To hell with 'that' religion: Malcolm X and an africana critical theory of religion.

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TO HELL WITH ‘THAT’ RELIGION: MALCOLM X AND AN AFRICANA CRITICAL THEORY OF RELIGION

By
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B.A., Ohio Mid-Western College, 2013
MDiv., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In Pan-African Studies

Department of Pan-African Studies
The University of Louisville
Louisville, KY

May 2023
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A Dissertation Approved on

April 18, 2023
by the following Dissertation Committee:

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Dr. Michael Brandon McCormack

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Dr. Ricky Jones

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Dr. Tyler Fleming

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Dr. Maryam Moazzen
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation, first and foremost, to my family. My earnest desire has always been to become a man that would make you all proud. In my early life, I dishonored my father, my mother, and my family name. This journey has been my quest to reclaim the honor to that name and give the same to my wife and children.

I also dedicate this work to the numerous men and women who have been systematically locked into the life of the streets. I never would have thought that a person that lived a life like mine could accomplish something like this. Although I saw examples of Black people with backgrounds distinct from my own who were able to become successful, I never thought I could. For other Black men and women who came from a context similar to what I experienced, this dissertation is for you.

I also dedicate this dissertation to those who doubted me and sought to hinder my chances toward success. This is to my high school teacher, Ms. Frazier, who kicked me out of class almost every day instead of trying to encourage me to excel in school. This is for the administrators and police at my high school who placed me on the school-to-prison pipeline for a minor infraction. This is also for every police officer, jail and prison guard, probation officer, apartment landlord, and any individual who treated me like I was nothing and was unworthy of respect. This is also for the people who laughed at me when I was fresh out of prison working at McDonalds and told them I was going to get a PhD.
Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to Malcolm X. It was his example and blueprint that led me to the path of self-resurrection. He showed me how a guy who went to prison could improve his life with the power of God and mere determination.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most importantly, I want to thank God for saving me from myself and giving me the strength to complete this task. This journey toward a PhD was conceived in a prison cell about fifteen years ago. There is no way I could have accomplished this without the power of God.

I also want to thank my committee members: Dr. Michael Brandon McCormack, Dr. Ricky Jones, Dr. Tyler Fleming, and Dr. Maryam Moazzen. I cannot over emphasize my appreciation for your patience and your commitment to my success as a scholar. You all have played a vital role in my journey and I want to express how grateful I am for that.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my wife Brittany and my children Selah and Silas for their patience as I pursued this degree. You all have sacrificed a lot along the way and I want you to know that I do not take that for granted. Particularly to my wife, Brittany: Thank you for your support and for the ways you gave of yourself so I could become a better man.
ABSTRACT

TO HELL WITH ‘THAT’ RELIGION: MALCOLM X AND AN AFRICANA CRITICAL THEORY OF RELIGION

Jimmy Earl Butts III

April 18, 2023

Using Malcolm X as a fulcrum, this dissertation explores the possibility of resolving the apparent tension between religion and revolution in a Pan-African context. While the first chapter defines the terms “revolution” and “religion,” it also introduces readers to the conceptualization of religion as incompatible with revolution, and it presents Africana Critical Theory as the methodological tool used to guide how the author analyzed the possibility of rectifying that problem. The second chapter delineates the literature that has sought to address the potentially problematic relationship between religion and revolution. The author concludes that the Marxist tradition was too Eurocentric and the Conian tradition was too Christian-centric to qualify as useful theories for interreligious Pan-African revolutionary praxis. What he discovered, however, is the need for an Africana Critical Theory of Religion that offers a dialectical perspective and can help construct a theory that is able to reconcile religion and revolution.

Chapters three through five address specific criticisms of religion that were presented by Malcolm X along with solutions he offered. Tackling problems such as the teaching of nonviolence (Chapter 3), Disunity (Chapter 4), and accepting the oppressor’s religion (Chapter 5), the author begins each chapter by articulating the criticisms of Malcolm X. Subsequently, he dialectically examines how other Africana intellectual-activists approached the particular problem posed by Malcolm. This
allows the author to construct a standard that solutions are required to meet. Finally, the author presents the solutions offered by Malcolm and assesses them considering the aforementioned standards.

In each of the previously mentioned chapters, the author seeks to determine if Malcolm could function as a useful locus of analysis to alleviate the tension between religion and revolution, bearing in mind the thought of various Africana intellectual activists. While he mostly met the standards addressing the issue of violence and unity, Malcolm fell drastically short on the topic of oppressed people supposedly adopting their oppressor’s religion. Nevertheless, even with this limitation, it is argued that Malcolm provides a fruitful base from which one can analyze the potential of harmony between religion and revolutionary praxis.

**KEYWORDS:** Malcolm X, Africana Critical Theory of Religion, Religion and Revolution, Africana Philosophy, Religion and Violence
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970s in the midst of the socio-political upheaval defined as the Black Power Movement, the African American feminist writer Toni Cade Bambara published an edited volume of writings from Black women to inject their perspectives in the discourse of that period. Included in that collection is a piece by Francee Covington in which she discusses the topic of revolution.¹ In this essay she asserts that Black revolutionary rhetoric often overstates the willingness of African Americans to perform those types of actions. Responding to an imagined interlocutor that she quotes as saying “we’re going to burn the mother fucker down!” she contends “How many state capitols, police stations, and college campuses have been burned down by Black people?” Continuing, she stated, “Revolution…is not an easy task or an eight-hour-a-day, five-days-a-week job.”² In addition to her critique of the disparity between the words and actions of Black people, she highlights the implausibility of a successful Black revolution in the United States. Black revolution in this country, according to Covington, is not a reasonable strategy based on their lack of freedom of movement, they have no major allies with countries in close

¹The Black Power Movement has been described as a period between 1966 and 1975 that was characterized by its emphasis on Black self-determination, Black Nationalism, support of the African anti-colonial struggle, and a willingness to use violence as a tool for Black liberation. For more on the Black Power Movement see, Peniel Joseph, ed., The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights—Black Power Era (London: Routledge, 2006), 2, 69, 107.

proximity to the U.S., and the inability of Black people to defeat smaller enemies such as the organized crime groups like the Mafia who harm the Black community by supplying it with drugs.  

Most important for this current project, she contends that religion could be a very useful tool in revolutionary struggle. She claims that from its inception in human history, religion “has been a force for war. When religion is added to nationalism, the fight is going to be a fierce one.” Moreover, religion can function as a source of inner strength to revolutionaries through empowering them to survive and not break under hardships or even torture. Although religion *could* provide these advantages, she felt that during her time in the 1970s there was no religion that could unite Black people all over the country. For her, religion had the ability to help people transcend different political perspectives, but Christianity would not be a good rallying point for Black people during her time. She complained that Black people were committed to a watered-down Christianity that did not have the ideological strength to empower them for an actual revolution. Covington’s essay highlights the importance of an analysis of the relationship between revolution and religion. This dissertation aims to theorize about how these two phenomena can cooperate and/or be compatible with one another. That is, the author will explore the possibility of relieving the apparent tension between revolution and religion. In order to complete this task, however, we must first reflect on the meanings of the terms ‘revolution’ and

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3Ibid., 317, 318, 320—1.
4Ibid., 318.
5Ibid., 319, 321
‘religion’ and how they have been theorized.

**What do you mean by ‘Revolution?’**

The word revolution is often used to refer to certain historical events. Thus, revolutionary theory has developed through an examination of past events that were subsequently described as revolutions. Historian Eric Hobsbawm provided a regional and historical range of analysis that he described as the age of revolution. This age referred to the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain and the French Revolution in France that extended from 1789 C.E. to 1848 C.E. More specifically, it “begins with the construction of the first factory system of the modern world in Lancashire and the French Revolution of 1789 ends with the construction of its first railway network and the publication of the Communist Manifesto.” Hobsbawm described this era as the “greatest transformation in human history.” It is important to note that Hobsbawm explicitly excludes Africa from this framework. This perspective on the regional boundaries of the age of revolution is reflected in the way many have theorized revolution.

Exemplary figures in this tradition include Karl Marx (d. 1883) and Hannah Arendt (d. 1975). Learning from the revolutions mentioned above, Marx

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6The Industrial Revolution refers to the expansion of the productive power of human societies that was so rapid that it created what has seemed like a “limitless multiplication of men, goods, and services.” This happened through a transition to a mechanized factory system that could produce goods so rapidly that it diminished the cost of goods and create its own market. The French Revolution was a time of major political and societal change in France. For more on the Industrial and French Revolution, see Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848 (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1962), 1, 28, 32.

7Ibid., 4.

8Ibid.

9I begin with Karl Marx because he is one of the earliest theorists of the modern understanding of revolution. Jack Goldstone argues that it was Karl Marx and Frederick Engels who “first formulated many of the key issues in the study of revolution. Their Manifesto of the Communist
argued that a revolution consisted of “the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.” He contrasted his notion of revolution against those he claimed “strive for a change in social conditions which will make existent society as bearable and comfortable for themselves as possible.” These are the class of people, according to Marx, who are the beneficiaries of the rising progress of industry, while laborers are increasingly exploited and oppressed. The conflicting experiences between the ruling class and labor class of the productive forces of industry, inevitably brings society to the point of revolution. In other words, the economic exploitation of the working class by the ruling class sets into motion the destruction of the ruling class because those suffering at the bottom of society eventually realize that they “have nothing to lose but their chains.”

While the author focused on Marx’s answer to the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of revolution, he turns to Arendt to observe how she answered the ‘what’ of revolution. She explained that the word ‘revolution’ originates from the field of astronomyParty, published in 1848, has undoubtedly been the most influential essay on revolution ever written.” See, Jack Goldstone, ed., Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies, 3rd edition (California: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, In., 2003), 23.


12 Marx, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 217; Karl Marx, “The German Ideology, Volume 1” in Eugene Kamenka, ed., The Portable Karl Marx (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 192, 194. Hobsbawm argues that the “transition to the new economy created misery and discontent” which he describes as “the materials of social revolution…small and inadaptable businessmen, petty-bourgeois, special sections of the economy, were also victims of the Industrial Revolution and of its ramifications.” See, Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution, 38.

13 Marx, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 241. Hobsbawm contends that the “exploitation of labour [sic] which kept its incomes at subsistence level, thus enabling the rich to accumulate the profits which financed industrialization (and their ample comforts), antagonized the proletarian.” See, Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution, 39.
“designating the regular, lawfully revolving motion of the stars.”

When the word entered into politics, it was used metaphorically from its scientific meaning to describe the revolving back to a preordained order; a notion of restoration. She maintained that revolution did not exist prior to the age of modernity. Political changes in antiquity were merely the transformation of the person in leadership while simply restoring the existing societal structure. Making a helpful distinction, Arendt argued that although each is associated with violence, what makes a revolution distinct from an insurrection, coup d' etat, civil war, and rebellion, is the idea of freedom along with the pursuit of a new society. For Arendt, “revolutions are more than successful insurrections.” It is only “when this pathos of novelty is present and where novelty is connected with the idea of freedom are we entitled to speak of revolution.”

Arendt does, however, enter into the discussion of the ‘why’ of revolution. She argued that before the modern era, the distinction between the poor and the rich was viewed as natural for the body politic. By contrast, the American colonial experience had become a symbol of a society without poverty. This led people to doubt whether poverty was an inherent part of human society. Based on assumptions about the American experience, the rebellious European poor began to take on a

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15 Ibid., 42-43. According to Jack Goldstone this more recent application of the word to politics traces back to the 15th and 16th centuries when “Italians began to refer to the frequent rotations of power between different groups as a *revolutio*, from the Latin ‘revolvere,’ to cycle or revolve.” See, Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 54.
16 Ibid., 18, 21, 35.
17 Ibid., 34.
revolutionary posture.\(^{18}\) Thus, in contrast to Marx who connected revolution to the discontent and class conflict brought on by the external forces of the economy, for Arendt, revolution is brought about by the subjective (inward) realization of the poor of the possibility of something better. Stated differently, in Marx’s theory of revolution, the forces of society will bring about revolution whether there are hopeful examples in the world or not. Nevertheless, in Arendt’s view, people are most likely to pursue revolutionary change when they have become aware of alternative modes of possibilities beyond their present circumstances.

The reader should consider another significant quality of the age of revolution articulated by Hobsbawm. He claimed that in regard to the ideologies of the American and French Revolutions, these marked the first time that religion was irrelevant. This was, according to Hobsbawm, a product of the imposition of secularism from the middle-class onto the masses. Although the masses were largely a religious demographic, he contended that the new labor movement that emerged during the age of revolution was secular.\(^{19}\) It can be said that by 1848 in parts of Europe, people began to transition from thinking of the world through the lens of traditional religion. Hobsbawm explained this by stating that “Bourgeois triumph thus imbued the French Revolution with the agnostic or secular moral ideology of the eighteenth century enlightenment, and since the idiom of that revolution became the general language of all subsequent social revolutionary movements, it transmitted this


\(^{19}\)Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution, 220.
secularism to them also.” If Hobsbawm is correct, then this secularizing phenomenon cannot be ignored. He essentially asserted that there is a secular bias in the very work of revolutionary theory. Moreover, based on a European-centered frame of analysis, there is an assumed inherent incompatibility between revolution and religion. Even though this “secular revolution” perspective fails when other regions are included, scholars from those “excluded communities” who have been educated from the European perspective often adopt the aforementioned European bias. While the preceding descriptions of revolution were limited to European

20 Ibid., 220.

21 According to Vincent Lloyd, scholar of Black religion and secularism, “In the specific case of black theology in the contemporary U.S. context, secularism has been particularly pernicious. In the late 1960s and early 1970s…black secularism triumphed by splitting black theology into two groups. Secular religious studies scholars…and scholars of black religion within the theological academy…Both sides understood blackness in worldly and secular…terms.” See, Vincent Lloyd, Religion of the Field Negro: On Black Secularism and Black Theology (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 10. Another example of the attempt to deemphasize the significance of religion in the African American context is present in the work of Arthur Fauset. In his book Black Gods of the Metropolis he aims to challenge the notion of Black people’s natural religiosity. To do this he provides an interpretation of the centrality of the Black Church that suggests the reason for its significance lie in the fact that it was the only institution that allowed Black people to express themselves. That is, they were excluded from all other institutions in American life. While it is commendable that Fauset sought to challenge certain claims about African Americans that were used against them, it may be an overreaction to completely discount the centrality of religion for African Americans; especially in light of their African background. See, Arthur Fauset, Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 98, 107. One of the effects of this process of secularization could manifest itself by the intentional overlooking of evidence of the pervasive presence of religion in the history of Africana resistance to oppression. For example, Garret Felber’s groundbreaking study on the NOI challenges simplistic conceptions that the NOI was apolitical and disengaged from the broader struggle for Black liberation. He points out that the NOI fought for religious freedom and prisoner rights through sit-ins, hunger strikes, and overfilling solitary confinement. Their activism was so effective that by the early 1960s these Muslims were responsible for transforming the rights of prisoners through their litigations and organizing. In 1961, Muslim prisoners in Washington D.C. and New York cited section 1983 of the Civil Rights Act of 1871 to breach the barrier between the Constitution and incarcerated people. As a result, the Supreme Court ruled that the federal government can intervene if the Fourteenth Amendment rights of prisoners are denied by the state. These actions of the NOI led Felber to conclude that the activism of the NOI is the actual foundation of the contemporary prison abolition movements. Beyond this, Felber highlights the significant role of the NOI in the Attica prison uprising. His work is an example of how there can be a scholarly consensus about the absence of forms of political resistance utilized by Africana religious groups or individuals that reinforces the anti-religious rhetoric that claims religion has done little for Africana peoples. Felber’s work shows the need for utilizing more rigorous research methods before passionate claims are circulated. For more on this, see, Garret Felber, Those Who Know Don’t Say: The Nation of Islam, the Black Freedom Movement, and the Carceral State (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 51, 52, 53, 170—5, 188. In other cases, an inadequate methodology for recognizing religion in Africana cultures may cause some scholars to conclude the absence of religion from a particular context or phenomenon. For example, according to T.J. Desch-Obi, in the Kongo-Angolan tradition, “combat as it is ritually
history, other scholars have challenged and expanded the regional limitations of the age of revolution presented by Hobsbawm and have thus, broadened the scope for theorization.

**Expanding the Theory**

Scholars such as Eugene Genovese and Paul Lovejoy have injected other regions and their histories into the discourse on the age of revolution. Although European conceptions of revolution developed independently (and perhaps, in opposition to) religion, the exact opposite is true in the Africana tradition. According to Genovese, the revolts of enslaved Africans actually pre-date and foreshadow what Hobsbawm described as the age of revolution. He placed them as part of the opposition to capitalism. These revolts affected the trajectory of world history and actually helped to shape the age of revolution.\(^2^2\) In both the United States and the Caribbean, these forms of resistance were fundamentally [not peripherally] religious.\(^2^3\) Calling for war, they appealed to the religious sentiments of their enslaved ancestors.

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\(^2^3\) Hebert Aptheker argues that Nat Turner immersed himself in the Bible when his time permitted. His understanding of religion led him to rationalize his opposition to the status quo. After his revolt was betrayed and numerous rebels were sentenced to death, many went to their demise claiming that they were happy because they felt that God was involved with the uprising. See, Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts: On Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel and Others* (New York: International Publishers, 2020), 294—5, 302. Aptheker quotes a letter written in the 1830s by a white person that read, “Religion has been brought to their aid. Their leaders, who you know are preachers, have convinced many of them that to die in the cause in which they are engaged affords...
brothers and sisters. Obeahmen, Vodun priests, Muslims, and Christian preachers often led these plots.24 Charms were used to overcome the fear of new recruits and “stiffen their resolve in the face of overwhelming odds.”25 Through the work of Genovese, then, the age of revolution must be extended to include the activities of Africans resisting their enslavement in the Americas. As a result, we find that religion was the central component of the African’s revolutionary activity in this expanded age of revolution.

Lovejoy provided a similar re-characterization of revolution and a spread of the theory to include West Africa in its realm of analysis. He agreed with Genovese by including the slave revolts in the Americas as a part of the age of revolution. However, Lovejoy stated that there is a noticeable absence of Africa from the focus on the age of revolution.26 Speaking to this gap in the previous literature, Lovejoy asserted, “[t]he arguments of this book are directed at Eric Hobsbawm and Eugene Genovese largely in symbolic fashion, not because they neglected the scholarship of the jihad movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which they did, but because their enormous contributions to an understanding of the age of revolutions have achieved a level of orthodoxy that


24Genovese, From Rebellion to Revolution, 28, 29, 42, 44.


overshadows the wealth of scholarship on a missing component of that era.\textsuperscript{27} Going further, he stated that Hobsbawm and Genovese should not be excused for ignoring the jihad movements in West Africa because this history has been well known as early as the 1950s and could have easily fit in the age of revolution paradigm.\textsuperscript{28} He attributed this oversight of Islamic Africa in the scholarship to Eurocentrism.\textsuperscript{29} Thus, he was determined to add the age of jihad in West Africa to the region included in the age of revolution.\textsuperscript{30}

What one learns from Lovejoy’s contribution is that the revolutionary jihad movement in West Africa had a similar effect on West Africa and the Atlantic world as those revolutions in Europe, but religion (Islam) was central to the revolutions in the African context.\textsuperscript{31} According to Lovejoy, Sufism was dominant in West Africa during the age of jihad.\textsuperscript{32} Once again it becomes evident that the historical material that Africana revolutionary theory must be drawn from is a historical engagement with revolutionary resistance that placed religion at its center. Much to the chagrin of

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 101. Hobsbawm actually mentions the revolts of Muslims in Africa and those in Bahia, Brazil even while not factoring these into his concept of the Age of Revolution. See, Hobsbawm, \textit{The Age of Revolution}, 224.

