produce, to West, Marx's early assertion of his will is foundational to the ethical character of his later work and critical to unlocking commitment to not only (re)conceptualising the world but offering a theory to improve it.

Yet, while in their major works, early Marxist philosophers Engels describes process alienation (the distancing in the consciousness of the wage worker from the means and modes of capitalist surplus production), Kautsky describes neighbour alienation (the abstraction of the labouring citizenry, through marketised competition, from their community members), and Lukács describes species alienation (the reification, or inextricableness, of the human being from his industrial loci of commodified labour power), all predicated by the material conditions of capitalist exploitation, none of these writers is able to approximate Marx's ethical orientation because of their commitment to certainty rather than contingency.¹⁵ This is because these Marxists were moderate historicists, as opposed to being radical historicists. In the Introduction to *The Ethical*

Dimensions of Marxist Thought (1991), West explains radical historicism this way:

My passionate interest in philosophy was – and remains – primarily motivated by the radical historical *conditionedness* of human existence and the ways in which possibilities and potentialities are created, seized, and missed by individuals and communities within this ever changing conditionedness, including our inescapable death, illness, and disappointment. This attention to the historical character of all thought and action has led me to be suspicious of intellectual quests for truth unwilling to be truthful about themselves, including my own.¹⁶

This is the essence of radical historicism, without which, there emerges *moral apathy*. As Walter Benjamin writes in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in ‘Thesis XVI’, historicism depicts the ‘eternal picture of the past; the historical materialist, an experience with it, which stands alone. He leaves it to others to give themselves to the whore called “Once upon a time” in the bordello of historicism. He remains master of his powers: man enough, to explode the continuum of history.’¹⁷ While historicism observes ‘the eternal picture of the past’, ‘master of his powers’, radical historicism, through ethological coordinates, seeks to be the exploding interruption to the mechanical process of history.” The mechanical view of history is what leads to moderate historicism, that is, ‘attempts to console man with a dialectical proof that his agony and defeat are not really evils but necessary elements in the goodness of the whole’.¹⁸ To vivify

his dialectic of radical historicism and moderate historicism, West commences a discourse on relativism.

Informed by the Deweyan American pragmatist tradition, to West, only radical historicism, which looks at how truth is revisable and contingent throughout cultures and history, can respond adequately to the paucity ensconced in the three major moral relativistic positions: descriptive relativism, strong relativism and weak relativism. Descriptive relativism observes that there are cultural differences between subjects that allows for differing and at times disparate ethical procedures (Lukács); strong relativism acknowledges that there are differing social ethical procedures between cultures and abjures that there is no way to intercede a programme of transposition between them (Kautsky); and weak relativism posits that there is a way to formulate a transposition between the ethical procedures of differing cultures but that there is no consensus methodology available to systematise such an enterprise (Engels).¹⁹

Comparing him to Charles Sanders Peirce owing to his move to preserve the notion of moral objectivity 'by claiming that it amounts to what moral agents will converge to or agree upon in the long run',²⁰ West calls the view of Engels 'the teleological quest because it attempts to ground moral objectivity in the every-broadening intersubjective agreement which shall occur at the end of history (or, in Marxist terminology, the end of prehistory and the beginning of history).²¹ Likening him to John Dewey, who often tried to translate norms-talk into needs-talk,²² West terms Kautsky's view 'the naturalist quest because it tries to hold all metaphysics at arm's length and promote an evolutionary naturalism

which ensures that moral progress and technological progress go hand-in-hand'.²³ Finally, West calls Lukács' view 'the ontological quest because it tries to ground moral objectivity in the inherent "dialectics" in the nature of reality, in the development of history'.²⁴ Ultimately, of Lukács, West explains his is 'a sophisticated Hegelian move to overcome traditional foundationalist epistemology and ethics, only to resurrect an untraditional foundationalism in ontological garb'.²⁵

This discourse on moral relativism is West's Black Marxism. Here, West roundly rejects sameness. Sameness is the site of exploitation; sameness is the phenomenology that engenders domination. The cowardliness and callousness of strong, weak and descriptive moral relativisms preclude any instructive procedure of identifying harm. Though there is no homogeneous procedure for distinguishing a moral quotient between cultures and peoples, an approach to identify wrongs as a highly contingent process must be developed.