\textsuperscript{29}Lovejoy, \textit{Jihad in West Africa}, 103.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{31}The jihad movement in West Africa overthrew numerous governments and transformed interpretations of Islam in that region. Virtually the whole of West Africa was conquered and under the rule of the jihad states from the Senegambia to Lake Chad. Moreover, Lovejoy argues that there was a literary flowering as a result of the jihad movement that is comparable to the effect of the European Enlightenment. Lovejoy goes as far as saying that Islam in West Africa was an inhibiting factor in the accumulation of enslaved people that would go to the Americas. In fact, Caliph Muhammad Bello, the ruler of the Sokoto Caliphate came to an agreement with Captain Hugh Clapperton, a representative of the British government, to abolish the transatlantic slave trade in 1824. These are some of the comparable effects that the jihad movement had that warrants its inclusion in the age of revolution, according to Lovejoy. See, Lovejoy, \textit{Jihad in West Africa}, 6, 25, 55-56, 162, 207.

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 5.
those who aim to secularize the history of Africana liberation struggles, religion has been almost the exclusive site of Africana liberation discourse and praxis. Thus, there cannot be a truly authentic African-centered revolutionary theory where religion plays a peripheral role.33 Said differently, any attempt to develop an Africana revolutionary theory that de-centers (or marginalizes) religion is one that suffers from the limitations of Eurocentric thought.

The aforementioned fact seems to warrant a reconsideration of placing revolutionary theory from the Africana perspective in a European tradition of revolution and revolutionary theory. Although both Genovese and Lovejoy demonstrate the legitimacy of including Africana resistance in the age of revolution, this author’s work departs from their projects and follows more closely in the spirit of Cedric Robinson. Unlike Genovese and Lovejoy who try to fit Africana resistance into a European tradition, Robinson argues for a separate and distinct Black radical tradition.

**Pointing to an Africana Source for Revolutionary Theory**

Robinson put forward the claim that there is a “distinctly African” Black radical tradition separate from, and superior to, the European tradition of radicalism. He highlighted the truth that Africans who arrived in the Americas were not “de-cultured,” but brought their past with them. That is, their ontological, cosmological,

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33 My use of the term “African-centered is not limited to Molefi Asante’s conceptualization of Afrocentricity. African-centered methodology is an approach to research that places African(a) thought and experience at the center of one’s analysis. For more on the idea of being African-centered, see, Sekhmet Ra Em kht Maat and Karanja Carroll, “African-centered Theory and Methodology in Africana Studies: An Introduction” in *The Journal of Pan-African Studies*, vol. 5, no. 4 (June 2012), 2, 5, 6.
and African presumptions were transported with them into the “New World.” For Robinson, enslaved Africans were able to preserve their native consciousness and protect it from foreign intrusion. He stated that they had the “ability to imaginatively re-create a precedent metaphysic while being subjected to enslavement, racial domination, and repression. This was the raw material of the Black radical tradition.” For this reason he noted, Black radicalism should not be mistaken for a “variant of Western radicalism whose proponents happen to be Black. Rather, it is a specifically African response to …oppression.” Furthermore, he claimed that it is actually a more powerful tradition than European radicalism. This is because the Africana tradition developed from a tradition that was in complete opposition to Western society.

Moreover, this opposition, according to Robinson, was often religious in

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34Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 121—2. These African “presumptions” were shaped by a way of viewing the world that was centered on religion. Scholar of Africana Philosophy, Paget Henry, stated that in traditional African Philosophy, philosophy “functioned as the handmaiden of religion.” Moreover, he claims that traditional African ethics, ontology and epistemology were founded on religion and focused on religious content. That is, traditional African philosophy was shaped by religious discourses. See, Paget Henry, *Caliban’s Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 21-22, 76.


36Ibid., 73.

37Ibid., 124, 299, 318. Minkah Makalani critiques Robinson’s notion of the Black tradition being in complete opposition to Western society and stated that his theory is too broad and loses its theoretical coherence. While taking this critique seriously, I would argue that Black life in the Americas has been one of conflict with the society based merely on one being Black. This, in my opinion, makes the opposition total. There are those who have compromised with the society in order to improve their life condition, but even their compromise reflects the total opposition of the state because it demonstrates that the Black self is not consistent with Western society. That is, the compromise (or consciousness suicide) is a form of opposition of the Black person to herself. Her opposition to herself is a reflection of the Black self being in opposition to the society, even if it is in a fractured way that collapses onto the person herself. For more on this see, Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism From Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 14.
form. His explanation should be quoted at length:

…where rebellion was immediately impractical, the people prepared themselves through obeah, voodoo, Islam, and Black Christianity. Through these they induced charismatic expectations, socializing and hardening themselves and their young with beliefs, myths, and messianic visions that would allow them, someday, to attempt the impossible. Their history confirmed these processes; their fruition could be seen in the papaloi of the Haitian Revolution; the obeah men and women who crowd the trial records of slave rebellions in the Caribbean and elsewhere; the Muslim revolts in Brazil; the rebel preachers who appear at the center of resistance in Jamaica, Suriname, and North America.38

One finds recurring throughout the work of Genovese, Lovejoy, and Robinson the centrality of religion in revolutionary activities among Africana peoples. Nevertheless, this is rarely reflected in the literature written by Africana theorists of revolution. Although this is true, for an African-centered project, we must find creative ways to shape revolutionary theory from this source. Before explaining and applying this strategy, it is important that the reader is provided a brief introduction to Africana revolutionary theory.

**Toward an Africana Theory of Revolution**

Returning back to Covington, she provided readers with a helpful and concise definition of revolution quite similar to those mentioned above. For her, revolution referred to the “overthrow of a government, form of government, or social system with another taking its place.”39 This definition highlighted the fact that attempts to reform the current system, or to integrate into it, does not fall under the strict category of a revolution. A revolution, in this formulation, requires a transition from an old to a new social and political system.

38Ibid., 310.

39Covington, Are the Revolutionary Techniques Employed in The Battle of Algiers Applicable to Harlem?, 315.
Malcolm X also contributed to revolutionary theory. Interestingly enough, according to Grace Lee Boggs, as the principle theorist for which the Black Power Movement was based on, Malcolm had come to the conclusion that a Black Revolution was necessary for Black people to obtain true liberation. Boggs goes on to state that Black youth applied the strategy articulated by Martin Luther King Jr. in the South, but through these experiences they finally arrived at the same conclusions that “Malcolm had been developing before black audiences in the North since his break with the Muslims.” She continued, “Malcolm’s theories, unlike those of King’s, had developed out of the day-to-day experiences of Blacks fighting just to survive in the ghet’oes [sic] of the North...He was assassinated before he could give organizational form to his revolutionary perspective.” Thus, as a central figure in Black revolutionary discourse, it seems imperative that the understanding of revolution utilized in this dissertation would consider how Malcolm X discussed the term.

In one of his most important speeches, entitled Message to the Grass Roots, delivered in November of 1963, Malcolm lays out a theory of revolution. He utilized a historical method of analysis to provide a definition of the term. By focusing on the motives, objectives, and methods of past revolutions, Malcolm defended his position. Pointing to the American, French, Russian, Chinese, Kenyan, and Algerian revolutions, he identified land as the motive, independence as the objective, and


41Ibid.
bloodshed as the method to achieve a revolution.\textsuperscript{42} Similar to Covington’s critique above, Malcolm warns his listeners that some of them would stop using the word “revolution” if they truly understood what it entailed.\textsuperscript{43} This is because “you haven’t got a revolution that doesn’t involve bloodshed” and, he continued, Black people are “afraid to bleed.”\textsuperscript{44}

What can be ascertained from Malcolm’s understanding of revolution at this point is that it, by necessity, is violent and nationalist. In regard to the latter point, Malcolm explicitly stated that the motive to obtain land is a quality of nationalism. This is because, for him, land was “the basis of independence.”\textsuperscript{45} Thus, he saw the Black revolution as a form of Black Nationalism.\textsuperscript{46} It also must be added that Malcolm shared the assumption about the meaning of revolution with some of the theorists mentioned above. This manifested when he not only contended that “[r]evolution is bloody, revolution is hostile, revolution knows no compromise,” but also that “revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in its way.”\textsuperscript{47}

Consequently, for Malcolm X, a revolution is a violent overturning of the present


\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid. This implies that there is no such thing as a nonviolent revolution. Some have suggested that Malcolm allowed for the possibility of a nonviolent revolution. In fact, Malcolm actually argued in a different speech that America is the first country that has the opportunity to have a “bloodless revolution.” Contrarily, however, immediately following this comment Malcolm declares that America is not morally equipped to accomplish this. Although this will be discussed in more detail below, it must be stated here that while Malcolm argued for the theoretical possibility for a “bloodless” revolution, he did not seem to believe in the possibility of an actual bloodless revolution. For this reason, I emphasize his theory of revolution that he believed was possible not simply in the theoretical, but in the actual world. See, Malcolm X, “The Black Revolution” in Malcolm X, \textit{Malcolm X Speaks}, 56-57.

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 10.

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., 9.
political order for the purpose of independence and self-determination.

However, for some Africana theorists, religion is a hindrance to the goal of revolution. For instance, Oliver Cromwell Cox pointed to the incompatibility of religion with revolution in his important book entitled *Caste, Class, and Race*. It is interesting, however, that he declared Jesus as a threat to the status quo and a “religious radical who sought to forcefully overthrow the corrupt priesthood.”\(^{48}\) This statement notwithstanding, Cox argued that religion thrived “in harmony with and, on a whole, sanction[ed] the status quo...[it] is normally rightist; it is the most lethargic and inert of the institutions confronting the revolutionists.”\(^{49}\) Moreover, he contended that “the function of the Church [is that of] a prime deflator of social movements.”\(^{50}\) Cox concluded that Christianity had been used to defend slavery and capitalism and would likely support any future system of exploitation as well.\(^{51}\) For this reason, he declared that a revolution is impossible unless “the Church is either overthrown or forcibly brought into line with the movement.”\(^{52}\) Cox went as far as saying that “religion holds a central place in every stage of the class struggle.”\(^{53}\) What readers may gather from Cox’s analysis is that religion, unless transformed, would naturally cause a problem for the revolutionary struggle. Nevertheless, this reality should make engaging with religion a central component of revolutionary theory.


\(^{49}\) Ibid., 171—2.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 194.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 172.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 171—2.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 275.
Frantz Fanon weighed in with much more detail on the relationship between revolution and religion. Agreeing with Cox, he argued that religion served the interests of the oppressor. He stated “the Church in the colonies is a white man’s Church, a foreigners’ Church. It does not call the colonized to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor.”\textsuperscript{54}

Going further, he asserted that religion provided divine sanction for the social order and, as a result, it was used to stifle any revolutionary sentiment among the oppressed. According to Federico Settler, whose dissertation examined Fanon’s approach to religion, Fanon believed that both the colonialist and the nationalist bourgeois would protect the social arrangement by deploying religion.\textsuperscript{55} Although it seems that Fanon acknowledged the ability of the oppressed to use religion as a means of resistance, he still believed that since it could be used by either oppressed or oppressor it should not be a part of revolutionary discourses.\textsuperscript{56}

Oppressed people should refrain from the beliefs and practices of religion, according to Fanon, because they functionally de-radicalized revolutionaries. He argued that the religious beliefs and practices of Africans harmed the revolutionary struggle by shifting the attention of the people from the colonial threat to the threat of taboos and evil spiritual beings. Going further, he maintained that traditional religion deflated the aggression of the colonized through practices such as possession and

\textsuperscript{54} Frantz Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 7.

\textsuperscript{55} Federico G. Settler, “Religion in the Work of Frantz Fanon” Dissertation (PhD) University of Cape Town, 2009, 168.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 176.
dance; these channeled energy away from the revolution.\textsuperscript{57} Here Fanon’s critique covers both beliefs and practices. In regard to beliefs, Settler explained that Fanon thought that these religious assumptions detached people from the independence struggle.\textsuperscript{58} Apparently, Fanon considered the colonial struggle as warranting a significant amount of the attention of the colonized if it was to be victorious. One could not be preoccupied with rules or the threat of spiritual enemies when faced with a material enemy in the colonizer. For example, he was concerned that a mystical Sufi tradition that was practiced by some tribes placed too much focus on piety; Fanon thought this distracted adherents from their material reality.\textsuperscript{59} He also taught that a belief in fatalism caused the oppressed to absolve their oppressor of guilt and attribute their condition to the will of God. In this case, the colonized subject had lost sight of the colonist through their religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{60}

Thus, according to at least these two figures, religion posed a problem to the Africana revolutionary struggle. The present author contends, however, that this perspective on religion is not limited to Cox and Fanon; rather, they represent a rule instead of an exception.\textsuperscript{61} This warrants a detailed analysis of religion and its

\textsuperscript{57}Fanon, \textit{Wretched}, 18-21.

\textsuperscript{58}Settler, \textit{Religion in the Work of Fanon}, 169.

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 178.

\textsuperscript{60}Fanon, \textit{Wretched}, 18.

relationship to revolutionary struggle. While Fanon seemed to want to set aside
religion altogether, Cox suggested that there must be something done about religion.
In fact, he contended that religion must be confronted head-on if a successful
revolution would take place. If one rejects the plausibility and wisdom of seeking to
overthrow religion, they have to at least take him up on the task of revolutionizing it.
Herein lays the significance of this dissertation.

This study points to Malcolm X as offering a solution to the apparent conflict
between revolution and religion mentioned above. Moreover, the author contends that
Malcolm sets forth a Pan-African, or perhaps more concisely, an Africana critical
type of religion for the purpose of shaping a religion that is compatible with
revolutionary praxis. By placing Malcolm in conversation with other Africana
revolutionary thinkers, this project aims to contribute to the discourse on the
relationship between revolution and religion. In other words, one might approach
Malcolm’s consistent critiques of religion as a “chisel” that is able to “sculpt” a
revolutionary form of religion. Furthermore, just as Professor Barry Hallen used the
word, “Africana” in this dissertation simply refers to Africa and its diaspora. The
author also finds the term “Pan-African” useful and relevant for this project.

Following Hakim Adi’s usage of the word, Pan-Africanism generally refers
to the concern for the total liberation of people of African descent globally.
Moreover, it has as its assumption that people of African descent have a shared

62 Barry Hallen, A Short History of African Philosophy (Bloomington: Indiana University
destiny and can only obtain their liberation through unity with one another.\textsuperscript{63} The inherently political nature of the term is significant for this author. Thus, although the author will, perhaps, use “Africana” more frequently in this text for convenience and for its confluence in regard to the nomenclature of the method that is used in this dissertation, it must be said that he views the term as almost interchangeable with the word “Pan-African.”\textsuperscript{64} However, it should not be lost on the reader the importance of the inherent political connotations of the word “Pan-African” as it is defined above. Those connotations should be read into the seemingly apolitical, but geographically inclusive and racial identifying implications of the term “Africana” as it is used in this dissertation.

In regard to the use of the term “revolution,” for the remainder of this paper it will mean the violent overthrow of the existing socio-political order. To clarify, however, a “revolutionary” for this author does not have to successfully overthrow the system to legitimately hold that name. She needs only to have sought, or contributed to the broader aim to replace the old system with a new one. However, there must be some room for nuance here; even Arendt admitted that the actors of the first (European) revolutions did not expect, were not inclined, and were not prepared to bring about a totally new political and social system.\textsuperscript{65} She argued that much of the


\textsuperscript{64}As will be discussed below, the method used in this dissertation is entitled Africana Critical Theory. Therefore, in order to highlight my dependency on this method, I utilize the term “Africana” frequently even in contexts where I believe that the word “Pan-African” might signal more clearly all that I may want to imply in a statement. I could use the phrase “Pan-African Critical Theory of Religion” but it would not indicate my use of Reiland Rabaka’s Africana Critical Theory.

\textsuperscript{65}Arendt, \textit{On Revolution}, 41.
pathos of those revolutions came about after they had progressed to a “point of no return.” Similarly, Boggs explained that,

It is not strange that the Black movement began with a reform stage. Great revolutions usually do. Masses of people usually begin by seeking rights or the satisfaction of needs into revolutionary struggle in the specific sense that I have defined when the reforms they seek are not granted, or, having been granted, only whet their appetite for more. This highlighted the reality that often, a revolution is an organic process. Moreover, some individuals who contribute to the revolutionary struggle may not have in mind the goal of complete social and political change. This is an important nuance when one considers the Africana radical and revolutionary tradition. Although some would like to make a sharp distinction between a “revolution” and an “insurrection” or “revolt,” this author conceives of this distinction in a less restricting way. As already noted above, both Genovese and Lovejoy include the revolts of the enslaved into the age of revolution. Similarly, when this author refers to Africana revolutionary activists and thinkers, he allows for a broad conception that centers on revolutionaries that fit in Covington’s definition above, but also includes some figures who may have not intentionally sought the complete overthrow of the system; rather, they contributed to the larger movement and radical discourse that aimed for major change. In this way, the central question this dissertation will address is: how does one make various expressions of religion compatible with the violent overthrow of

66Ibid., 42.
68Although Genovese allows for the revolts of the enslaved to be included in the broader discourse of the age of revolution, he does point to a turning point with the Haitian Revolution. He contends that this is when the goal of restoration gave way to the actual notion of revolution in the Africana tradition. See Genovese, From Rebellion to Revolution, 85.
the existing order? Nevertheless, before beginning the process of mapping out how to address this question more directly, there is a need to develop a working definition of religion.

**What do you mean by “Religion?”**

Anyone who endeavors to define the meaning of the term religion, especially as it relates to Africana peoples, must be aware of the intellectual history of that discourse. Knowing this history will alert them to the pitfalls and what is at stake when they approach the task of defining the word religion. Not only will awareness of this history encourage the scholar to approach the conversation with sensitivity, but also a sense of humility once it is realized how religion has been a central site for a battle over the dignity of Africana peoples.

**Approaches and Assumptions for the study of (Continental) African Religion**

In regard to how religion has been discussed in relation to continental Africans, Harvey Sindima provided a great discussion of this matter in his book entitled *Classical Theories in African Religion*. Sindima pointed out that early studies on African religion were completed in the service of colonialism. These studies were mostly done by scholars of anthropology; a discipline that Sindima described as rooted in ethnocentrism. He explained, “colonialism and anthropology cannot be separated, because they are rooted in a common epistemology, namely, European cultural ethnocentrism expressed in otherness. Given this background, the study of

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African religion and culture could only be within the content of primitivism.”70
Taking this point further, Sindima informs readers that the International Institute for
African Languages and Cultures (I.A.I), founded in 1926, funded most of the
anthropological research studies conducted between the two World Wars. Both the
Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation began funding the I.A.I with
the aim of assisting the colonial regimes to better govern in colonial Africa.71 These
claims strengthen the point that the origin of the study of African religion in the
modern world was shaped by the interests of colonial administrators. The aim was to
“other” those who were to be “civilized;” to create a “savage” in contrast to the
European.72

In response to this assault on African dignity, African scholars began to
challenge the claims of African inferiority and lack of civilization. One of the earliest
African scholars addressing African religion was Jomo Kenyatta with his book
entitled Facing Mt. Kenya. According to Sindima, Kenyatta was aiming to prove that
African concepts about religion are comparable to those in European society.
Similarly, Joseph Danquah, wrote a book entitled The Akan Doctrine of God with the
goal of demonstrating that Africans were not polytheistic in contrast to what
Europeans had claimed.73 These and other scholars most commonly used what is
known as the theological-comparative method because it lent itself to the attempt to

70Ibid., 242.
71Ibid., 233—4.
72Ibid., 240.
73Ibid., 250, 253.
compare African religion with Christianity. This approach held sway until about the 1980s when African scholars utilized an approach to studying religion that sought to observe the religious manifestations as they were in themselves; this research strategy is called phenomenology.\textsuperscript{74} The need to correct the discourse used to humiliate them was something shared between continental Africans, and those in the African diaspora.