For example, in Kautsky's *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History* he deals with moral relativism in terms of how naturalism has its own innate embodied morality. To do this, Kautsky examines a case of explorer Fridtjof Nansen and his experience with the Esquimo of Greenland in the late 1800s, and how their elderly, when they are ready to die, are hurled by fellow tribesmen from a nearby cliff when they are in advanced senescence, to spare their tribespeople's food rations.²⁶ Leading to this description of altitudinous, altruistic euthanasia, Kautsky recounts how Nansen describes the Esquimo's moral character as being filled with 'honorableness',²⁷ having an 'especial value that he

should be able to rely on his fellows and neighbors'.²⁸ Though, according to Nansen, Western forms of '[v]irtue and chastity do not stand in great esteem in Greenland'²⁹ among the Esquimaux, that it is 'no great shame if an unmarried girl has children',³⁰ the tribe 'consider[s] it dreadful to kill a fellowman'.³¹ 'War', Nansen writes, 'is hence quite incomprehensible to them and abominable; their language has not even a word for it, and soldiers and officers who have been trained to the calling of killing people are to them simply butchers of men'.³² Kautsky cites Nansen's (and Dalager's) observations of the Esquimaux to advance a theory of unstandardised morals differentiated between white and indigenous Greenlanders, to wit, betwixt Western civilisation and the Global South, as a ponderance on a possible ordering of moral norms astride disparate cultures. In a discourse on murder as a possible exemplar of love of neighbour, Nansen relates the following:

We must absolutely guard against condemning from our standpoint views which have been developed through many generations and after long experience by a people, however much they contradict our own. The views of good and bad are namely extraordinarily different on this earth. As an example I might quote, that when this Egede had spoken to an Esquimo girl of love of God and our neighbor, she said 'I have proved that I love my neighbor because an old woman who was ill and could not die, begged me that I would take her for a payment to the steep cliff, from which those always are thrown who can no more live. But because I love my

people, I took her there for nothing and threw her down from the rocks.'³³

Kautsky rejoinders that 'the necessity of killing old and sick members of society very easily arises with limited food supply', thus making possible for 'this killing [to become] signalized as a moral act'.³⁴ He rightly asserts that, regarding Esquimo sociality, that '[i]t is the opposition of the morality of primitive communism to capitalist morality which appears'³⁵ in their various forms of moralism. He writes, 'In the Eskimo society the theory and practice of morality agree with one another; in cultivated society a division exists between the two'.³⁶

Yet, in the end, Kautsky dives into the same pitfall as any moral relativist, *philosophic certainty*, writing 'Science stands above Ethics, its results are just as little moral or immoral as necessity is moral or immoral'.³⁷ This systematisation and routinisation of the procedures of prejudice, where the experience of a people can be potentially mathematised as a rule of a vaunted committee, deigning to dispense judgement on culture with the imprimatur of scientism, is a homogenising project that precludes the possibility of differentiation between the social mores of various peoples. Thus, it becomes a method of concretising a unary, univocal and uniform modality of existence(s) that winnows plurality, obviating contextualisation or historicisation. Consequently, sameness becomes the rule of the day. The Barbary slave trade of Europeans by the Ottomans becomes the same as the Mid-Atlantic slave trade of Africans by the Europeans. James Madison enslaving many children of his hundreds of bonded servants becomes the same as Nat Turner killing white babies in their cribs during his

Virginia insurrection of 1831. This inclination is a failing of moral relativism as much as it is a failing of philosophic certainty, and assimilationist (and exceptionalist) theodicy as modes of classed rationalist thought.

Therefore, a theodicy of liberation becomes a radical historicist technology of assuaging moral relativism, through an activistic and deterministic technology of selfhood that is demonstrated in the cultural production of Black people, who have been at work towards their beatification apart from white culture for centuries. This self-deterministic procedure is what Cedric Robinson terms the Black radical tradition. Robinson posits in *Black Marxism* that, despite some mainstream beliefs, in a systematic way, Black people have always been about the work of their own liberation against oppressive and repressive forces interior and exterior to European traditions of radicalism, such as scientific socialism, orthodox Marxism, trade unionism, etc. Robinson details how, for example, in early nineteenth-century French Guiana, enchained as slaves, Black revolutionists staged a rebellion:

A slave rebellion broke out in August 1823. Fifty estates and perhaps as many as 30,000 Africans were involved. In two weeks, it was over: two whites killed, 100 slaves killed with the executions of many others to follow. In the next five months, rebels were tracked down, executed, and in some instances tried.³⁸

Robinson maintains that this type of revolt was a methodology of resistance to the commoditisation and species alienation of flesh known as enslavement on the part of those Black Africans who were made slaves. It was not only a

common practice, begun by the *Cimarrones* and Maroons of Brazil and Jamaica, respectively, in the sixteenth century, this praxis of absconding the tortuous pangs of the human being forced into arduous servitude, but it was a *modus operandi* of radicalism that could not be comprehended by the European or Eurocentric mind, according to its narrow view of epistemology, phenomenology, metaethics and ontology. This is because there seems to be little victory in launching a rebellion that will result in such casualty, such loss, while your oppressors seemed to maintain minimal losses, and this Afrocentric praxis is counterintuitive to the imperial mindset of continental philosophy:

In southern Africa, the Xhosas' Hundred Years War (1779–1880) with the white colonists was already into its third decade. Before its obviously impermanent conclusion, it would take this people deeply into the historical tradition as any Black people, even the Haitians, had dared. The 'Nongquase' or Cattle-Killing of 1856–57, which resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Xhosas by self-inflicted starvation, continues to evade Western comprehension.³⁹

This severest example of an Afrocentric modality of resistance that tends to elude Eurocentric understandability is rooted in 'a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality',⁴⁰ that is, the deeply undeniable agency of Black people.

When the enslaved revolutionists and self-liberated participants in the proto-Black radical tradition in the New World colonies of the metropolises of

Europe took their lives into their own hands instead of surrendering their autonomy to their captors, they were engaging with Afrocentric cultural artefacts of making history on their own terms as a community, often through fugitivity. This fugitivity as an expression and affirmation of collective agency took differing forms at varying times in its presentation, as in eighteenth-century maroon populations burgeoning on the Jamaican hillside after escaping coercive servitude, or in its metaphysical construction, as in newly African bondages bound for various colonies crossing the Middle Atlantic Ocean in irons in the holds of ships jumping overboard into the mouths of sharks, in 'a refusal of objectification, an unmooring of the relentless, necromantic machinations of a global order that demanded human beings be transformed into saleable commodities'.⁴¹

In his text *Black Suffering: Silent Pain, Hidden Hope* (2020), practical theologian James Henry Harris poses a thoughtful phenomenological rendition of the Black radical and enslaved preacher Nat Turner. Harris explains Turner as a sovereign self, evading the assimilation of being enslaved, of 'being turned upside down and inside out'.⁴² As Harris posits, 'The architects of violence were now its victims',⁴³ speaking to Turner's killing of sixty white men, women and children (babies) in his famous insurrection of 1831 in Southampton County, Virginia. Harris writes:

Nat Turner's 1831 insurrection subtends and subvenes the meaning of alterity in the consciousness of the radical Black individual because it situates otherness as the thesis, rather than

the antithesis. Freedom is now the thesis. And the only axis to freedom – and not merely eschatological freedom – is through the struggle to bring it about via insurrection, the result of the personal pain and suffering of the preacher – Prophet Nat.⁴⁴

Exploring the interiority of Turner's violent and irruptive rebellion, Harris wants to counterpose a dialectics of freedom and slavery, suggesting, much like Fanon before him, that violence is a clarifying, purificatory act, that ennoble the individual who existed under systematic repression. This is a violence that obviates alterity and erasure 'institutionalized by the wielders of power and capitalism'.⁴⁵ Turner's violence was not illogical or wildcat, it was an acknowledgement of his agency, an affirmation of his humanity that had been denied him for decades of his life. Here, then, Harris is not making an ontological claim about Black suffering, a suffering of inexorable permanence. His view, thus, is anti-Afro-pessimist in its formulation.

To be in the school of Afro-pessimism, one must link suffering as synonymous with Blackness, to posit that suffering equals Black, that it is *a priori* Black, that the '[e]radication of the generative mechanisms of Black suffering would mean the end of the world'.⁴⁶ It, Afro-pessimism, suggests that without struggle there can be no Blackness, and without Blackness there can be no struggle, that '[a]ffirmation of [B]lackness proves to be impossible without simultaneously affirming the violence that structures [B]lack subjectivity itself'.⁴⁷

Contrary to the position advanced by R. L. Stephens in 'Wanderings of the Slave: Black Life and Social Death' (2013), struggle does not exhaust the

meaning of Blackness, nor does Blackness exist solely within the horizon of struggle. To assert such a conflation is to delimit the scope of Black humanity. Black existence encompasses far more than struggle – manifest in its illeity, its external and observable dimensions and its phenomenological depth. Just as the trace or presence of the signifier lacks precedent, so too Blackness has no antecedent. It is phenomenal without being ontological. Through processes of acculturation, the hypostatic nature of Blackness acquires subjectivity.

To ascribe to Blackness an overdetermined plenary weight, as Afro-pessimism does, is to render its subjectivising quality a form of transcendentalism. Such a move imposes an implacable metaphysics and risks insinuating a notion of Black superiority – an assertion without basis. Black people do not possess a monopoly on suffering, nor does suffering constitute a productive lens through which to apprehend the Black experience in America. Its sensational and overdetermined character forecloses the possibility of a measured and interrogative analysis of race and experience. Afro-pessimism presumes a tautological relation between Blackness and suffering, even when empirical evidence suggests otherwise – namely, that to be Black in society necessarily entails death, that Black people’s ‘absence from the spatiotemporal structure of the narrative’⁴⁸ is required. Within this framework, Black suffering is construed as ontological, existential in its concrescence and ineluctably colour-coded.

For example, Frank B. Wilderson, III, the scholar responsible for coining the term Afro-pessimism, believes that the Black person is still a slave, because

to be a slave is to be in the ontological position of social death, and to be Black is tantamount to living in a state of social death, in perpetuity. For Wilderson and the Afro-pessimists, '[s]ocial death is aporetic with respect to narrative writ large (and, by extension, to redemption, writ large)',⁴⁹ and this vulnerability is imbrued irremissibly onto the existence of the Black person as a conspicuous sign of insuperable ontological insufficiency. Yet, if we are in the moment that Derrida suggests, where the transcendental signified is the logocentric universe (following the architectonic role of religion in the Middle Ages [theocentricity] and science in the Age of Enlightenment [anthropocentricity]), and if it is evidentiary that the present-past and future-present are done away with, that there is a great oneness from signifier to signified, then suffering would have to exist before Blackness to give it its significative *ousia* [*étant*]. And that makes no logical sense. This moment is not of the transcendental signified but of the traumatic signified where the trauma precedes the signified not because of racial category but because of the supplementarity of the signification itself.

The Afro-pessimist might retort that therein lies the fallacy – the limits of reason itself. The definitions of ontology and existentialism are too rigid themselves, and the line of demarcation between the concepts is imaginary. To exist is to be, and to be Black is to exist in pain. All human existence cannot escape suffering in any generalised way; however, Black suffering is beyond the pale of general suffering and is grounded in race and racial hatred. The argument is based solely on the notion of causality inherent in Blackness as Being and experience. Being always on the precipice of becoming nothingness, as part of a

metaphysical grounding. This is Black reality and Black suffering. They are so interstitially constituted that they cannot be separated.

However, what Harris in *Black Suffering* is inviting us to do is to approximate the plenary force of Black agency, not in ontological sufferings along lines of racialisation. Rather, he wants us to view suffering as an impermanent relative to our desire for liberation. Contrast Turner's irruptive yet beatifying use of the scripture with Brockden's assimilative and degrading adoption of the same to see the difference between a liberational model of theodicy and an assimilationist model of theodicy. In doing so, it rings true that scripture can be read in either an assimilationist approximation or a liberationist extrication, as the interlocutor with the text deals with the matter of suffering, or theodicy, as a philosophy of religion. As Virginia's governor John Floyd remarked following Turner's revolt, castigating the Black clergy of that day, 'From all that has come to my knowledge during and since this affair – I am fully convinced that every Black preacher in the whole country east of the Blue Ridge was in the secret, and again in relation to the extent of the insurrection "I think it greater than will ever appear."⁵⁰ From the Black religious tradition emerged the Black radical tradition in the United States, and, in the case of Nat Turner's revolt, it was one that was liberational. This is what I hope the anti-assimilationism of Haywood and liberation theodicy proves to be.