\textbf{Approaches and Assumptions for the study of African American Religion}

The history of the study of African American religion is just as compromised as scholarship on religion on the African continent. Based on his recounting of the history of the study of African American religion in his book called \textit{The Burden of Black Religion}, Curtis Evans contended that the general assumption about African Americans from the time of slavery until, in some cases, the present day, is the notion that they are inherently religious. He demonstrated that this perspective had different implications throughout African American history. During the period prior to the Civil War, white abolitionists used ideas of the religiosity of the enslaved population to quiet the fears of enslavers who believed they were inciting rebellions.\textsuperscript{75} Moreover, they condemned slavery because they believed that it “stunted the natural capacities of Africans and did not allow their religious feelings and native culture to emerge

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., 295, 296, 305—7.

\textsuperscript{75}Curtis Evans, \textit{The Burden of Black Religion} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.
fully."  

76 Some even went as far as to concede the intellectual inferiority of Black people but declared that they were naturally religious.  

The notion of natural religiosity during this time also implied that Black people possessed “more feminine or Christ-like qualities.” Thus, in contrast to the masculine and bellicose Anglo-Saxon, Africans were emotional, peaceful, and submissive. These qualities, it was said, made Africans exemplary Christians.  

77 Figures like Martin Delany even contended that Black people were too religious and this hindered their advancement as a people.  

What one should be aware of is the range of meanings implicit in the assertion of the natural religiosity of Black people; namely, that while abolitionists used this rhetoric in the cause of emancipation, the qualities they projected on to enslaved Africans may not seem flattering to some.  

After the Civil War, however, there was a transition in the meaning of the natural religiosity of Black people. What was once described as passive and peaceful, now the inherent religiosity of Black people was interpreted as emotionally extravagant, without discipline, primitive, and culturally inferior.  

80 Black religion was now described as fanatical, defective, and lacking in morality. In the 1880s, a white historian named Philip Bruce argued that Black religion derived from a defective brain. He contended that Black religion supported the lewdness of Black people and

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76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., 23.
78 Ibid., 27.
79 Ibid., 52.
80 Ibid., 62, 65.
was the product of bad biology.\textsuperscript{81} Some social scientists went as far as stating that African American religion was something other than religion; it was merely emotionalism.\textsuperscript{82} However, beginning with W.E.B. Du Bois, Black scholars took up the subject of religion in their scholarly writings. On the one hand, Du Bois saw the Black Church as taking responsibility for too many of the social needs of the Black community (ex. entertainment, leisure, amusement). On the other hand, Du Bois desired the church to be more active in the social and political advancement of African Americans.\textsuperscript{83} 

The 1920s included more fierce critics of Black religion by African Americans themselves. According to Evans, these individuals were openly hostile to traditional Black religion. Many believed that the adherence to Christianity was a form of psychological enslavement among Black people.\textsuperscript{84} Similar to the white observers of Black religion, some Black leaders believed that the emphasis on emotion rather than intellect predisposed African Americans to religion.\textsuperscript{85} 

Beginning around the mid-1940s, however, some Black scholars began to push against the notion of natural religiosity of Black people. Black social scientists saw claims of Black innate religiosity as a liability that needed to be corrected. These scholars claimed that religion was no longer as significant in Black communities as

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{81}\textit{Ibid.}, 74, 92.  \\
\textsuperscript{82}\textit{Ibid.}, 132.  \\
\textsuperscript{83}\textit{Ibid.}, 152, 164.  \\
\textsuperscript{84}\textit{Ibid.}, 183  \\
\textsuperscript{85}\textit{Ibid.}, 185.
\end{flushright}
they were before since many had migrated to urban areas. They identified what they
understood as a secularization process that was a corollary of industrialization and
urbanization.\textsuperscript{86} Scholars such as E. Franklin Frazier welcomed this alleged
secularization in urban areas because it helped to disprove notions of innate
religiosity.

Thus, after a very brief overview of perspectives on African and African
American religion, it should be clear that when scholars approach the subject of
religion in relationship to Africana peoples, they are not entering into a dispassionate
discourse. The tradition that they are entering and that they have received is one that
began with racists seeking to justify Black oppression. Moreover, once Africana
peoples began producing their own scholarly works on religion they were forced to
react to the claims set forth by the racist “scholarship.” This lack of neutrality is not
unique to the study of Africana religion. However, the intensity and the centrality of
Africana religion as a site for the battle of Black dignity or degradation may make it
distinctive.

Thus, when scholars attempt to study and contribute to this discourse they
must be aware that they are all “drinking from a well that has been injected with both
‘poison’ and ‘sweetener.’” Placing his finger on this very issue, Evans related that the
“weight of the past, mostly negative or simplistic representations of black religion in
the broader culture, and the contemporary economic, social, and political problems of
the black community placed a peculiar burden on those who sought to write about

\textsuperscript{86}Ibid., 253, 263.
black history, especially black religion. Apologetic literature to defend ‘the race,’ critiques of ‘the Negro church,’ efforts to undermine notions of innate religiosity or primitive emotionalism, and calls for black churches to become more politically and socially active become more understandable, though not necessarily defensible, in this light.”

In other words, once one begins to discuss Africana expressions of religion, they are entering a contested terrain that has not been limited to debates among scholars, but has shaped the life experiences of people of African descent as they have faced (and continue to face) racial oppression. Now that this history has been provided, it may be helpful to engage with some scholars that will be used to highlight how the term “religion” will be applied in this dissertation.

**Toward an Africana Theory of Religion**

When continental African scholars began to add to the literature on the study of religion they had a set of assumptions and identified particular aspects of their religious traditions others may not have emphasized. For example, Jomo Kenyatta argued that religion is the dramatization of the things that are most significant to human life. Focusing in on the Gikuyu people, he says that at all points of their daily lives they are influenced by the supernatural. Moreover, Kenyatta assumed belief in the spiritual world and the ability to commune with the ancestors.

Idowu Bolayi is another early African writer on religion. He argued that the central aspect of Yoruba life is their religion. Going further he explained that “in all

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87 Ibid., 273.

things, they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and the all-governing
principle of life for them.\textsuperscript{89} Bolayi also asserted that the origin of the Yoruba religion
is from the revelation of God. Moreover, he maintained that those who study African
religion must have an open mind and refrain from searching for facts to fit certain
preconceived theories.\textsuperscript{90}

John MBiti is another scholar of African religion who added to the discourse.
He explained that religion was closely bound up with the African way of life.
Religion consisted of beliefs, religious objects and places, practices, ceremonies and
festivals, morals, and religious leaders.\textsuperscript{91} What emerges from these early scholars are
two things important in regard to this study: 1) Religion was central to the African
way of life; 2) An assumption that there is some validity in ideas about the
supernatural.

The former claim however, has been fiercely debated by Africana scholars.
For example, both Oulsegun Oladipo and Barry Hallen contended that the role of
religion in traditional African culture has been misrepresented.\textsuperscript{92} In fact, Oladipo
directly charged Mbiti with exaggerating the role of religion in African culture.\textsuperscript{93}
However, on closer examination, one is able to see that it is a reductive definition of

\textsuperscript{90}Ibid., 1-2, 202.
\textsuperscript{92}Olusegun Oladipo, “Religion in African Culture: Some Conceptual Issues” in Kwasi
Wiredu, ed., \textit{A Companion to African Philosophy} (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 361;
Barry Hallen, \textit{A Short History of African Philosophy} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002),
29-30.
\textsuperscript{93}Oladipo, \textit{Religion in African Culture}, 356.
religion that aids this assertion. Oladipo defined religion as an “expression of a relationship between individuals and God.”\(^94\) He went on to explain that it involved a belief in a creator in whom mankind is dependent on. Furthermore, it included an attitude of devotion to this creator.\(^95\) Ultimately, then, for him, “a religious attitude is a devotional attitude.”\(^96\) Utilizing this definition, he then argued that although belief in a Supreme Being is widespread in Africa, that being is not worshipped. Deities in Africa are feared and respected, but “only to the extent that the divinities are able ‘to prove themselves’ by delivering the desired goods.” Thus, Oladipo concluded that this “kind of attitude can hardly be regarded as a religious attitude.”\(^97\)

For the current author, however, this approach to religion is problematic and seems to provide an \emph{a priori} justification for minimizing the importance of religion in Africa. In other words, with an extremely truncated definition of religion that requires an attitude of devotion, the scholar begins with the ready-made tool for a secular interpretation. While conceding the presence of a belief in a Supreme Being, deities, and a form of interaction with these beings and humans, Oladipo then moved to constrict his definition of religion to exclude these from the concept of religion. The author finds this approach inadequate.

Shifting to African American theorists, Charles Long is an important scholar of religion who provided some insight toward a definition of the term. He defined religion as “orientation—orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to

\(^{94}\)Ibid.

\(^{95}\)Ibid.

\(^{96}\)Ibid., 357.

\(^{97}\)Ibid., 358.
terms with the ultimate significance of one’s place in the world.”

Adding more detail to his use of the word “orientation,” Long stated that orientation “refers to the manner in which a culture, society, or person becomes aware of its place in the temporal spatial order of things.”

Marimba Ani, on the other hand, enters the discussion about religion by making a distinction between it and spirituality. She maintained that spirituality referred to the conception of the cosmos as sacred and that it transcended the physical world. Moreover, spirituality is the tools utilized to apprehend the sacred. In regard to religion, however, she argued that it “refers to the formalization of ritual, dogma, and belief, leading to a systematic statement of syntactically suprarational [sic] tenets that may or may not issue from a spiritual conception of the universe. Most often it functions to sacralize a nationalistic ideology.” Ani contribution is very significant to this present study. There are a few things that should be gathered from her claims above: 1) spirituality refers to a way of approaching the sacred cosmos; 2) Religion is defined by “rituals,” “dogmas,” and goes beyond rationality (i.e. suprarational). Thus, Ani’s definition of religion shares the assumptions of formality similar to Mbiti, but departs from Long’s conception of religion that would not seem to make the distinction between religion and spirituality.


101 Ibid.
Contrarily, Anthony Pinn’s definition of religion deals with the origins of religion. He described his approach as moving away from conceptions of religion that focus on dogmas and institutions, and practices. Similar to psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, Pinn believed that religion derived from human need and desire. More specifically, Pinn pointed to the human desire to be rescued from the experience of dread and terror. He moves closer to Long rather than Ani, when he suggested that religion is the search for ultimate meaning in life. Religion refers to the process of wrestling with “the huge questions of life—the ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘when,’ ‘where,’ and ‘why’ questions.” This view is distinct from Long, because Pinn explicitly suggested that humanism is a category that he includes within this definition of religion.

While Eddie Glaude provided helpful details about his approach to the study of African American Religion, most relevant for this author’s purposes is his discussion of religion and magic. He informed his readers that within religious studies, there have been debates about the distinctive qualities of these two phenomena. Glaude considered the historical function of these two terms and, as mentioned above, he accepted the burden of writing about Black religion with

102 Anthony Pinn, What is African American Religion?: Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 40, 46-47, 65. Sigmund Freud argued that religion derived from the impulse toward wish fulfillment; the wish to have more control over their lives from the dangers of the world. For him, religion is an illusion that aims to assist humans in their feeling of helplessness in light of the terror they face from various aspects of life that they cannot control (ex. death, hurricanes, tornadoes, drought, floods, etc.). See, Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 38-4, 51, 56.


105 Ibid., 27.
sensitivity. He stated that historically, classifying something as “magic” was used as a way to distinguish primitive cultures from the West. It was a tool for “othering” non-Europeans to suggest that they “practiced magic; we in the West had religion.” Explaining further, he stated that religion “worked in lockstep with the very idea of differentiating the civilized from the primitive.”  

Thus, at this point, Glaude had already shown his readers the problematic history of Europeans excluding non-Europeans from the notion of being religious or practicing a religion. However, he went forward to show that in the African American context, “magic” functionally defined a community of those who saw themselves as distinct from slaveholders. This notion of magic creating a community amongst the enslaved is in response to claims by scholars such as Emile Durkheim who suggested that religion was a collective phenomenon and could not be something limited to an individual.  

Glaude stated that:  

Magic is not simply a private individual affair as Durkheim suggests. The term works within a broader process of distinguishing groups of people and establishing hierarchies among them. Magic also works in the other direction. Those groups who have been designated ‘other’ or ‘inferior’ can take the practice of magic as their unique possession, which sets them apart from white colonizers or enslavers.  

Thus, Glaude disrupts the popular notion that ‘magic’ and ‘religion’ are distinct and suggested that this differentiation is untenable. The same could be said about the distinction Ani attempted to make between “spirituality” and “religion.” If we take

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the perspectives of Long, Pinn, and Glaude, it does not seem that the term “religion” must necessitate the notion of dogma and institutions; for Long, it is human orientation to the ultimate aspects of life. Similarly, Pinn connected religion to the quest for ultimate meaning in life. Moreover, just as the notion of “magic” functioned as a way of othering non-Europeans and suggesting their inferiority, the term “spirituality” tends to work in a similar way. That is to say, often when “spiritual” is juxtaposed to “religious” it is often used as a way of signifying a more enlightened perspective that has advanced past being subject to religion with its hierarchies.

Therefore, in this dissertation, the term “religion” will refer to an orientation toward ultimate reality that includes a conception of the sacred. The sacred, here, is used to connote a notion of being separated from the “mundane;” that is, the profane. Moreover, similar to Kenyatta and Bolayi, along with Ani’s description of spirituality above, this author includes in his definition of religion an assumption of a reality that transcends the physical world. As Ani contended, “The need to ‘prove’ the existence of the spiritually true is a European need.” Following the aforementioned scholars, this author will be using an African-centered approach to understanding religion. However, it should be obvious at this point that the author rejects Pinn’s inclusion of humanism in his concept of religion because it does not assume a reality that transcends the physical world. Having defined both revolution and religion we now return back to the main inquiry of this project; reformulated to reflect the

109 For a more detailed discussion about the sacred and profane, see, Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 313.

definitions articulated above: in what ways can one make various expressions of an orientation toward ultimate reality, that includes a conception of the sacred, compatible with the violent overthrow of the existing order? To help answer that question the author will use a method of research formulated by Reiland Rabaka entitled: Africana Critical Theory.

**Research Methodology**

In this section the author will provide a brief description of what Africana Critical Theory (ACT) is, and its particular methods of research. To begin, Critical Theory is the attempt to construct a comprehensive social theory that can address the key social and political issues of the contemporary world. The task of a Critical Theorist is to provide criticism and alternatives to domination and discrimination. Critical Theory is dialectical in the sense that it aims to disentangle the matrix of progressive and regressive, and oppressive and liberating structures, theories, conditions and ideologies in society. Take for instance the topic of modernity; while Critical Theorists have consistently critiqued the products of modernity, they reject the notion that it is totally negative. Rather, they are able to honestly appraise both the positive and negative contributions of modernity.\(^{111}\)

From Rabaka’s perspective, in a general sense, critical theory is theory critical of domination and discrimination with the intent to simultaneously offer ethical solutions to the key social and political problems of the contemporary world. Critical Theory aims to critique, correct, and offer alternatives to imperialism.\(^{112}\) As seen with


the Frankfurt School, critical theory aims to identify the most pressing problems of an age and put forward viable solutions.\textsuperscript{113}

ACT, then, describes the task of highlighting the dialectics of deconstruction and reconstruction along with the dialectics of domination and liberation in the classical and contemporary global African experience. Rabaka contended that ACT seeks to find solutions provided by continental and diasporan Africans, and the Black radical tradition, to the most pressing problems.\textsuperscript{114} The task of his project of ACT, according to Rabaka, is to excavate and present an archaeology of the thought of Black radical figures in order to construct a tradition of critical theory. This approach is important because while fragments of Africana critical theory are often scattered in obscure publications, the aim of his project is to chronicle and construct their thought in a cogent and coherent fashion. Rather than simply offering a commentary on the ideas of these thinkers, Rabaka sought to critique and examine particular theorists to apply them to classical and contemporary forms of injustice and oppression.\textsuperscript{115} In short, “Africana critical theory is nothing other than the serious and systematic, critical and dialectical thinking about the goals, methods, strategies and tactics of continental and diasporan African revolutionary self and social transformation.”\textsuperscript{116} To operationalize the paradigm of Critical Theory, Rabaka offers this meaning:

Discourse on Domination and Liberation to Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral’s Dialectics of Decolonization” (PhD. diss., Temple University, 2001), 2.


\textsuperscript{114}Ibid., 3, 5.


\textsuperscript{116}Ibid., 297.
1. To Critique Imperialism

2. To Correct Imperialism

Thus, for the current project, the author will excavate and identify Malcolm’s critiques of oppressive religion and put them in conversation with the critiques of other Africana activist-intellectuals; presenting an archeology of the thought of Africana activist-intellectuals in regard to their critical engagement with religion. Furthermore, the author will excavate and identify the corrections Malcolm offers to oppressive religion and put them in conversation with corrections that other activist-intellectuals have offered.

Additionally, just as Rabaka went beyond merely offering a commentary on the ideas presented by these intellectuals, this author will also not only explain, but he will critique and examine the concepts articulated by the individuals that will be engaged. This will require the use of tools and concepts from Africana Philosophy, Interreligious Dialogue, Islamic Studies, Philosophy of Religion, Afropessimism, Black Feminism, Black Queer Studies, and Africana History. With particular reference to the last one mentioned, although critical theory (is able to) make(s) use of each of these aforementioned discourses, the need to contextualize and comprehend phenomena makes critical theory intrinsically historical. Therefore, the ideas, concepts and structures addressed in this dissertation will also be considered in their historical context. This follows Malcolm’s own claim that “when you see that you’ve got problems, all you have to do is examine the historic method used all over the world by others who have problems similar to yours. Once you see how they got
theirs straight, then you know how you can get yours straight.” Thus, the author will have constructed an Africana critical theory of religion.

Furthermore, connected to the idea of paying close attention to historical context, another intervention this dissertation aims to make is to emphasize the stability of much of Malcolm’s views throughout his life as a public figure. While the idea that some of Malcolm’s beliefs remained consistent throughout his life is not a novel claim, there is a common theme in Malcolm X Studies that accentuates apparent changes in his life; especially after his pilgrimage to Mecca. Moreover, the focus on his supposed major transformations has caused some to argue that one cannot make any declarative statements about his views during his final year because they were continuously in flux. For example, Michael Eric Dyson contended that “the nature of Malcolm’s thought during his last year was ambiguous and that making definite judgements about his direction is impossible.” Admittedly, one cannot deny that even Malcolm himself contributed to this perception of himself during and after his pilgrimage experience. Nevertheless, other evidence suggests a different


118 I make a similar case in an article currently under review. However, in that piece, I focus on his views on race in general, and white people in particular. See, Jimmy Butts, “Malcolm X and His Religio-Racial Understanding of White People” in Journal of Black Studies (Major Revisions).