The assimilationism of conservative theodicy, that holds 'only assimilation can civilize, refine and modernise Afro-American enhancement in increased interaction with whites',⁵¹ would have one believe that the oppressed Black

masses looking to themselves for their own liberation is not possible, even if that liberation looks like failure, takes the form of death. In this research document, because he was 'the theologian of the American religion', I engaged with Emerson's activistic theodicy and found that, while inspiring, it was too American in its ethos, that is, its metaphysics was too towards the unrealised potential of humankind as explanatory of ponerology, or the study of evil in the world, and thus too insular in its self-importance. I attempted to show that the problem of evil is not unrealised human potential but that the threat of nonbeing, what Leonard Harris calls necro-being, makes realising potential impossible. Further, I examined the theodicean tradition of Black thinkers of the American Enlightenment and found their philosophy of religion too integrationist and apologist. This became the need for an activistic theodicy of liberation, a theodicy that extends beyond the sphere of the self and into communal acts of resisting traditional theodicy, or a theodicy of assimilation via Harry Haywood's revolutionary advocacy for self-determination.

Though West did not believe that Crummell was an assimilationist because he published during the time of slavery, where a Black abolitionist had to be sure to engage in modes of reifying beatifying Black self-image, I attempted to show that Crummell's exceptionalism was undergirded by an assimilationism. In fact, as I attempted to show, Garnet, Turner, Delany and Crummell, though activistic and necessary for their time, all held exceptionalist theodicies that existed in a dialectical nature with assimilationist epistemology. If not for the issue of slavery, these men would have been of a similar political ideology as Black

conservatists of the twenty-first century, all engaged in modes of what I term traditional theodicy, or theodicies of assimilationism.

To explain a traditional theodicy, i.e. Black conservatism, I examined key concepts in McWhorter's *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America*, Hughes' *The End of Race Politics: Arguments for Colorblind America*, and Sowell's *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* and their cumulative assertion that Black suffering is caused by the refusal of Black people to immerse themselves fully into white culture, thus remaining outside the hedge of protection of polite white society. In this way, I attempted to precisify how assimilationist theodicy functions as a taboo of biopolitics because the moral rightness of white society is not meritorious but meretricious. Consensus building as a neoliberal, homogenising project with neoconservative sensibilities continues to construct new theodicies (read taboos) for domination and exploitation.⁵² Therefore, through the process of this paper, I wanted to show how falsifying with facts, using language that may be quantitatively accurate but qualitatively untrue, thus using the language of invalidation, is a central tool of imperialism, colonialism and domination.

This falsification is both methodological and sociological and is what enables, for example, United States Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau, representative of American statecraft, to welcome white Afrikaner South Africans as 'refugees', saying, 'Some of the criteria is to make sure that refugees did not pose any challenge to our national security, and that they could be assimilated easily into our country',⁵³ while denying the entry of embattled Black

Africans from South Africa, Congo or Sudan under the hedge of protection of white American culture. Here, white culture can be read as the larger imperialist/colonialist culture, which blames autonomous nations that do not assimilate to a particular world social order as being the sole cause of their sufferings (one can think here about President Trump suggesting that Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy was responsible for being invaded by Putin's Russia in 2022).⁵⁴ When Walter Rodney writes of the emaciated colonialist education the Scramblers for Africa provided to the native Africans, how many of the colonising nations between 1885 and 1960 had a name for their indigenous populace who could be assimilated through their educable cooperation, *assimilée* for the French, *assimilado* for the Portuguese, *évolués* ('those who have evolved') for the Belgians, he explains how among the Portuguese, for example, up to 1960, nearly half of their population was illiterate.⁵⁵

This fact reveals that assimilation as a sociopolitical sanctifying pursuit is a fiction: it asks the assimilated culture to attain to a standard that the dominating culture has not accomplished, and what Black conservative theodicy is incapable of performing. In this way, to be conservative is to preserve a nostalgic vision of America and political tradition, attaining to fictive realisms of an imagistic past, because to rely on facts alone would demolish the evidentiary truth of the present – that perfection, or anything like it, can never be achieved. Consider our earlier discussion in Chapter 3 about the mythologised vision of conservatism, an idealist political ideology abstracted from Burke's Whig liberalism, reappropriated in the American context from the Tory appropriation of the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries. This muddy conservative mythology reveals that conservatism as a political orientation has never been inevitable or eternal. If anything, Conservatism is a political philosophy as much as it is an anachronism, out of joint, out of time.

Brockden in the eighteenth century, alongside Crummell, Garnet, Delany and Turner in the nineteenth, exemplifies the construction of a false dichotomy of theodicy within Black cultural philosophy in America. While their theodicean frameworks were historically significant – seeking to cultivate ‘self-image and self-determination during the prolonged Afro-American entrance into the corridors of modernity: the long-overdue reaping of the harvest that Afro-Americans helped cultivate’⁵⁶ – their failure to interrogate capitalism as an integral component of the fascistic system that enslaved Black people physically, socially, politically and economically foreclosed the possibility of genuine self-determination.

Moreover, the dichotomous logic embedded in these theodicies has continued to delimit Black conservative thought well into the twenty-first century. Thomas Sowell exemplifies this retrogressive trajectory in Black (neo)conservative discourse, operating along the dialectic of exceptionalist and assimilationist strategies while maintaining an influential commitment to the glorification of Western civilisational enculturation and the monopoly capitalism of American imperialism. In contrast, Harry Haywood’s anti-monopoly, anticapitalist and anti-imperialist theodicy may rightly be described as liberational, a hallmark of Black political philosophy that envisions the construction of a new world, ‘[developing] a new way of thinking, and [endeavouring] to create a new man’.⁵⁷

¹ Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (New York: Encounter Books, 2005), 269.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mark 16:15–16, *King James Bible*.

⁵ Cornel West, *Ethics, Historicism, and the Marxist Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1980), 45.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach in Marx/Engels Selected Works, Volume One* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 15.

⁸ West, 4–5.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 287–8.

¹¹ Ibid, 29.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 30.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 90–1.

¹⁶ Cornel West, *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (New York: The Monthly Review Press, 1991), xvii.

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974).

¹⁸ West (1980), 121.

¹⁹ Ibid, 10.

²⁰ Ibid, 174.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 175.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Karl Kautsky, *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1906), 137.

²⁷ Ibid, 136.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, 137.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, 138–9.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 153.

³⁸ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 160.

³⁹ Ibid, 165.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 171.

⁴¹ Joshua Bennett, *Being Property Once Myself: Blackness and the End of Man* (New York: Belknap Press, 2020), 177.

⁴² James Henry Harris, *Black Suffering: Silent Pain, Hidden Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 84.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 83.

⁴⁶ Frank B. Wilderson, III, 'The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents', in *Afro-pessimism: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: racked & dispatched, 2017), 145.

⁴⁷ R. L. Stephens, 'Wanderings of the Slave: Black Life and Social Death', 5 June 2013, *Mute*, para 8.

⁴⁸ Frank Wilderson III, 'Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption' (2016) University of California, Irvine, para 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ James Arthur Holmes, *Black Nationalism and Theodicy: A Comparison of the Thought of Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner* (Boston: Boston University, 1997), 30–1.

⁵¹ West, 79.

⁵² Here, I am thinking about Mark Fisher's great book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009), which he writes following the Great Recession, where he suggests neoliberalism and neoconservatism coexisting in America as possible because of their commitment to imperialist statism. Fisher writes, 'Extrapolating a little from Brown's [Wendy] arguments, we might hypothesise that what held the bizarre synthesis of neoconservatism and neoliberalism together was their shared objects of abomination: the so called Nanny State and its dependents. Despite evincing an anti-statist rhetoric, neoliberalism is in practice not opposed to the state *per se* – as the bank bail-outs of 2008 demonstrated – but rather to particular uses of state funds; meanwhile, neoconservatism's strong state was confined to military and police functions, and defined itself against a welfare state held to undermine individual moral responsibility' (65).

⁵³ Rachel Savage and David Smith, 'First white South Africans arrive in US after Trump grants them refugee status', 12 May 2025, *The Guardian*.

⁵⁴ Yang Tian and Ian Aikman, 'Trump blames Zelensky for starting war after massive Russian attack', 15 April 2025, *BBC News*.

⁵⁵ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso, 1972), 247–8.

⁵⁶ Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 69.

⁵⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 309.

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