120 Dyson, Making Malcolm, 69-70.

interpretation is more valid.

On several occasions within the last couple months of his life, Malcolm himself pointed out that there had been no changes to his views. For example, roughly a month before his death, Malcolm recounted that numerous reporters had stated that they heard he had changed. He went on to say that people were crazy to think he would ever change when the conditions that produced him remained the same. He said if someone thought he had changed, they “got the wrong man.” Revealing his awareness of the assumptions about his supposed change being a result of his conversion to Sunni Islam, Malcolm subsequently declared that although he was a Muslim, his religion had not made him a fool. Even his wife, Betty Shabazz, maintained years after his death, “A lot of people say that Malcolm changed after that trip…They look at every individual change and say that Malcolm had changed from one thing to another…[However,] Malcolm’s basic goal or objective never changed.”

Thus, part of the contribution of this dissertation is not simply to analyze the thought of Malcolm, but to highlight that there were no major changes in the thought of Malcolm X throughout the entirety of his public ministry; with the subject


123Ibid.

of gender being an exception. While establishing this concept is not the main objective of this dissertation, it has influenced the approach the author will take. Consequently, one will see throughout chapters 3-5 an articulation of solutions presented (and maintained) by Malcolm over the course of his public ministry.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The author will structure this study thematically and he will utilize content analysis to interpret his data. Rabaka organized his research around particular social themes such as racism, colonialism, and sexism; he put Africana thinkers in dialogue about these concerns. Similarly, in regard to Malcolm X’s critiques of religion, the author will organize dialogue around violence, religious divisions, and adopting the religion of the oppressor.

The data collection process will involve selecting published [and some unpublished] writings, speeches, and sayings from Malcolm X and others in the Africana revolutionary tradition. These include intellectuals like Fannie Lou Hamer, Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, Maria Stewart, Steve Biko, and Desmond Tutu, who all left behind an intellectual corpus of critical engagement with society, but were also actively involved in the Africana liberation struggle. The data that will be purposefully gathered from these intellectuals will be their discussions about the problems presented by Malcolm X [or those closely associated with them] that have been listed above.

Content analysis is a research approach that will help structure the data into thematic and dialectical groupings. Mcdougal explained that content analysis allowed one to interpret the message in his or her data and synthesize the data into relevant
categories.\textsuperscript{125} In other words, the author will gather, organize, and then analyze data that is relevant to the categories mentioned above. This construction will assist in the process of evaluating the different critiques and corrections offered by Malcolm X in conversation with other thinkers.

\textbf{Chapter Breakdowns}

The next chapter of this dissertation provides a review of the literature on the topic of revolution and religion. Entitled \textit{Marx, Cone, and Their Children}, the second chapter begins with the Marxist’s tradition of critical engagement with religion. Starting with that tradition is an attempt to take the methodological advice of Ani seriously when she stated:

\begin{quote}
I teach Pan-African studies. The experience convinces me more and more, however that teaching Pan-African studies well means teaching European studies simultaneously. To be truly liberated, African people must come to know the nature of European thought and behavior in order to understand the effect that Europe has had on our ability to think victoriously. We must be able to separate our thought from European thought, so as to visualize a future that is not dominated by Europe. This is demanded by an African-centered view…\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

Considering the Marxist tradition of critical theory of religion from Marx, the Frankfurt School, to the Siebertian School, the author will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of that school of thought. Subsequently, the author will engage with the school of Black Liberation Theology beginning with its inaugurator, James Cone, followed by figures such as Dwight Hopkins, Josiah Young, and Womanist theologians such as Kelly Brown Douglass and Monica Coleman. He will make the case that the Marxist tradition is limited by Eurocentrism and the Conian tradition is

\textsuperscript{126}Ani, \textit{Yurugu}, 2.
limited by its attempt to regulate theology and, thus, cannot resolve the supposed tension between religion and revolution in the Africana context. Although there are strengths in both traditions, they are inadequate for this current project.

The chapters that follow will begin the process of theory construction for an Africana critical theory of religion. Chapter three entitled *Between Turner and Tom* will open up the debate on the effects of religion on the desire to use violence as a method for liberation. The author will highlight Malcolm’s critique of nonviolence within Christianity and Islam. Moreover, it will be argued that while surface-level interpretations of Malcolm’s discourse during his last year have confused some of his readers, Malcolm consistently advocated for revolutionary violence throughout his entire public ministry.

With the title *Between Bandung and Balkanization*, chapter four will reflect on Malcolm’s claim that religion poses a problem to a unified liberation struggle. Utilizing the work of Black feminists and Afropessimists and putting them in conversation with Malcolm and other Africana thinkers, the writer articulated some of the challenges intersectional approaches to identity and politics have presented to the establishment of Black political unity. It is also asserted that Malcolm believed that a race-based unity complimented by the submerging of differences of individual identities would foster and maintain Black unity.

Going by the name *Between Homogeneity (or Hegemony) and Hybridity (or Human Freedom)*, chapter five will analyze Malcolm’s claim that adopting the religion of one’s oppressor stifles liberation. Using concepts such as hybridity and the Black Atlantic, the author challenged the idea of a religion uninfluenced by various
cultures. Moreover, utilizing the history of Christianity in Africa and the Americas, the author argued that Africana people fundamentally shaped Christianity from its earliest days to the modern context. It is ultimately argued that Malcolm’s directive, for the political success of African Americans, to return to Islam, the religion of their forefathers and the natural religion for Black people, lacks nuance and historical validity.

Each chapter will begin by setting forth Malcolm’s critique of the particular issue and how he felt that it was detrimental to the Black revolutionary struggle. The author will then situate Malcolm’s critique in relation to other Africana critics of that same issue. He will accomplish that by dialectically adjusting and summarizing the key ideas from these thinkers and constructing a set of standards by which the solutions offered must be judged. The author will then articulate Malcolm’s solutions to the problems and place these views in conversation with other Africana thinkers; including those who support and those who are opposed to the solutions Malcolm offered (represented in the list of standards that will have been constructed). He will strive to create a synthesis of the underlying arguments presented from all sides of the issue and determine if they can be used to improve or compliment Malcolm’s position.

The concluding chapter will summarize what was learned in the previous chapters. The author will also present some ways that the posture toward religion Malcolm espoused could be applied to further the Pan-African revolutionary struggle. After making some final comments on the current project, the author will then
suggest possibilities for future research in the construction of an Africana critical theory of religion.
Part of the task of this dissertation is not completely novel. The attempt to critically engage with religion and the struggle for human freedom has been done by various scholars. However, the current project seeks to construct an African-centered critical theory of religion for the purpose of revolutionary struggle. That is, the author endeavors to place Africana revolutionary thinkers in dialogue around critical discussions about how religion relates to the pursuit of revolution. This simple description, however, cannot do full justice to the distinctiveness of what this writing is attempting to accomplish. To help with this it is necessary to situate this dissertation within the broader academic discussions around religion, revolution, and liberation. There are two particular traditions that can help bring the proposed contributions of this work into sharper focus.

The first one that will be discussed in this chapter can be defined as the Marxist tradition of critical theory of religion. As noted in the previous chapter, Marx holds a place of prominence in European revolutionary discourse. Building on earlier generations of thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel, Marx’s intellectual contributions were the culmination of this train of thought “in the transformation of philosophy into critical social science, the birth of critical theory proper.”

Moreover, his analysis of revolution, along with his close friend and colleague
Friedrich Engels, included some important assessments of religion. Their critical evaluation of religion was picked up by subsequent generations of scholars who looked closely at the role of religion in society. Reflecting on how scholars in this tradition engaged with religion will provide more insight to what this dissertation is doing.

James Cone and the tradition of Black Liberation Theology provides another lens into this present work. Just as Marx represents a transition in European intellectual thought, Cone trail blazed a new tradition within African American scholarship. Professor Cone’s work represents the response of Black Christians to the challenges presented by Black Nationalists to the Black Church. Cone’s formulation of Black Liberation Theology may be viewed as a tradition or school of thought that critically engages with religion in at least two ways: 1) critiquing and delegitimizing white Christianity; 2) critiquing and reconstructing a form of Black Christianity that aims to give theological validity to a radical/revolutionary form of Christianity. It is important to emphasize here for readers that in no way is the author suggesting that critical assessments of Black Christianity began with Cone. Tracing this history of African American critiques of Christianity in his book *Christianity on Trial*, Mark Chapman argued that “despite the important differences between pre- and post-Black Power religious thought, there is a common thread that ties these two generations together. In both periods African American Christian and non-Christian thinkers exposed the racism of the white church and sought to make black faith a

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powerful resource in the struggle against oppression.”129 Agreeing with Chapman, this author simply contends that it is with Cone that the beginnings of a formal, systematic, academic, and continual critical evaluation of Christianity in particular, but Black religion more broadly. Some readers might point to dispersed individual writings by W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Benjamin Mays, C. Eric Lincoln, and others. Nevertheless, what separates Cone and his work is that he actually founded a particular school of thought that sustained this critical engagement. It must be admitted that one can point back to figures like David Walker and trace a line of Black intellectuals critiquing Black religion. However, neither of them developed a formal school of thought that continues their work focused on a critical analysis of Black religion. For this reason, the author will engage with the tradition of Black Liberation Theology to further move towards the distinct elements of his project.

Beginning with the Marxist tradition, this chapter will articulate the founders’ critical view of religion. While attempting to grapple with Marx and Engel’s general assessment of the phenomenon, the author will give particular attention to their understanding of the effects of religion in regard to human pursuits of emancipation. Continuing this same approach, the author will then discuss the Frankfurt School, the work of Rudolf Siebert, and contemporary scholars who are a part of this tradition. Next, a critical assessment of this tradition will be presented; highlighting both useful elements along with elements that are less advantageous for this paper. In the second half of the chapter a similar process will be applied to Cone, along with figures like Gayraud Wilmore, Womanist theologians and Ethicists such as

129Ibid., 7.
as Kelly Brown Douglass and Emilie Townes, and contemporary expressions of this
tradition. The chapter will end summarizing the importance of these schools of
thought, while also pointing to the need for the work that will follow in the
subsequent chapters.

The Marxist Tradition of Critical Theory of
Religion

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’
Critique of Religion

Beginning with the thoughts of the progenitors of the Marxist tradition,
there are three primary points that will be emphasized to begin a reflection on this
school of thought. The first is the argument that the content of religion is not factually
true but it is rather the product of self-alienation for the purpose of illusory happiness.
Rather than deriving from contact with some immaterial world, Marx believed that
religion was created in response to the material conditions of human beings. This is
part of his larger argument where he asserted that all human ideas including their
“language of politics, laws, morals, religion, [and] metaphysics…[are] determined by
a definite development of their productive forces and the intercourse corresponding to
those productive forces up to its remotest form.”130 In other words, human thought is
not independent from outside influences. It is rather a product of society.

He describes religion as the product of confused human imagination. Man
mistakenly attributes qualities of personhood to imagined beings.131 By contrast,

130 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “German Ideology” in n.d., Karl Marx and Friedrich

131 Karl Marx, “Estranged Labor (1844)” in John Raines, ed., Marx on Religion
atheism recognizes the real world as it actually is, according to Marx.\(^{132}\) Similarly, Engels believed that atheism is almost obviously true. He described religion as primitive, erroneous, and a “fantastic reflection of men’s minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces.”\(^{133}\) These external forces can be natural or social. For example, Engels pointed to the economy as an alien force that dominated mankind and made them depend on religion.\(^{134}\)

With these explanations, Engels insisted that continual adherence to religion was intellectually untenable. Just as it seemed to be implied by Marx, Engels proclaimed the victory of science over religion. In a congratulatory tone and with the use of a military metaphor, he declared: “One division of the army after another lays down its arms, one fortress after another capitulates before the march of science, until at last the whole infinite realm of nature is conquered by science, and there is no place in it for the Creator.”\(^{135}\) For this reason, it must be concluded that whatever else one says about the Marxist tradition on religion, it begins with the assumption that religion is a human phenomenon that makes false claims about the nature of reality.

Going further, Marx argued that religion has a sort of dehumanizing effect

\(^{132}\)Karl Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Dialectic and General Philosophy (1844)” in Raines, Marx on Religion, 88; Marx and Engels, German Ideology, 74, 75.


\(^{134}\)Engels, Anti-Duhring, 148, 149.

on mankind. His explanation of this concept is used in parallel to his theory of human alienation from their labor. As the value of things increased, the value of humans decreased. This is because while human labor is used to produce commodities in the capitalist society, it also made a commodity out of the worker. Describing this process, Marx stated that the product of human labor was the embodiment of human labor in a material object. This process of material object production is one that depleted the human subject of his or her ownership of their labor and what it produced. Marx defined this as a process of alienation of the worker. For this reason, he argued that the more human labor increased, the more the worker lost a part of him or herself.\textsuperscript{136} It may be helpful to quote Marx at length explaining this process and how it is tied to his theory of religion:

\begin{quote}
Labor not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a commodity and it does so in the same proportion in which it produces commodities in general. This fact simply means that the object of labor produces, its product, stands opposed to it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor embodied and made material in an object, it is the objectification of labor. The realization of labor is its objectification. In the sphere of political economy this realization of labor appears as a loss of reality for the worker, objectification as loss of and bondage to the object, and appropriation as estrangement, as alienation…All these consequences are contained in this characteristic, that the worker is related to the product of his labor as to an alien object. For it is clear that, according to this premise, the more the worker exerts himself in his work, the more powerful the alien, objective world becomes which he brings into being over against himself, the poorer he and his inner world becomes, and the less they belong to him. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains within himself.\textsuperscript{137}
\end{quote}

What Marx argued was that religion drained mankind of their humanity in the same way labor extracted parts of the human person through alienation of the person from the objects produced by their work. Just as the work no longer belongs to the worker

\textsuperscript{136}Karl Marx, \textit{Estranged Labor (1844)}, 118—9.

\textsuperscript{137}Ibid.
but to someone else, religion is the process of the human brain detaching itself from the individual and projecting it onto an imagined supernatural being. For both the religious person and the worker, this is a loss to his or her self.  

Marx also asserted that religion provided a counterfeit satisfaction that was meant to replace happiness based on the actual material world. He contended that religion is “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.” There has been much discussion among scholars about the meaning of “opium of the people.” Many have suggested that a purely negative interpretation does not accurately represent Marx’s use of the word, or his view of religion. In particular, Andrew McKinnon did an in-depth study of the historical use of the word “opium” during the time of Marx and he concluded that the “interminable repetition of the phrase in Marxian analyses of religion…has lost its metaphoric sense…their understanding is governed…by a literal and presentist reading of this central metaphor.” He went on to argue that in the mid-nineteenth century Europe, the word opium would have various connotations which included opium as medicine, opium as a source of profit, and opium as a source of utopian visions. People would have viewed opium as both a

138 Ibid., 121.
141 McKinnon, Opium as Dialectics of Religion, 11.
pain reliever and as something that could cure diseases. In fact, Marx himself used opium, according to McKinnon.\footnote{Ibid., 14.} Thus, he argued that Marx used this term as a dialectical metaphor to point out both the positives and the negatives of religion.\footnote{Ibid., 12.} Religion then, according to Marx, was able to provide the person with a psychological replacement for happiness while his or her conditions in the world remain the same.

Moving to the second point that will be highlighted, for Marx, it is this very illusion of happiness that makes it necessary for humans to discard religion so they will be inclined to pursue true happiness. While it may be true that Marx was aiming to highlight both the constructive and the destructive aspects of religion, this author is not convinced that it is a presentist caricature to interpret Marx as being anti-religion. This should be clear once the statement that follows his famous quote mentioned above is read. He contended that the “abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion.”\footnote{Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, 41-42.} Although McKinnon challenged the use of the term “abolition” and implies that \textit{aufheben} would be better translated as “overcoming,” it still stands that Marx saw religion as something that modern humans needed to progress past. He compared it to snake skin that must be shed in order for

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Ibid., 14.} Marx, \textit{Contribution to the Critique of Hegel\textquoteright s Philosophy of Right}, 41-42.
\end{thebibliography}
the snake to progress. In other words, religion is a phenomenon from an early stage in human development and should be cast off and replaced with science.\textsuperscript{145} Even Engels argued that atheism should be compulsory and religion prohibited.\textsuperscript{146} Therefore, the Marxist position on religion calls readers to graduate past the illusions of the human condition so that they can actually change the conditions that cause human suffering in the real world.

Returning back, momentarily, to his description of religion as alienation, Marx contended that if religion is alienated self-consciousness, then it is through the destruction of religion that will result in human’s repossession of the once alienated self.\textsuperscript{147} In fact, he claims that atheism is “the first real emergence, the realization become real for man, of his essence as something real.”\textsuperscript{148} From these comments one may conclude that the elimination of religion allows for the individual to retrieve his or her alienated self; thus drawing them closer to true happiness.

One can also gather from Marx that human happiness is obtained through the transformation of the oppressive existing order. Citing the biblical passage that asserted that human suffering on earth will be seen as insignificant once humans get to heaven (Romans 8: 18), Marx argued that believing claims such as this extinguished the passionate resistance one would usually have toward their


\textsuperscript{146} Engels, \textit{Anti-Duhring}, 145.

\textsuperscript{147} Marx, \textit{Critique of Hegel’s Dialectic and General Philosophy (1844)}, 86.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 88.
oppression. For this reason, religion is not simply a neutral entity in society among a potential revolutionary group. Rather, it is a hindrance to their revolutionary consciousness because it “softens the blow” of reality. Interpreting Marx, John Raines stated “if one gets rid of the illusory happiness (gets rid of religion) then it forces people to contend with the need for real happiness.” It seems legitimate to say that according to Marx, the faster a people rid themselves of religion the faster they will be able to carry out a revolution. Thus, religion seems to be a barrier to revolutionary change according to Marx. What then is his alternative?

The third and final element of the Marxist (i.e., Marx and Engels) theory of religion this author will cover is the idea that although religion should be discarded, the utopian quality of certain religions should be retained in secular form. As anti-religion as Engels was he had no problem admitting that religion could be revolutionary. He actually characterized early Christianity as a revolutionary movement developed by the masses. He even highlighted how the Reformer Martin Luther (d. 1546) used the Bible as a weapon of critique to contrast the “feudalized Christianity” during his time with the Christianity of the early believers. He even cited Thomas Munzer (d. 1525), a preacher and theologian during the Protestant Reformation, as one who had called “upon the princes of Saxony and the people to

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150 Raines, Marx on Religion, 167.

rise in arms against the Roman priests.”

Nevertheless, he and Marx recognized the potential of religion to support the status quo. Marx highlighted that Christianity had supported slavery and serfdom. Moreover, he maintained that Christianity preached “cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, [and] humility.”

This perspective on religion convinced Marx and Engels that the religious notion of the final judgement carried revolutionary potential that should be preserved even as society progressed beyond religion. Marx asserted that the “dream of the imminent destruction of the world inspired the early Christians in their struggle with the Roman world empire and gave them a certainty of victory.” Engels adds that one can only find this level of entrenchment against the present order during his time among the Socialists. Seeing them as parallels, Engels argued that “the struggle against a world that at the beginning was superior in force, and at the same time against the novators themselves, is common to the early Christians and the Socialists.”

Going further, Engels contended that both movements proclaimed salvation from oppression; the difference, however, was that Christianity placed its moment of salvation in heaven while socialism claimed its salvation moment was “in this world, in a transformation of society.”

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152 Ibid., 110.
154 Karl Marx, “Letter From Karl Marx to Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis” in Raines, Marx on Religion, 239.
156 Ibid., 316.
However, for Engels, the aforementioned problems associated with religion are eliminated in Socialism.

**Limitations of Marx and Engels’ Theory**

There are some aspects of Marx and Engels’ theories of religion that are helpful, but they are inadequate for this current project. Highlighting the potential of religion to de-radicalize revolutionary social groups is an important intervention of this tradition. This type of critique is valuable even for Africana critical theorists of religion. However, there are some crucial concerns that limit the Marxist approach. First, it seems that the aim of both Marx and Engels was to explain what they perceived as the human origins of religion to delegitimize its truth claims. Being materialists themselves, they frequently sought to show that the social phenomenon of religion can be demonstrated as having derived from the human experience in the material world rather than a supernatural entity. However, as Religious Studies scholar Daniel Pals has stated, “A simple rejection of religion is one thing, of course; a full intellectual campaign to unmask its falsehood is quite another.”

This dissertation is not concerned with proving or disproving the human origin of religions or whether they are intellectually valid. Rather, the author’s concern is with the ability of those who adhere to a religion to participate in the revolutionary struggle. Debates about the truthfulness of religion are distractions from revolutionary struggle and reflect a kind of abstraction from revolutionary praxis that allows for the

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exploration of ideas that are unrelated to revolution.\textsuperscript{158}

Moreover, the idea that religion should be discarded is premised on the assumption that it quells revolutionary praxis. However, Engels shows a significant awareness of revolutionary religious adherents in the history of Christianity. Furthermore, moving beyond the European context may have provided more nuances for the Marxist understanding of religion.\textsuperscript{159} As James Cone noted, there is a Black revolutionary Christian tradition in the United States that includes figures like Nat Turner and Martin Luther King Jr. that challenges Marx’s views on religion.\textsuperscript{160} Rather than calling for people who have dedicated their lives to a particular religion to discard it, the call should be to imitate those known religious revolutionaries. Even Marx recognized the longing among religious people for a destruction of the world. Utilizing this as a bridge to engage with religious people seems to be a more effective strategy than discrediting religious commitments as illegitimate.

It also must be stated that Marx’s and Engels’ view of religion is very paternalistic and condescending. Pals once stated that there is a significant level of sarcasm and contempt in the way Marx addressed religion compared to other

\textsuperscript{158}This is not to say that abstract thought is unimportant. In fact, many of the things covered in this dissertation engage with deeply theoretical issues. The distinction I would like to make is between providing the theoretical grounding of revolutionary praxis, and an agent operating within revolutionary praxis. Although these are two distinct categories, the arguments for the former, assumes the latter. That is, while the task of constructing the theoretical grounding for revolutionary praxis is itself a work of abstract reasoning, the type of arguments used to justify the theory requires one imagines themselves in the standpoint of revolutionary praxis. Many of the arguments in this dissertation, I am willing to admit, do not stand outside the standpoint of an agent operating within revolutionary praxis; they do not work from the comforts of a desk or university classroom. The author is, however, imagining what would be the case if he was in the midst of a revolution. What then would be appropriate?


thinkers.\textsuperscript{161} They position themselves to look “from on high” at religion from the superiority of the Enlightenment and scientific knowledge. Even the most sympathetic reading of Marx and Engels seems to merely communicate that they understand why oppressed people would turn to religion. Through their verbal sympathy they metaphorically reach down from their intellectually superior platforms and “pat the head” of oppressed people tenderly to communicate that they understand. Unfortunately, this level of intellectual arrogance has not only influenced the Marxist tradition of critical engagement with religion, but this is a common feature of secular thought. An Africana critical theory of religion must not begin from a position that would alienate the vast majority of Africana people globally. The claims of Marx and Engels shaped how scholars would engage with the discussion of religion and revolution in generations after them. Significant heirs of this Marxist theory of religion were a group of scholars in Frankfurt, Germany.

**The Frankfurt School’s Critique of Religion**

While the origin of this expression of the Marxist tradition derived from the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany and was founded in 1923, David Ingram placed what came to be known and designated as the Frankfurt School, in 1937 after the publication of Max Horkheimer’s essay entitled “Traditional and Critical Theory.”\textsuperscript{162} Deriving from the influence of Marxism, the Frankfurt School initially saw its work as an aid to the “practical prospects for revolutionary action by

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{161} Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 132.
\textsuperscript{162} Ingram, *Critical Theory and Philosophy*, 1.
\end{flushright}
the proletariat.” However, what may not be as commonly known is the importance of religion to the thought of the Frankfurt School. As Eduardo Mendieta contended, “At the heart of the Frankfurt School critical theory we find not just an incidental or ancillary attention to religion, but a central, deliberate, and explicit confrontation with both religion and theology.” For him, the school was based on the “convergence of Marxism, Hegelianism, and Jewish Messianism.” Because the Frankfurt School consisted of numerous scholars, the author does not aim to provide a comprehensive introduction to the School. Rather, he will focus on a select number of intellectuals and address there thought on religion using a thematic structure.

The first major theme that will be addressed in this section is the claim that religious doctrine can harm revolutionary consciousness. One of the most extensive treatments of this analysis was done by Erich Fromm in his book entitled The Dogma of Christ. In this text, he begins with Sigmund Freud’s claim that religion derived from a psychic phenomenon; a feeling of helplessness experienced during childhood. This anxiety shaped the child’s posture toward his or her father. Love, fear, and hostility directed toward the father were transferred in adulthood to a fantasy figure: God. Continuing with Freud’s thesis, Fromm related that this childhood phase is also repeated in the adult’s relationship to those in power in society; there is, once again, feelings of love, fear, and hostility, but directed towards these new objects of


164 Mendieta, Introduction: Religion as Critique, 8.

165 Ibid., 5-6.
authority. Those in power, then, become persons to be respected and uncritically believed just as the father was in childhood. The central element of Fromm’s theoretical assumption is that “God forms a supplement to this situation. God is always the ally of the rulers.” Oppressors can rely on this unreal supernatural being to validate their authority. Fromm summarizes the theory he is using by arguing that religion functioned as a consolation to suffering, an encouragement for the oppressed to endure their conditions, and to relieve the guilt of those in power caused by the condition of those they oppress.

To support his thesis he traced the development of the dogma of Christ in Christian history. Christianity, readers are told, began among the oppressed masses out of a messianic-revolutionary movement in Judea. However, the hopelessness of defeating the Roman Army caused them to satisfy their wish to destroy those in authority through fantasy. Fromm claimed that the early Christian message that Jesus became God was an attempt to satisfy the longing among the masses to enact revenge on those who dominated them. Fromm explained:

Conscious hatred was reserved for the authorities, not for the elevated father figure, the divine being himself. But the unconscious hostility to the divine father found expression in the Christ fantasy. They put a man at God’s side and made him a co-regent with God the father...he was a symbol of their unconscious hostility to God the father for if a man could become God, the latter was deprived of his privileged fatherly position of being unique and unreachable. The belief in the elevation of a man to god was thus the expression of an

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167 Ibid.

168 Ibid., 67.

169 Ibid., 76, 79, 81-82.
unconscious wish for the removal of the divine father.  

Stated differently, since the hostility the masses felt toward those in power could not be satisfied in the real world, it found expression in their religious dogma; that revolutionary anger was unconsciously directed toward God the father. It was expressed in the reduction of God’s glory through the elevation of a man to godhood. In this way, religion functioned as a substitute for the desire to pursue revolutionary change. The impulse of resistance was appeased through religious dogma.

Fromm goes on to explain that the shift in the demographic of the Christian population led to different interests and, consequently, distinct dogmas to satisfy those interests. The community began to increasingly attract well-to-do and educated individuals until under Constantine it ceased to be a religion of the poor and became the state religion. Now in the hands of the rulers, Christianity had to serve the purpose of encouraging loyalty to those in power. Thus, the idea that Jesus became God the Son was replaced with the teaching that Jesus was one with God the Father (and thus, co-eternal with him). This replaced the tension between the Son and the Father with harmony between the two. Moreover, this removed the revolutionary character of the original dogma. If the Father was a projected figure symbolizing the state, then the Son represented the citizens of the state. Harmony between the Son and the Father supported harmony between the citizens and the state.  

Articulating this matter further, Fromm argued that in the new dogma, “the stress was no longer as in the early Christian doctrine, on the overthrow of the father but on the self-annihilation of

\[170\] Ibid., 82.
\[171\] Ibid., 85, 89-90.
the son. The original aggression directed against the father was turned against the self, and it thereby provided an outlet that was harmless for social stability.\textsuperscript{172} Therefore, Fromm’s psychoanalytic interpretation concluded that religion sapped the revolutionary fervor from the oppressed.

Theodor Adorno presented another example of the way religious doctrines can work against revolutionary praxis. Adorno noted that the Christian doctrine that humans have been corrupted since Adam causes the “fetishization of the presently existing relations.” This, he believed, served the evil of society through justifying a fatalistic approach to the human condition. The notion that it is impossible to create a perfectly just society is used to encourage conformity to the unjust order.\textsuperscript{173} In this way, the doctrine of the corruption of the human race functioned as a means to justify political quietism.

A final example of the way religious doctrine can hinder revolutionary consciousness was given by Max Horkeheimer. He claimed that one of the ways that Christianity adapted in order to survive was to declare the absence of clear divine commands in regard to social ethics. Strengthened by the Reformer, Martin Luther when he discouraged theological speculation, many left certain ethical questions to be decided by reason and the state.\textsuperscript{174} Adorno claimed that by taking this posture, the Church “sealed its pact with that worldly wisdom which it had originally professed to renounce.”\textsuperscript{175} Demonstrating the consequences of the church’s non-interference posture, Adorno argued:

\textsuperscript{172}Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{173}Theodor Adorno, “Reason and Revelation” in Eduardo Mendieta, ed., The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers (London: Routledge, 2005), 170.
\textsuperscript{174}Max Horkeheimer, “Theism and Atheism” in Mendieta, The Frankfurt School on Religion, 216.
\textsuperscript{175}Ibid., 213.
We must love our enemies. But whether this means burning the heretics and the witch, sending children to work before they can read, making bombs and blessing them, or whether it means the opposite, each believer has to decide for himself without even suspecting what the true will of God might be. A guiding light, though a deceptive one, is provided by the interests of the fatherland, of which there is little mention in the Gospels. In the last few centuries, an incomparable greater number of believers have staked their lives for their country than for the forbidden love of its enemies.

What Adorno pointed to is that when the church forfeits its voice concerning issues in society, it allows Christians to make decisions in conformity with the status quo. In all three cases mentioned above, the Frankfurt School scholars sought to critique the way religion was used to support a condition of oppression. To be sure, Horkeheimer understood that certain elements of religion could support resistance to oppression. Nevertheless, the Frankfurt School gave much attention to expose oppressive forms of religion.

The second theme that can be ascertained from the Frankfurt School is the claim that a total rejection of religion is untenable for modern society. They believed that both religion and reason have important contributions to make toward society.

For example Adorno suggested that when religion is excluded from society through secularism, it creates a feeling of indifference to life since “this is all there is.” For Adorno, this view of the world encouraged passivity to the human condition. He asserted that “as long as their attitude toward existence remains unchanged, the rest seems vain to them also.” Consequently, modern society should not so quickly

176 Ibid., 216.
discard religion.

Related to Adorno’s position, Horkeheimer articulated a similar concern. He claimed that it is the duty of philosophy to expose the consequences of the destruction of religion for Western societies. Two repercussions of the secularization of society, for Horkeheimer, include the elimination of objective reason/eternal truths and the deification of nature. According to his view, eternal truth is dependent on theism. The bracketing off of religion from reason paved the way for the elimination of objectivity. This was because objectivity was patterned off of the claim of religious revelation as being absolute. Speaking directly to the consequences of secularization, Horkheimer argued that

In reality the contents of both philosophy and religion have been deeply affected by this seemingly peaceful settlement of their original conflict. The philosophers of the Enlightenment attacked religion in the name of reason; in the end what they have killed was not the church but metaphysics and the objective concept of reason itself, the source of reality and determining the guiding principles of our lives has come to be regarded as obsolete. Speculation is synonymous with metaphysics, and metaphysics with mythology and superstition.

Explicating this further, he argued that “Without reference to something divine, a good deed like the rescue of a man who is being persecuted unjustly loses all its glory, unless it happens to be in the interest of some collective whole inside the national boundaries or beyond them…The death of God is also the death of eternal truth.” Not only does Horkeheimer’s critique connect objective morality to theism, but he also points to the elimination of self-less acts. Once the divine is rejected,

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181 Ibid., 40.

182 Max Horkheimer, “Religion and Philosophy” in Mendieta, The Frankfurt School on Religion, 243. See also, Horkeheimer, Theism and Atheism, 221.
fighting against injustice loses its inherent value. In other words, in a world without God, the pursuit of justice would be directed by self-interests. When reason is viewed as subjective anything can be justified. Horkheimer contended that it is impossible to condemn a political or economic system as cruel or despotic without objective values.\(^{183}\) Going further he argued that “Justice, equality, happiness, tolerance, all the concepts that, as mentioned, were in preceding centuries supposed to be inherent in or sanctioned by reason, have lost their intellectual roots. They are still aims and ends, but there is no rational agency authorized to appraise and link them to an objective reality.”\(^{184}\) He went as far to say that philosophical bases used for values meant to replace God continue to borrow elements from theism that it’s materialist assumptions are unable to support on their own.\(^{185}\)

Horkheimer has also made the argument that nature has replaced God within the materialist philosophy. However, the problem with this ideology is that nature can only support self-preservation and survival-of-the-fittest. In this new religion of Nature, professors deliver the oracles because Nature cannot speak for itself. Nevertheless, the dogma of self-preservation can be deduced from Nature. This cannot, Horkeheimer asserted, guide humans in regard to liberty and justice.\(^{186}\)

Jurgen Habermas agreed with both Adorno and Horkeheimer but adds the charge of misinformed arrogance. He highlighted the history of secular attempts to distinguish reason from religion by figures like Immanuel Kant. According to

\(^{183}\) Horkheimer, Means and Ends, 42, 45.

\(^{184}\) Ibid., 41.

\(^{185}\) Horkeheimer, Theism and Atheism, 221.

\(^{186}\) Ibid., 218.
Habermas, in the Middle Ages religion and metaphysics had a mutually beneficial relationship. In other words, there was no sharp division between reason and religion.\textsuperscript{187} However, he complains, “the unbelieving sons and daughters of modernity seem to believe that they owe more to one another...than what is accessible to them...of religious tradition.”\textsuperscript{188} What must be emphasized from the current theme is that Frankfurt School scholars saw that the rush to discard religion by secularists could have anti-revolutionary effects such as justifying indifference to societal ills and the elimination of the objective moral foundations for pursuing justice.

The final theme that will be covered here from the Frankfurt School is the claim that causing religious content to migrate into the secular might be a more legitimate form of secularization. Adorno stated that “Nothing of theological content will persist without being transformed; every content will have to put itself to the test of migrating into the realm of the secular, the profane.”\textsuperscript{189} He believed that theology will not survive in the modern world without taking the form of a secular idiom. One reason for this is not merely the advances of Enlightenment intellectuals, but the tragedy of Auschwitz. If God would permit that type of evil to take place he has no right to speak from on high.\textsuperscript{190} Metaphysics, however, is an example of the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 334.
\textsuperscript{189} Adorno, \textit{Reason and Revelation}, 167.
\textsuperscript{190} Adorno, \textit{Meditations on Metaphysics}, 180.
\end{flushright}
secularization and the preservation of theology in a more acceptable form.\(^{191}\)

Yet, it is Habermas who developed this concept more fully. Referring to the same process as Adorno, Habermas described it as an act of sublation of religious content into philosophical concepts. Religious content is able to be injected into scientific discussions if it has undergone this procedure of demythologization.\(^{192}\) Carrying a similar sentiment as Adorno, Habermas stated, “Under the conditions of postmetaphysical thinking, whoever puts forth a truth claim today must, nevertheless, translate experiences that have their home in religious discourse into the language of a scientific expert culture—and from this language retranslate them back into praxis.”\(^{193}\)

Of particular importance for this author is the desublimation process mentioned by Habermas. The attempt to realize some of the radical goals of religion in concrete form is a source for revolutionary fervor. Habermas explained it in this way: “Rather than save religion in thought, they want to realize its profanized contents in a political effort of solidary praxis. This pathos of a desublimated earthly realization of the Kingdom of God is the driving force behind the critique of religion from Feuerbach and Marx to Bloch, Benjamin, and Adorno.”\(^{194}\) In other words, when the religious ideas of the Kingdom of God are profanized (sublimated) into concepts such as justice, peace, liberation, and the elimination of poverty, it can then stir up the

\(^{191}\)Ibid., 201.


\(^{193}\)Ibid., 310.

\(^{194}\)Habermas, *Faith and Knowledge*, 334.
desire to desublimate (manifest) these into a physical reality: a Kingdom of God on earth. Habermas’s description is important in at least two ways. First, he highlights the central role of religion in the Frankfurt School’s vision of critical theory: the profanization of religious concepts for the purpose of revolutionary praxis (i.e. bringing these ideas into material realization). Secondly, it highlights a path forward for revolutionary solidarity among both the religious and non-religious. If religious revolutionaries profanize their visions of liberation this may be a bridge to dialogue with secular revolutionaries. On the other hand, secular revolutionaries must become aware of the revolutionary potentials in some religious doctrines even if they have yet to be profanized. As Habermas has said, “cultural and societal secularization [can be] a double learning process which forces the Enlightenment traditions as well as religious doctrines to become reflexive about their respective limits.”

Limitations of the Frankfurt School

There are numerous important tools for an Africana critical theory of religion that the Frankfurt School tradition offers. Although many of the theorists did not practice a religion, they were able to realize some valuable contributions religion offered to revolutionary praxis. The notion of an objective standard of justice seems to present the basis of an unwavering commitment to liberation regardless of one’s self-interests. The assertion that objective moral values (ex. justice) are dependent on the existence of a personal God is something that numerous philosophers and philosophers of religion have affirmed. If someone believes that all humans should

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196 Contrary to popular assumptions, the view of the necessity of God for a philosophically coherent notion of morality and justice is not a view merely held by theologians who have been trained at seminaries and divinity schools. Many scholars, some who have received their terminal degrees from prestigious secular universities, have made this case on philosophical grounds rather than on
be treated equally because of the teachings of their religion this belief carries the potential to keep revolutionaries grounded in the legitimacy of their fight regardless of changing circumstances.

Also, the discussion of transforming religious claims into secular language provides an important tool for Africana liberation. If Africana revolutionaries of various religious views sublate their ideas into secular language this may allow them to find common ground with one another. Moreover, the attempt of desublimation of religious aims into material form may have a radicalizing effect for religious adherents. The notion of striving for the world to function as it should, rather than the way it is can be a powerful motivating force.

Nevertheless, the Frankfurt School cannot serve the needs of an Africana critical theory of religion. Grounded in the thought European Enlightenment intellectuals, many of the concerns of these scholars are alien to Africana communities. As noted by Rabaka, scholars in this tradition neglected the thought traditions and life-worlds of continental and diasporan Africans. Outside of a small group of Black bourgeois intellectuals, there is no evidence that Africana communities have been affected by the secularist claims of the Enlightenment. The problems Africana communities typically have with regard to religion do not need theological dogma. This, however, fact does not suggest that the claim in anymore legitimate than its opposite. However, I am invested in the importance of disabusing secular thinkers that certain claims that challenge their worldview are somehow founded on irrational and mindless dogma that gains support only from theology. For more on this see, Linda Zagzebski, “Morality and Religion” in William Wainwright, ed., The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 354; Paul Copan, “The Moral Argument” in Chad Meister and Paul Copan, eds., The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion (London: Routledge, 2007), 365; Mark Linville, “The Moral Argument” in William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, eds., The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 404, 438; William Lane Craig, Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 172, 175.

discourses at the level of extreme abstraction that is typical of European thought and was adopted by the Frankfurt School.

Another reason why the Frankfurt School is inadequate for the project of Africana critical theory of religion is that the positionality of Africana peoples in the world is not analogous to those for whom the Frankfurt School theorists were concerned about. Frank Wilderson provided an explanation for this when he argued that “Black people [are] the living, breathing contradistinction to life itself.”\textsuperscript{198} Thus, he posited that there is a distinction between humans (non-Black people) who suffer, and non-humans (Black people) who suffer from social death. For him, this means that there is no legitimate analogy between the Black experience of oppression and any other form of oppression because Black people suffer as non-entities.\textsuperscript{199} Even Robison pointed to this position of complete alienation of Black people in the modern world. However, he and Wilderson declared that this was an advantaged perspective to critique society; a perspective the Frankfurt School lacks.\textsuperscript{200}

Furthermore, although the Frankfurt School intellectuals assess ideologies that can harm revolutionary struggle, this project places an emphasis on the process of revolutionary struggle. The Africana critical theory of religion presented by this author places an emphasis on the act of revolution and ideologies that further that process. Rather than focusing on ideologies that hinder revolution, African critical theory of religion seeks to analyze ideologies that influence the type of revolution that

\textsuperscript{198} Frank Wilderson, \textit{Afropessimism} (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 41.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 14, 16, 40.

\textsuperscript{200} Robinson, \textit{Black Marxism}, 299; Wilderson, \textit{Afropessimism}, 14-15.
must be waged. Fromm, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas may offer analyses of religion, culture, and society in the context of peace. This dissertation offers an analysis of concerns for those who are or will be in the midst of a revolutionary struggle.

**The Siebertian School of Critical Theory of Religion**

As a continuation, critique, and expansion of the Marxist tradition of critical engagement with religion, there is what the author describes as the Siebertian School of Critical Theory of Religion. According to numerous scholars, including his former students Michael Ott and Dustin Byrd, Rudolf Siebert founded the Critical Theory of Religion; sometimes called Dialectical Religiology. Ott argued that Siebert “is the originator of the study called the critical theory of religion.” He continued by stating that this theme “has been researched and developed by Siebert since 1947...[and] since 1954, Siebert has continued to develop the critical theory of religion through his prolific writing and teaching.” What seems apparent, then, is that there is a conception of a subset of the broader, more general category of critical theory of religion that, according to Ott and others, was founded by Siebert.

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Beginning with Siebert, and moving to his aforementioned students, this section will describe and analyze the formal school of the Critical Theory of Religion.

**Rudolf Siebert and the Critical Theory of Religion**

One of the tasks of Siebert’s work was to resolve the tension between science and philosophy, and religion highlighted by the Enlightenment. Ultimately, he sought to demonstrate the importance of religion even in the post-Enlightenment contemporary world. This was significant because, according to him, the Enlightenment had emphasized a secular consciousness that opposed the original human longing for the Absolute. He went on to say that the Enlightenment almost completely eliminated any notion of truth coming from the content of theology.

As an example of the diminished esteem directed toward religion, Siebert contended that Marx sought to correct the work of Georg Hegel by uncoupling Hegel’s socio-ethical analysis from the theology that was embedded in it. That is, Marx changed Hegel’s historical idealism into his own historical materialism. As Enlightenment scholars continuously stripped away religious/theological content from their intellectual production, there was also a parallel emptying of the power these concepts once offered to society. Speaking again of Marx’s transformation of Hegel’s idealism, Siebert contented that Marx had quashed its “theological glowing

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205 Ibid., 68, 328.
fire.”

Explaining this process further, he stated, “Unlike Hegel’s historical idealism the revolutionary element in Marx’s dialectical materialism is no longer reinforced by the theological presupposition of the God who sacrifices himself in history and rises again to himself. Historical materialism is thus rendered extremely vulnerable in theory and more still in praxis by metaphysical objections.” For him, Hegel was able to legitimize his concept of the dialectical sacrifice and self-sacrifice of civil society using theology (the death and resurrection of Jesus was a philosophical justification of the dialectical method; the notion of “negation (death) resulting in triumph (resurrection)” grounded the continual dialectical process Hegel articulated. It consisted of the negation of two opposing ideas that resulted in the elevation to a higher idea); Marx was unable to ground his theory this way because it was atheistic. This weakened the revolutionary potential of Marx’s dialectical materialism because it could easily begin to justify the status quo once economic concerns are alleviated. In other words, there was no philosophical grounding for a continual

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206 Ibid.
207 Ibid., 329.
208 According to Adital Ben-Ari and Guy Enosh, the dialectical method is the integration of seemingly contradictory perspectives as a form of knowledge construction. Things that seem to be in conflict on one level, may be synthesized on an elevated level. The two seemingly opposing views are integrated and synthesized. This is where dialectics parallels with the death and resurrection of Jesus: the integration of the two things are a sort of “death” for them both.; they are no longer in their original form. The synthesis of the two things at the higher level is a kind of “resurrection” of the “dead” concepts/things. In dialectics however, the new synthesis becomes the new thesis, which will then face an antithesis which will create a new synthesis. This is an continual process. What this means then, is that the oppressed in all subsequent societies always have the philosophical grounding for continued opposition to their contemporary circumstances. What Siebert is highlighting is that Hegel grounded his dialectical theory on the assumption of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Once this is stripped away, the secularist cannot just “pick this theory up and run with it.” If they are going to remove the theological assumptions of dialectics, then they must provide some other basis to support the concept philosophically; according to Siebert, this had not been done. For more on the dialectical method, see, Adital Ben-Ari and Guy Enosh, *Dialectics, Power, and Knowledge Construction in Qualitative Research: Beyond Dichotomy* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 14, 16, 17-18.

dialectical progression that would fuel continual revolutionary discontent and praxis in dialectical materialism.

Recognizing what he believed was a philosophical weakness in Marx and other Enlightenment thinkers, Siebert aimed at demonstrating the contributions that religion could offer to secular philosophy. He was able to do this by borrowing tools from Frankfurt School intellectuals. In his major writings he does an intellectual archeology by “digging” through the works of his intellectual predecessors. As he “mines” through their discourse, he points out and retrieves helpful elements, and he also points out, critiques, and discards the unhelpful parts: creating new knowledge by building on previous work; but also superseding it with fresh concepts and theories. To demonstrate this process, the author will discuss Siebert’s use of the concepts of determinate negation and communicative praxis he retrieved and developed from the Frankfurt School critical theorists.

Although this is a foundational theme to much of his work, Siebert explicitly announced his use of determinate negation as a methodological guideline in one of his most important texts.210 Describing this concept, he pointed to Horkheimer and Adorno who revealed that there was a theological core to critical theory: the second commandment of the Jewish Decalogue. This was the prohibition on making images of the Divine/Absolute (Exodus 20:4). From this concept, they concluded that nothing can be said about the Divine/Absolute in a positive form; all that could be said is what is not the Absolute. Ultimately, what one is able to affirm is that the

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210 Siebert, From Critical Theory to Critical Political Theology, 10-11.
Divine is totally Other than that which appears in the world.\textsuperscript{211} With this, Siebert contended, that the “second commandment turns into a negative theology, philosophical agnosticism and ideology: the struggle against idols.”\textsuperscript{212} Moreover, he stated that negative theology is the very foundation of critical theory.\textsuperscript{213} This position lends itself to a critique of society. If “what is” can never reflect the Absolute, then “what is” always falls short of “what should be.” There is, then, always something that must be “negated” from “what is.”

This “negation” however, must not be an absolute negation, but a determinate one. The concept of determinate negation is tied to the notion of dialectics. According to Siebert, dialectics is a form of discourse that “allows the extremes to mediate themselves through each other.” He went on to state that dialectical discourse “is an argumentative process. It consists of arguments and counterarguments. It is driven by objections and counterobjections [sic]. It is decided by the better argument.”\textsuperscript{214} Stated differently, dialectics is the process of analyzing opposing perspectives and aiming to find a resolution that accommodates valuable contributions represented from both. Thus, for example, religion is approached from a dialectical perspective: there are both oppressive and emancipatory aspects of religion. This caused Siebert to assert that one should not simply discard religion as a


\textsuperscript{212}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{213}Siebert, The Critical Theory of Religion, 146.

\textsuperscript{214}Ibid., 10.
whole, but must preserve the emancipatory aspects it possesses.\textsuperscript{215}

Siebert believed that there was a potential force for revolutionary praxis within religion. He based this on the religious notion of the Transcendent or Other which created a negative theology. As mentioned above, the Other could always be used as a justification for resistance toward the present state of affairs. This utopian vision of the totally Other was a contrast to the unjust world that needed to be negated.\textsuperscript{216} Moreover, Siebert complained that the Hegelian Left (which included Marx) erroneously considered religion as essentially a means of social control. However, a dialectical view of religion suggests that it has both reactionary and revolutionary elements.\textsuperscript{217} For example, he described Jesus as a non-violent revolutionary who took on the whole Roman Empire through spirit rather than a sword.\textsuperscript{218} Siebert also pointed to Thomas Munzer, who led a violent uprising, as one possessing the “spiritual gift, to make revolution.”\textsuperscript{219} In fact, he went as far to say that this “idea of the absolute or the universal freedom of All, instead of only the freedom of the One or of the Few, entered world history only through Christianity…through the Jesus revolution, which was most deeply rooted in the Torah and in the Hebrew prophets, and which insisted on equality of and the reciprocity among all human beings, and which has influenced Islam, as well as later religious and secular

\textsuperscript{215}Siebert, \textit{Toward a Radical Interpretation of the Abrahamic Religions}, 45.

\textsuperscript{216}Siebert, \textit{Toward a Radical Interpretation of the Abrahamic Religions}, 21, 41-42.


\textsuperscript{219}Siebert, \textit{From Critical Theory to Critical Political Theology}, 389.
movements and revolutions.” Thus, at the heart of Siebert’s work is the notion that the secularization of Western society caused by the Enlightenment has robbed the West of the revolutionary force of religion. But in order to obtain this force, one must take a critical approach to religion that identifies the revolutionary content. In other words, religion must be determinately negated.

This determinate negation, in Siebert’s view, is for the purpose of religious content to migrate into secular philosophy. Drawing from Adorno’s (and Horkheimer’s) claim that theology needed to migrate into secular consciousness, Siebert argued that “progressive semantic material and potentials are to be rescued from the depth of religion and the mythos by an inverse cipher theology into secular discourse.” The purpose of this “rescuing” of religious content/theology and causing it to “migrate” into secular philosophy is to accommodate dialectical discourse between the secular and the religious. Siebert hoped to create a theory that would combine both secular thought and theology for the purpose of serving the oppressed. He believed that both traditions could help one another and create a more robust theory when joined together.

Melding the two together, Siebert created his version of critical political theology by uniting Habermas’ theory of communicative praxis with theology. Siebert described Habermas’s theory of communicative praxis as a struggle for recognition. Habermas sought to create a theory that would help humans achieve a

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221 Siebert, *Toward a Radical Interpretation of the Abrahamic Religions*, 58-59. See also, Ibid., 57; Siebert, *The Critical Theory of Religion*, 145, 159;

totally reconciled society that would eliminate the depersonalization of individuals through a totally technocratic and monetarized society, as well as a society of continual war. Going further, Siebert continued, Habermas believed that the key for this reconciled society was in the communicative everyday praxis that revealed moral-practical reason.\textsuperscript{223} That is, the reciprocal recognition between individuals displayed in communication.\textsuperscript{224} Adding more detail, Siebert asserted that a “speech act consists of two parts: In one part I give the message about something, which I have noticed in the world, and communicate it to somebody else. By communicating the message to somebody else I take up an interpersonal relationship.”\textsuperscript{225} In the act of communication, the individuals are functioning simultaneously as singular subjects while also being united in the communicative act on the basis of mutual, reciprocal recognition of each other. In this way, the person does not lose the reality of their singular personhood, while also being connected to a larger body of individuals as equals. The aim was for an unlimited communication community that reflected both the individual autonomy of the singular subjects, and their solidarity with one another.\textsuperscript{226}

Siebert pointed out, however, that this formulation is simply a secularized version of a principle in Christian theology. Just as Siebert has emphasized the importance of causing theology to migrate into social philosophy, he stated that Habermas’s theory of communicative praxis is simply the Christian notion of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{223}Ibid., 7, 18, 35.  
\textsuperscript{224}Ibid., 107.  
\textsuperscript{225}Ibid., 8.  
\textsuperscript{226}Ibid., 7-8, 34.  
\end{footnotesize}
fellowship between believers.227 Siebert explained, “It is precisely this truth of a universal brotherhood and sisterhood ethics which Habermas has been willing to rescue from the allegedly obsolete traditional worldviews and to carry over and integrate in secular form into his universal pragmatic and theory of communicative praxis. What Habermas calls the communicative community characterized by non-coercive communication is very much a secular translation of the whole movement of Christian brotherly and sisterly communities, beginning with the communistic early Christian community.”228 In other words, Habermas had successfully completed the process of causing religious content to migrate into secular form. Nevertheless, Siebert contended that the truncated version that was adopted was philosophically inadequate.

At this point, one returns to the logic of Siebert’s claim that secular philosophies may very well adopt values that derive from the sources of religion, but the rejection of the theological presuppositions renders the borrowed content philosophically untenable. Pointing to Habermas’s theory, Siebert contended that the mutual devotion between the one and the other is limited by the death of the other. The universal solidarity, according to Siebert, is limited by the finitude of human life.229 The secular version of communicative praxis does not allow adherents to “rationally engage in a solidarity which is truly universal. Annihilation is the last word. While the Christian communistic communities combined the ethical and the

227Ibid., 13, 244.
228Ibid., 218.
229Siebert, From Critical Theory to Critical Political Theology, 8; Siebert, The Critical Theory of Religion, 195—6, 251.
mystical elements, for secular communication communities these elements fall apart. There is a price to be paid for dropping the mystical elements by the secular communicative ethics: the price is universality.” Siebert does not seem to be making a claim about the cognitive or moral ability of those who hold on to Habermas’s secular position. Rather, his claim has to do with the philosophical grounding of such positions. To say it differently, one may hold to an ethics that is grounded in an inconsistent philosophy, and still act out those ethical claims. The problem is simply that the moral actor in the communicative praxis model is acting on premises that are unfounded in their stated philosophical assumptions. The secular communicative praxis lacks what Siebert calls the “theological glowing fire” that would strengthen it because it would ground it in a consistent philosophy of praxis. It is precisely at the “dead end” in Habermas’s communicative praxis where a political theology may step in and move the theory forward.231

Siebert contended that political theologians, or theologians of communicative praxis, accepted Habermas’ interventions of communicative praxis, but they reapplied the theological glowing fire to his secular system. Political theologians were able to insert the theology of the resurrection into communicative praxis to make the theory actually universal. That is, the belief that those innocent people who have died will be rescued from the grave allows the living to remain in communicative solidarity with them.232

230 Ibid., 251.
231 Ibid., 196, 330.
232 Siebert, From Critical Theory to Critical Political Theology, 9, 60-61
communication community “excludes nobody, not even the dead.”

Having laid out some of his ideas from his major works, one should be able to see Siebert’s work come full circle. The author began by pointing to Siebert’s claim that the total rejection of religion weakened the post-Enlightenment Western society. He then articulated Siebert’s demonstration that the heart of Critical Theory was the second commandment of the Jewish Decalogue. Then he discussed Siebert’s appreciation for Habermas’s further development of Critical Theory with the theory of communicative praxis. Yet, according to Siebert, this theory was inadequate without a theoretical foundation for actual universal solidarity. Finally, he noted that Siebert pointed to the work of political theology that can join together communicative praxis with the belief in the resurrection of the dead as a way to resolve the philosophical limitations of Habermas’s theory.

Siebert offered some important tools for the construction of an Africana critical theory of religion. First, his method of grounding his contribution in the thought of his intellectual predecessors mirrors the methodological trajectory of the following chapters of this dissertation. Moreover, his dialectical process of sifting through those important European thinkers and retrieving helpful elements while also discarding unhelpful elements will be used by the current author. The reader will notice that this is akin to the method utilized by Rabaka in his Africana Critical Theory. Siebert’s work also points to the value of systematically compiling the dispersed thought of various intellectuals to create a tradition of critical engagement with religion. Marx and the Frankfurt School intellectuals discussed various topics

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but their treatment of religion at times is so subtle that it allows for those with a bias against religion to never notice it in their work. In this light, the present dissertation aims to compile and analyze the critical thought of Malcolm X on religion by putting him in conversation with the Africana tradition of critical engagement with religion. Nevertheless, there are some significant concerns about Siebert’s work that makes it incompatible with the current project.

The first issue is of the glaring absence and invisibility of Africana people in Siebert’s major works. For example, the African American experience is never used as an example of the horrors of history. He mentioned Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, Auschwitz, El Salvador, and some continental African states, but the terrorism enacted against African Americans is never used to highlight the suffering of humanity. The only time the enslavement of Africans in the Americas is directly mentioned is to identify the Dominican Las Casas as a reformer based on his suggestion to replace enslaved “Indians” with Africans. Thus, the horrors of people of African descent is used to demonstrate gradations in Christian political resistance; contrasting Las Casas, the reformer, with Munzer the revolutionary. Moreover, it is also unfortunate that when African Americans are used as examples for the degradation of American society, it is their actions that are pointed to as examples. He mentioned an African American who killed five people in 1993 as an example of the rise in frequency of “animalistic massacres.” He also described the alleged O.J. Simpson murders as the most heinous horror that was in popular news at that time.

234 Ibid., 213, 389, 390
235 Ibid., 138, 146.
On one occasion, he mentioned his brother-in-law’s reluctance to drive through the “black slums of Washington D.C.” without a gun in the car.\textsuperscript{236} While Siebert may not have intended this, in the context of American history, the minimization of Black suffering, and the criminalization of Black communities, his discourse does not seem to push against that narrative.

Furthermore, while his family lived in the United States in the midst of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements and the emergence of Black Liberation Theology, there are no explicit examples of any political activity on behalf of Black people or any intellectual engagement with central figures in Black Theology. It is difficult to reconcile Siebert’s frequent mentions of his participation in opposition to the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, his general anti-war activities, and his assistance of the innocent victims of war-torn Ex-Yugoslavia, without any mention of participating in the struggle for Black liberation.\textsuperscript{237} Furthermore, although he recognized Martin Luther King Jr. as a political/liberation theologian and one whose example should be imitated, he does not engage with Black Theology at all in his major works. Despite the centrality of African Americans to forming a “theology from below” when Siebert was shaping his critical political theology in the midst of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, Black theologians are not sources he drew from.\textsuperscript{238} The absence of African Americans from any theoretical consideration in his major works is an issue of such significance as to render Siebert’s work of limited relevance for an

\begin{footnotes}
\item[236] Ibid., 406.
\item[237] Ibid., 79, 386, 387, 392, 394.
\item[238] Ibid., 300, 416, 418.
\end{footnotes}
Africana critical theory of religion.

In addition to the above, if a theory is to be constructed for the purpose of supporting interreligious (and non-religious) Pan-African revolutionary praxis, then the centrality of theology to Siebert’s theory would be a burden. As already mentioned, the hope of the resurrection is central to Siebert’s development of political theology. In other words, since it is part of Siebert’s aim to construct a theory that is philosophically consistent, then, the theological belief that Jesus was resurrected, and that he will ultimately resurrect the innocent dead, is a fundamental concept for his contribution to work.\textsuperscript{239} However, for this current project, the author has no concern for the theological or philosophical consistency of the beliefs of Africana people. His only concern is whether the beliefs held by Africana people will allow them to participate in interreligious Pan-African revolutionary praxis. Solving the abstract intellectual problems in society has its place. But part of the argument of this dissertation is that Africana peoples, if they want to obtain their full freedom, do not have time to entertain those types of concerns. Siebert showed a significant amount of concern for those who adopt his position on political theology to believe in God and hold to certain theological views about Jesus. He warned of the danger of “absolute ‘profanation’” of theological content.\textsuperscript{240} These limitations create a theory that may be helpful on the micro-level for Africana Christians to participate in a broader interreligious revolutionary movement. Nevertheless, this is not a comprehensive theory that accounts for all people of African descent regardless of their beliefs about

\textsuperscript{239}Ibid., 160, 170, 300, 420.
\textsuperscript{240}Ibid., 158, 159, 201.
Expanding the Siebertian Critical Theory of Religion

Siebert’s Critical Theory of Religion was expanded further by two of his most important students representing the second and third generation of the Siebertian School: Michael Ott and Dustin Byrd. In this section, the author will point out key concepts preserved by these two representatives of the Critical Theory of Religion, as well as the ways they have added to or expanded the theory. One of the concepts a reader will find that continues in Ott’s work is the idea that the marginalization of religion in society has had negative effects. For him, the rejection of the truth content in religion had the result of destroying the cohesiveness of society and has increased antagonisms between the various compartmentalized egos that view themselves as over and against the rest of the world. Moreover, there has been a growing sense of meaninglessness, apathy, and resignation in modern secular life. He contended that secular reason can only stand mute in the face of social catastrophe because of the loss of an epistemological basis for morality.

The reader will additionally find that Ott also retains Siebert’s emphasis on determinate negation. Agreeing with Siebert, Ott argued that the foundation of critical theory is the dialectical method of determinate negation. He claimed that this sets critical theory apart from modern natural and social sciences “wherein there is a

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243 Ibid., 11.
radical separation between the subject and object and in which something either is or it is not, the dialectical method of determinate negation is a process whereby a new form not only negates the old but also preserves and elevates the old form in itself.”

As noted above, this process allows for repressive forms of religion to be discarded and for the emancipatory aspects of religion to migrate into social philosophy.

However, it is Ott’s critical interaction with Horkheimer and Walter Benjamin that moves Critical Theory of Religion further. In one sense, it might be said that he moves the theory forward by moving it backwards. Ott offered a more focused analysis on these two figures and highlighted the radical elements they both contributed to the Critical Theory of Religion. He seemed to suggest that the atheistic perspective of Horkheimer’s critical theory of religion served as a model for the task of translating the religious into the secular. In regard to Benjamin, Ott described the revolutionary potential of his call for remembering the past suffering of victims of oppression. This functioned, according to Ott’s interpretation of Horkheimer, as a potential fomentation of revolutionary resistance.

These contributions provide an example for further studies in the Critical Theory of Religion, but Ott also adopted one of the limitations of his teacher that makes his work incompatible with the development of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion. Ott’s work shows that the reevaluation of intellectual ancestors is not a

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244 Ibid., 12.
245 Ibid., 31.
“closed book.” Although Siebert had completed a thorough evaluation of Frankfurt School intellectuals, Ott demonstrated that it may be helpful to return to these sources of the theory so that one might apply a different perspective on their work. This is a helpful tenet for the Africana Critical Theory of Religion to follow. Malcolm X has been a very prominent subject for inquiry for many years, but it is helpful to reevaluate some of his thoughts through the prism of a distinct paradigm.

Nevertheless, similar to Siebert, Ott’s work is silent on the concerns of African Americans. In discussing the relevance of Benjamin’s work, Ott pointed to the 21st century anti-capitalist, anti-war, students, women’s labor unions, environmentalists, and “GLBTQ” [sic] protests as examples of mass social movements that may find Benjamin’s critical theory useful. This text that was published in 2021 mentioned nothing about the African American struggle or Black Lives Matter more specifically. He referred to the year 2018 in particular and identified the “youth protest movement” that fought to ban the sale of military grade weapons that have been used consistently in school shootings.\footnote{Ibid., 159, 161} The Africana scholar must once again ask: where is the concern for Black suffering? In a text published in 2021, one wonders how it is possible to speak of resistance and protest and skip over the protests that happened in response to the killings of Trayvon Martin (2012), Mike Brown (2014), Tamir Rice (2014), Sandra Bland (2015), Breonna Taylor (2020), and George Floyd (2020). The level of invisibility of the Black struggle in the Marxist/Critical Theory (of Religion) tradition is astounding. No matter how helpful a tradition may be, for someone to be writing contemporarily with

\footnote{Ibid., 159, 161}
the Civil Rights and Black Power era or during the era of Black Lives Matter, and not value Black concerns enough to mention them in their scholarship renders them inappropriate for a study addressing people of African descent.

As for the work of Byrd, similar to Ott, he retains some of the assumptions of his teacher, but he also developed the Critical Theory of Religion in very helpful ways. Just like both Siebert and Ott, Byrd highlighted the degenerative effects of the rejection of religion for society. He described it as causing deep feelings of meaninglessness and purposelessness. Furthermore, there was a feeling of being rudderless and hollow, along with the acceptance of destructive ideologies, the development of new levels of barbarity and civilizational destructiveness. Byrd followed Siebert and Ott as well when he pointed out the value of determinate negation and rescuing the emancipatory potential from religion. He did help clarify the process of the migration of religious content into secular philosophy by utilizing Giorgio Agamben’s work that discussed the concept of profanation. Interpreting Agamben, Byrd states that when something is transferred from the realm of the sacred and allowed to be used freely by all, it has been profaned. He went on to describe what the Frankfurt School scholars did as the profaning of religious concepts.

Byrd’s contribution to the development of the Critical Theory of Religion is related to the purpose of the profaning process. With Muslims in Europe as religious minorities in mind, Byrd provided a concept of determinate negation for the

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250 Ibid., 3-7, 9.

251 Ibid., 152—4.
purpose of assisting their process of being accepted as equal contributors to secular society while remaining faithful to their religion. He stated that the goal is for religious believers to “be accorded the respect of their fellow citizens to hear out their reasoning.”\textsuperscript{252} Again, he stated that it is “the hope of the critical theorist to build a bridge between the religiously committed Muslim and secular voices.”\textsuperscript{253} Byrd went further, however, and showed great sensitivity toward those who feel like it is an affront on their religious beliefs to demand that there be changes within their theology.\textsuperscript{254} Borrowing from Habermas, Byrd called for a “non-destructive translation” of religious content that would allow for those who are convinced of the divine origin of their religious beliefs to have a way of communicating this content in secular discourse. He explained:

The key to potentially overcoming such Islamic objections...is to make clear to those who presently cannot or will not translate their beliefs into publically accessible reasoning is that the act of a...translation is ‘non-destructive,’ as opposed to determinate negation, which as we saw with the first generation of Critical Theorists, follows Horkheimer’s thinking that ‘one cannot secularize religion without giving it up. While determinate negation, by its very nature, destructively produces a new phenomenon from the simultaneous negation and preservation of the thesis and antithesis, translation, the way Habermas intends, does not demand upon the believer the destruction of the thesis, i.e. Islam, only the creation of a temporarily-existing, exterior formulation of Islamic ideals, values, and principles in secular language, through which the believer can enter fully into the democratic will formation. In fact, such a translation does not affect Islam at all, but potentially advances the interests of the Muslims via language that can, in all hopes be accepted via Islam’s own resources as being valid within itself.\textsuperscript{255}

Distinct from Siebert’s critical political theology that requires certain theological sacrifices to be made, Byrd articulated a way for religious believers to maintain their

\textsuperscript{252}Ibid., 246.
\textsuperscript{254}Byrd, \textit{The Frankfurt School and the Dialectics of Religion}, 258.
\textsuperscript{255}Ibid., 265—6.
religious convictions while also switching to a mode of communication that does not assume the discourse partner adheres to the same theological commitments. Moreover, Byrd’s further development of the Critical Theory of Religion begins with his rejection of Habermas’ aim to integrate religious people at the expense of the prophetic negativity of their religion. He argued that the prophetic negativity of Islam should be recovered by Habermas rather than just the moral-practical rationality of the religion. The negativity could function as a resource for emancipatory causes. For example, he pointed to the Islamic teaching that forbids associating partners with God as a principle that could be used as a radical critique of the idolatry of money.

As one of the latest developments in the Critical Theory of Religion, Byrd’s work is very helpful and holds the potential to be quite useful for the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion. His suggestion of a non-destructive translation of religious content provides a convenient paradigm for the type of work this dissertation is striving to accomplish. The task of providing an interreligious Pan-African revolutionary theory must find a way that diverse Africana peoples can come together and cooperate with one another. The concept of non-destructive translation offers an approach that would not require the compromises that other formulations expect. As will be seen in subsequent parts of this dissertation, there are some perspectives that are adamant about religious or non-religious conformity in order to affirm one’s legitimacy in the liberation struggle. The author will reserve his critique of Byrd for the following section.

\[256\text{Ibid., 225, 226, 291.}\]
Siebertian Critical Theory of Religion and Malcolm X

This final section on the Marxist tradition of critical engagement with religion will briefly analyze the way Siebert and Byrd have sought to engage with the life and teachings of Malcolm X. As hinted at earlier, Siebert seemed to ignore the developments in the African American struggle during the time when Malcolm X was alive. Moreover, it was not until the past few years, nearing the end of his scholarly production (as of the date of this current writing, he is in his mid-90s), that he has been persuaded to consider a figure such as Malcolm X. One may appreciate his acknowledgement of Malcolm as a critic of religion; however, his lack of deep familiarity with the subject caused him to make some mistakes and to provide a commonly held characterization of Malcolm. For example, Siebert claimed that after his conversion to Sunni Islam in 1964, Malcolm refrained from speaking about the use of violence as a strategy for Black liberation.\textsuperscript{257} While this will be dealt with more thoroughly in the following chapter, it can be briefly stated here that Malcolm spoke of violence as a strategy for Black liberation all the way to the end of his life. Furthermore, Siebert claimed that after his 1964 conversion, Malcolm believed in the possibility of a nonviolent revolution.\textsuperscript{258} This claim, however, is a more common depiction of Malcolm X that one can find in the secondary literature on him.

However, as will be explained later, this also is an inaccurate interpretation of Malcolm X.


\textsuperscript{258}Ibid., 162.
Byrd’s engagement with Malcolm X is much more promising. He pointed to Malcolm’s critique of “Novocaine religion” as an example of Malcolm’s understanding of what in the tradition of Critical Theory is called “positive religion;” that is, any form of religion that sanctions the status quo.\textsuperscript{259} He explained, “In this slumber-induced religiousity, associated with the ‘Uncle Tom,’ the victims of history are routinely asked to suffer peacefully while they are victimized.”\textsuperscript{260} This type of religion, according to Byrd, did not allow for the type of revolutionary resistance Malcolm advocated. Malcolm was attracted to Islam because it provided more options for the revolutionary than Christianity. Byrd correctly argued that in Malcolm’s view, “without violence and the overthrow of the American political system, there was no chance for a true emancipation of African-Americans.”\textsuperscript{261}

Byrd also provided an important critique of Malcolm’s approach to religion. He contended that similar to Marx’s analysis of religion, Malcolm’s view of religion (i.e. Christianity) was insufficiently dialectical.\textsuperscript{262} Byrd stated that Malcolm never tired of highlighting the opiate qualities of Christianity; he did this while being familiar with the prophetic Christianity of his father.\textsuperscript{263} As noted above, a dialectical view of religion is able to admit both the positive and the negative qualities in religion. Byrd’s analysis exposes a weakness in Malcolm’s critical theory of religion.


\textsuperscript{260} Ibid., 97.

\textsuperscript{261} Ibid., 125.

\textsuperscript{262} Ibid., 102.

\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., 103.
Byrd’s work comes extremely close to the goals of this current project. His analysis of Malcolm’s critiques of religion surely moves in the direction desired by this current author. However, similar to the rest of the tradition mapped out above, Byrd still seems limited to an analysis grounded in European thought. Although Byrd engaged with a Black subject, the analytical framework he used to interpret him remained tied to the European Marxist tradition. Based on the bibliography he provided, of his twenty-nine sources, twelve are either primary or secondary sources for the life and thought of Malcolm X. However, thirteen of the sources that assist him in framing his analysis are either on Europe or the European tradition. He even stated that it was his intention to use this particular type of paradigm. Byrd asserted, “With the help of the Critical Theory of Religion, as developed by the Frankfurt School for Social Research, especially via the religious thought of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, I will reexamine Malcolm X’s critical analysis of Christianity.” Although it must be admitted that Byrd has provided some useful interpretations of Malcolm’s critiques of religion, the object of this dissertation is to provide an African-centered approach to Malcolm’s critiques of religion. This perspective is important for all of the reasons highlighted in the previous sections relating the limitations of the Marxist tradition of critical engagement with religion for Africana subject matter. For these reasons, the author must emphasize the need for an Africana critical theory of religion that places

264 The thirteen sources on Europe or the European tradition include seven Frankfurt School texts, three texts on Marx, one by Immanuel Kant, one on Lenin, one on Soviet Union and secularization, and one on the history of Protestantism. The other texts are on Che Guevara or Cuba, history, and Messianic Judaism. For more on Byrd’s sources, see, Ibid., 129-130.

265 Ibid., 92.
Malcolm in conversation with figures like Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Maria Stewart, and Fannie Lou Hamer, rather than Horkheimer, Adorno, and Benjamin. The second half of this chapter will explore the possibilities of a tradition that actually derived from the Africana experience and assess whether it can be useful to ground the present project.

**The Conian Tradition of Critical Approaches to Religion and Revolution: Black Liberation Theology**

**James Cone and Black Liberation Theology**

Beginning in the late 1960s until his passing in 2018 James Cone boldly proclaimed an interpretation of Christian theology that contributed to discourses on the relationship between Black religion, theology, and revolutionary religion. One of his most important claims was that in contrast to how academic theologians have characterized Christianity, God is on the side of the oppressed. He asserted this based on his belief that humans are able to know about God through his acts in history. Pointing to the biblical story of the exodus, Cone viewed God’s relationship to the Egyptians and the people of Israel as emblematic of the deity’s general relationship with human beings. In other words, God was disclosing something about his characteristics in his associations with those two groups.\(^{266}\) He explained that “God’s election of oppressed Israelites has unavoidable implications for the doing of theology. If God had chosen as the ‘holy nation’ the Egyptian slave masters instead of the Israelite slaves, then a completely different kind of God would have been

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revealed. Thus Israel’s election cannot be separated from its servitude...”

From this basis, he was able to make the general assertion that “God is found among the poor, the wretched and the sick.”

He was also able to find support for his thesis in the Gospels recorded in the Christian scriptures. The idea that God incarnated God’s self into human flesh, and became a first century poor Jew under Roman occupation was significant to Cone. Cone stated, “God did not become a universal human being but an oppressed Jew.”

Once again, the specificity of God’s historical activity reveals God to humankind. God’s identification with an oppressed group of people communicated that God is committed to oppressed people more generally.

Beyond the doctrine of the Incarnation, Cone argued one can observe from the life of Jesus that he stood unambiguously with the poor simply because they were poor. For this reason, Cone claimed that in the context of the United States Jesus is Black because Black people are the oppressed people in this country just like Jewish people were oppressed in first century Palestine.

This theological use of “Blackness” is parallel to first century Jewishness in Cone’s formulation. That is, to

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be Black means “that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are.” For Cone, this theology is also indicative for how the Church should function. If Jesus is Black, and the Church is the continuation of his work, than the Church must totally identify with the oppressed (i.e. become Black).

These theological claims could be seen as a form of critical theory of religion. Viewed in light of his critiques of the common perception of Christianity in the United States, when Cone first articulated these claims he was articulating what Siebert might call a critical political theology. He made it clear that he was providing a critical approach to religious discourse in the United States when he stated “If God is truly the God of the weak and helpless, then we must critically reevaluate the history of theology in America, a theology that owes more to white oppressors than oppressed blacks and Indians.” In this way, Cone was doing to white supremacist forms of Christianity and theology what Siebert described as determinate negation.

Connected to the notion that God has identified with the downtrodden, Cone asserted that the central content of Theology and the Gospel is God’s liberation of the oppressed. He contended that the task of theology is to analyze and express the meaning of God’s active liberation among enslaved people. For him, theology should demonstrate that God is behind the forces of liberation in society. Cone explained this concept in detail:

Taking seriously the tradition of the Old and New Testaments and the past and

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273 Ibid., 69.
present black revolution in America, black theology is a rational and passionate study of the revolutionary activity of God in the world in the light of the historical situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. Theology so defined moves us in the direction of the biblical tradition which focuses on the activity of God in history, liberating people from human bondage. God, according to the Bible, is known by what he does, and what he does is always related to the liberation of the oppressed.²⁷⁶

Thus, for Cone, the good news (Gospel) that biblical theology proclaimed is associated with anything that is compatible with Black freedom.²⁷⁷ This belief allowed him to connect the Gospel message to the radical movement that was taking place when he first formulated this theological perspective.

Cone declared that the Black Power Movement was the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the United States. Utilizing the theological assumptions mentioned above, Cone wrote in his first book, originally published in 1969, that “Black rebellion is a manifestation of God himself actively involved in the present-day affairs of men for the purpose of liberating a people.”²⁷⁸ He went on to say that the message of Black Power was the message of Jesus for the twentieth-century United States.²⁷⁹ Despite the claims of the Marxist school of critical engagement with religion explicated above, the religion that Cone articulated is the antithesis of what they described as Constantinian Christianity, and was more in line with the revolutionary religion Engel’s attributed to Munzer. Cone went as far to say that the theological meaning of the idea of righteousness is to be “politically engaged in the struggle of freedom.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶Cone, Risks of Faith, 32.
²⁷⁷Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, 121.
²⁷⁸Ibid., 38.
²⁷⁹Ibid., 37.
Most relevant for the purposes of this dissertation is Cone’s characterization of his theology as a revolutionary theology. Cone proclaimed that the time for debates, discussions, and talk was over. He was aiming to construct a revolutionary theology that confronted white society with the declaration that Black people will use any means necessary to fight for their freedom.\(^ {281}\) It is important to note that Cone explicitly sought to distinguish his conception of revolution from a mere protest theology.\(^ {282}\) He was describing a religious commitment to the overthrow of the racist society. He contended:

> The revolution which Black Theology advocates should not be confused with some popular uses of the word…Revolution is not merely a ‘change of heart’ but a radical black encounter with the structure of white racism, with the full intention of destroying its menacing power. I mean confronting white racists and saying: ‘If it’s a fight you want, I am prepared to oblige you.’ This is what the black revolution means.\(^ {283}\)

He goes on to explain that for Black Theology, there is no choice between violence and non-violence. The question more accurately stated is whether one will support the violence of the oppressor or the oppressed?\(^ {284}\) In response to those who juxtaposed Christian love with violence, Cone argued that “love may mean joining a violent rebellion.”\(^ {285}\)

It must be said that what Cone articulated is extremely close to a paradigm useful for the present project. A theology that claims that God is on the side of the oppressed acting in history for their liberation is a subversive religious belief.

\(^ {281}\) Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 135—6.

\(^ {282}\) Ibid., 137.

\(^ {283}\) Ibid., 136.

\(^ {284}\) Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 36.

\(^ {285}\) Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 113.
Moreover, his explicit validation of revolutionary violence could perhaps provide the link between religion and the violent overthrow of the state that the current author is exploring. As promising as it seems, and apart from the powerful critiques launched at Cone by William R. Jones, his theology suffers from two particular weaknesses that make it incompatible for this dissertation.286

First, because the goal is to find or construct a theory that accommodates for a Pan-African interreligious revolutionary praxis, the Christian-centeredness of Cone’s contribution limits its applicability. Philosopher John McClendon is helpful in articulating this concern. He explained that Christianity is foundational to Cone’s project and it requires Christian theological presuppositions.287 In other words, because non-Christian Africana peoples would likely not accept the theological ground on which his work is founded on, therefore, Cone’s Black Liberation Theology cannot be a theory of religion that a Pan-African interreligious community could base itself on. The reader should not be confused; a Christian holding to Cone’s view would most likely participate in the struggle envisioned by this project. But this theology would likely be limited to Africana Christians.

The second reason Cone’s Theology would be inappropriate for the aims of

286 The author is aware of the important critique directed at Cone from William R. Jones’ that suggested there is no evidence in Black history of God liberating (or even taking the side of) Black people. Moreover, Jones argued that in fact, the evidence seems to point in the opposite direction. Cone responded by arguing that redemptive suffering is a key feature of the biblical narrative and that his theology should be judged based on its utility for the Black liberation struggle rather than for its logical consistency. As important as this critique is for assessing Black Liberation Theology, similar to what Cone stated, my concern is not with whether religious views are true or even logical; my concern is whether they hinder or encourage revolutionary struggle. For Jones’ critique of Cone, see, William R. Jones, Is God a White Racist: A Preamble to Black Theology (Boston:Beacon Press,1998), 12, 13, 21. For Cone’s response to the critiques of Jones, see, Cone, Speaking the Truth, 14, 15; Cone, God of the Oppressed, 158.

287 McClendon, Philosophy of Religion and the African American Experience, 294, 301.
this current project is because a significant amount of Africana Christians may view his theological epistemology as too human-centered. Cone regulated the Bible to being a secondary guide and contended that “[t]ruth is found in the histories, cultures, and religions of our peoples.” For him, the ultimate test of truth is the Black experience. He goes as far to say that “There is no truth for and about black people that does not emerge out of the context of their experience.” Though Cone provided numerous great concepts that are useful for revolutionary praxis, some Africana Christians might see the elevation of the Black experience as the supreme authority as anthropocentric rather than centering God; a form of anthropotheism. McClendon also pointed to this problem when he stated that “if the ultimate reality is the Black experience, in the order of things, therefore God and Christ must take a backseat. Rather than Christ and God as ultimate reality, Christ and God serve as means to the greater end of Black liberation of which the Black experience is the ultimate reality.” If McClendon’s critique is true, Cone’s theological epistemology would require Black Christians who hold to a more traditional theological

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288 Cone, For my People, 148. See also, Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, 31.
289 Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, 120; Cone, God of the Oppressed, 190.
290 Cone, God of the Oppressed, 16.
291 McClendon, Philosophy of Religion and the African American Experience, 370—1. Although this is not central to my dissertation, it is still important to state here that Cone’s theological epistemology fails in another area. First, the incoherence of his statement that “truth is not objective. It is subjective.” One might first ask the question whether this statement is objective or not. In other words, is it objectively true that there is no objective truth? The logical fallacy and incoherence should be apparent. However, if we grant that the statement is subjective then it renders the words irrelevant. If the truth of his statement is merely limited to his opinion, then a comment aiming to speak about an essential quality of truth becomes nonsensical. Even more problematic, however, is that he stated in another place that “if there is no distinction between truth and error...then there is no way to say what Christian theology is.” The problem here is that the assertion of the existence of truth and error require the reality of objective truth. For this reason, not only are the two aforementioned claims contradictory, but Cone’s statement that there is no objective truth is self-defeating. See, Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, 19; Cone, Speaking the Truth, 10.
epistemology to make compromises they are not willing to make.\textsuperscript{292} Stated more directly, Cone’s formulation encroaches onto the area of theology and it would require a theological adjustment and thus limit the broad reaching aspirations of the present writer.

\textbf{Contributions to Black Liberation Theology by Cone’s Contemporaries}

Other scholars central to the discourse on Black Liberation Theology, and who actively contributed in the early 1970s as Cone was introducing and shaping it, include J. Deotis Roberts and Gayraud Wilmore. Roberts sought to both critique and expand Cone’s conception of Black Liberation Theology. He accused Cone of being “on the fence between the Christian faith and the religion of Black Power.”\textsuperscript{293} As part of his evidence he asserted that Cone was indifferent to whites even though there was a need for reconciliation between the races. He also charged that Cone’s articulation of Black Theology functionally self-segregated Black Theologians who, Roberts claimed, had been fighting to be included in the field of Theology. For Roberts, the narrowness of Cone’s Black Theology allowed white scholars the opportunity to ignore it rather than its inclusion in the “comprehensive field of theology.”\textsuperscript{294}

Beyond his critiques of Cone, Roberts accepted some of his claims but also

\textsuperscript{292}The traditional view among Christians is that the Bible is the chief authority in the life of the believer. While the traditional view affirms the importance of history and context, those are seen as secondary to the authority of the Bible. For more on this, see, Everett Ferguson, \textit{Backgrounds of Early Christianity} (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 539-545; Alister McGrath, \textit{Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought} (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001), 29-30, 38; Gregg Allison, \textit{Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 79-98; Paul Wegner, \textit{The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 34-35.


\textsuperscript{294}Ibid., 5.
expanded the theology. For example, he agreed with Cone stating that “Black Theology is a theology of liberation.” However, he added, that liberation must include both the deliverance from oppression along with the liberation from personal sins. For him, both were essential elements of the gospel. Moreover, he affirmed along with Cone, the idea that Christianity was a revolutionary faith. He stated that the “black church must…proclaim a revolutionary gospel and live by a militant creed. The black church must be the church militant in the here and now. It must conceive of salvation in holistic terms.” Nevertheless, this militancy Roberts encouraged for Black Christians was focused on “ballots and bills rather than bombs and bullets.” Furthermore, he was concerned with the temptation to exclude the Christian idea of enduring suffering completely from the values of Black Theology to further radicalize it. While rejecting the idea of passively enduring suffering, Roberts believed that “Black Theology must not attempt to take the cross out of the Christian faith. It must speak, rather of how to pass through suffering, of which the cross is the chief symbol, to a larger and fuller life.” This warning highlighted an important aspect of Robert’s intervention into Black Liberation Theology: a centrist proclivity.

As hinted at above, Roberts sought to soften some of the radicalness of Cone’s theology by promoting a more centrist Black Liberation Theology. On the first page of one of his foundational texts, he characterizes himself as standing

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296 Ibid., 33.
297 Ibid., 106
298 Ibid., 22.
“somewhere between…the black militants and…civil rights integrationist…between the ‘by-whatever-means-necessary’ ethicists and the view that ends and means are organically one.”

This is encapsulated in his particular understanding of Black Theology that affirmed “liberation and reconciliation must be considered at the same time and in relation to each other.”

Applying his centrist version of Black Theology, he warned that “one needs to be pro-black without being anti-white.”

Continuing his demand for balance, he stated that “Africentricity must not replace Christ-centeredness.” He even went as far to compare “white liberals” who turn into those supporting peace without justice, to Black people who had abandoned the civil rights movement and “joined angry black separatists” as both being wrong.

Thus, Roberts attempted to “balance” the extremes on both sides of the racial divide. This approach, however, caused him to hold what seems to be conflicting positions on certain issues.

Roberts’ centrist theology may have influenced him to hold on to irreconcilable theological perspectives. For example, on the one hand Roberts affirmed the potential need for seasons where activities are temporarily valid (Black strategic withdrawal from white people), but then he seemed to demand the simultaneous consideration of liberation and reconciliation. Confronting an imagined interlocutor who declared that “reconciliation is too futuristic for consideration at this

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299 Ibid., 1.
300 Ibid.
301 Roberts, Africentric Christianity, 57.
302 Ibid., 81.
303 Roberts, Liberation and Reconciliation, 9.
time” he asserted that “we must always seek reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{304} One also sees conflict in the way he addressed the topic of violence and nonviolence. Although he admitted that there have been some occasions where violent revolution was justified, when speaking of Black violence he consistently characterized it as revengeful, hatemongering, and a bad choice both pragmatically and psychologically.\textsuperscript{305} Moreover, at one point he condemned the Nat Turner revolt as bloodthirsty and revengeful. However, when he brings up Turner again in relation to Dietrich Bonhoffer’s plot to kill Adolf Hitler, he then characterized Turner’s action as righteous and the only path he had to obtain justice.\textsuperscript{306} It is difficult to ignore that his analysis of Turner becomes positive only when he is faced with a comparable attempt by a white man. These problems with consistency, particularly when related to the validity of revolutionary violence, make the value of Robert’s contribution for the present project very limited.

Similar to Cone, Wilmore argued that Black Liberation Theology prioritized the idea that Jesus is on the side of the oppressed.\textsuperscript{307} However, he added that “it began not with James H. Cone and J. Deotis Roberts but in slavery.”\textsuperscript{308} This outlook shaped his contribution to the discourse that might be viewed as an analysis of the historical effects of the African source of Black Liberation Theology as it had developed. Wilmore argued that the freedom and liberation tradition within African

\textsuperscript{304}Ibid., 7, 9.
\textsuperscript{305}Ibid., 3, 100, 102.
\textsuperscript{306}Ibid., 21, 102.
\textsuperscript{308}Ibid., 163.
American religion derived from their African background. It was their African past that caused the enslaved Africans to conceive of religion in a way that condemned slavery and legitimized resistance to injustice.

Moreover, Wilmore contended that there is a good amount of evidence to demonstrate that African American religion has an African foundation; in fact, he claimed that this foundation accounted for the most significant characteristics of African American religion.\(^{309}\) One explanation he gave for the preservation of this African foundation is that the early spiritual leaders among enslaved people in the Caribbean and North American colonies were representatives of traditional African religions. Furthermore, they viewed the Supreme Being as involved with the practical issues of life. This latter point is crucial for understanding Wilmore’s conception of the source for Black Liberation Theology. Wilmore explained that there is no rigid distinction between the natural and the supernatural within African religions. He went further and stated that the essential ingredient in African American religion prior to the Civil War was the surviving belief from African religions that the spirit world intersected with the world of objective reality.\(^{310}\) Thus, the seed that provided the liberation emphasis in Black Theology is the assumptions derived from its African background.

Wilmore traces this seed of liberation from the African background through slavery to the Civil Rights Movement. He claimed that the effectiveness of Martin Luther King Jr. in mobilizing Black people must be attributed to a latent passion for


\(^{310}\)Ibid., 37, 41, 49.
justice already present in Southern Black culture that had simply been muted out of caution for mere survival. He stated that it was Malcolm X who had awakened the spirit of rebellion in the black church with his challenges to the legitimacy of Christianity and Blackness.\textsuperscript{311}

While it should be obvious how Wilmore’s articulation of Black Theology may be helpful for any theory on radical Black religion, it is, nevertheless, limited in regard to this current project. The history of the inseparable strand of Black religion and Black resistance could function as a means of encouragement for Africana people who are religious. However, Wilmore seemed to collapse religious boundaries with a notion of a singularity of Black faith. He asserted that the entire religious and cultural landscape of Black society is a source of God’s revelation and Black Theology.\textsuperscript{312} While this may seem to serve the aim of interreligious Pan-African unity, it really just creates tensions for those who may feel like the characterization of their faiths as homogenous not only ignores mutually exclusive faith claims, but also see it as an affront on their deity. This may be welcoming to Africana religious people with more liberal views, but it would alienate those who may be political radicals, but are more religiously conservative.

**Second Generation of Black Liberation Theology**

The second generation of Black theologians was able to advance the field based on the foundation that had already been laid. Representing that generation in this section will be Dwight Hopkins and Josiah Young. As with the first generation,

\textsuperscript{311}Ibid., 207, 218.

\textsuperscript{312}Wilmore, *Pragmatic Spirituality*, 165.
Hopkins affirmed the claim that God is on the side of the oppressed to liberate them. He suggested that Black Liberation Theology seeks to answer the inquiry of how does the Gospel of liberation manifest itself in Black culture?\textsuperscript{313}

Hopkins addressed that question by doing a deep analysis of the religion of enslaved Black people in United States. He believed that because the Black Church began in slavery that it is appropriate to view “slave religion…[as] the first source for a contemporary statement of black theology.”\textsuperscript{314} Hopkins stated that “slave religion” was a convergence of a transformed version of white Christianity and survivals of African religions. This African source contributed a communal view of the responsibility of the individual that did not allow for a strong distinction between the liberation of the community and the salvation of the individual. This resulted in a complete mixture of the pursuit of the Divine and the pursuit of liberation among enslaved Africans, according to Hopkins. Furthermore, Hopkins noted that this politicization of religion is connected to the fact that in African traditional religions there was no conception of a religion that tended to the spirit of the individual and did nothing for them in the physical world.\textsuperscript{315}

In the New World, this African background would encounter white Christianity. As mentioned above, the enslaved reinterpreted the religion they observed among whites and developed the Invisible Institution. Hopkins describes


\textsuperscript{314} Hopkins, \textit{Slave Theology}, 1.

\textsuperscript{315} Ibid., 3, 5.
this institution as the site of a battle to determine who would have the power to shape the theology of the enslaved. The fact that they created their own liberated space to worship was an act of political agency and defiance to insist that they would have religious autonomy.\(^\text{316}\) They saw in the story of the Exodus a people with whom they could identify and be encouraged that God would also liberate them as well. Further, they developed an intercommunal ethics that distinguished between acts (such as ‘theft’) that were committed against other enslaved people, and that of ‘theft’ directed toward their enslavers. According to Hopkins, this preferential treatment of the poor verifies the legitimacy of contemporary Black Theology to take a similar stance.\(^\text{317}\)

The unique character of the religion of the enslaved Africans was so distinct that it seems that Hopkins implied that they practiced a different religion from whites altogether. He maintained that there was a radical distinction between Black and white Christianity based on an alternative theological interpretation. In fact, Hopkins stated that enslaved people saw “a direct political struggle between serving their God and serving the white slave master’s god.”\(^\text{318}\) They chose to worship their own liberator God in their own language and idiom. Rather than seeing their enslavers as their co-religionist, many enslaved Africans believed their masters were going to hell.\(^\text{319}\)

Hopkins’ examination of the religion of enslaved Africans has some potential for the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion. What he

\(^{316}\)Ibid., 2, 7.

\(^{317}\)Ibid., 26, 31.

\(^{318}\)Ibid., 2.

\(^{319}\)Ibid., 14.
demonstrated was that although enslaved Africans adopted a religion that went by the same name as their oppressors, it is inaccurate to characterize them as accepting the religion of their oppressors. Moreover, this challenges the common supposition that Black people mindlessly accepted the indoctrination of their oppressors and were convinced they were called to be slaves. While this assumption is often taken for granted, the only places where a significant amount of enslaved Africans accepted the degrading religion of their oppressors are in the minds and rhetoric of anti-religious Marxists and nationalists or anti-Christian radicals; neither the historical record or the writings of specialists of Black religion support this almost universal assumption. However, while there is value in the ability of Black Christians to point to Hopkins’ work as a rejoinder to those who have the additional free time to mock Black religion rather than focus all of their energy on fighting white supremacy, it does not assist in the overthrow of the state. What he provided is important information, but not a map toward revolutionary praxis.

Remaining consistent with this tradition, Josiah Young affirmed that Black Theology is an understanding that liberation is the essence of the gospel. Similar to Cone’s claim, Young agreed that God is metaphorically black based on God’s identification with the suffering of the world.\footnote{Josiah Young, “God’s Path and Pan-Africa” in James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, eds., \textit{Black Theology: A documentary History, Volume Two: 1980-1992} (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 19; Josiah Young, \textit{A Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors} (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992), 155.} He stated that Black Theology derived from a Black Nationalist heritage that was reflected in the militancy of Cone. However, he contended that the project was local rather than global. It did not place
the valorization of global African identity at the heart of Black liberation.  

In response to what he saw as a deficiency, Young developed a concept called Pan-African theology. He defined Pan-African theology as a transcultural, but nuanced, discourse that is committed to the liberation of Black people globally. It developed from both Black (African American) Theology and (continental) African Theology. Young emphasized the fact that his perspective does not negate the particularities of specific contextual domains; he merely extended their implications. Explaining this further, he stated:

The Pan-African theologian does not cover up the cultural and historical particularities of Black people, but celebrates them. Rich advantage is to be gained in multivocal, that is, Pan-African, resistance to the oppression of human beings. I should add, however, this caveat: the Pan prefixing the words ‘African theology’ does not mean all Black people everywhere have, now and for all time, achieved unanimity in everything. To say ‘Pan-African theology’ – it bears reiteration – is to recognize the many variations of African people, not to collapse their variations into reified monolith. Still, one uses the word ‘Pan-African’ appropriately any time he or she seeks to make ethnic, cultural, and geopolitical particularities among Blacks no barrier to their attaining unity-in-diversity.

Throughout his main texts, Young consistently emphasized that his Pan-African paradigm for theology attended to the contextual differences among diverse Africana peoples. The repetition necessary to avoid charges of essentialism or overgeneralizations becomes, for this current author, unnecessarily tedious. The extreme sensitivity toward flattening distinctions often leads to premature assumptions by those who apply the essentialism label liberally. The frequency of

321 Young, God’s Path and Pan-Africa, 19.
322 Ibid., 18.
323 Ibid., 19.
324 Ibid.
these charges functions as a means of subverting the political goals of Pan-African unity. Nevertheless, Young is careful to state that “Pan-African theology must be malleable in the face of these distinctions; otherwise it can never effect a coalition of praxes of liberation, which is its goal.”

Providing more content to this theology, Young contended that it focused on the ancestors. The notion of ancestors refers to an orientation toward history. For Young, the Pan-African theologian attempts a “plunging back” into the past; that is, she applies a historical analysis. This approach of transcontextuality is a form of communication between the living and the dead. This “relationship with the dead,” specifically, with the African ancestors, is a simultaneous process of de-Europeanization and re-Africanization. Applying transcontextuality, wherein the theologian is “communicating with the dead” (doing historical analysis), he or she, then, allows the ancestors to reincarnate in them, and this allows them to perform an otherness that is essential for true resistance. In other words, an orientation to the African past (re-Africanization) provides resources of non-conformity (de-Europeanization) that is the substance of a theology of resistance. Young then pointed to a medium through which one can “commune with the ancestors.”

Young pointed to the viability of jazz to function as a means of Pan-Africanization. He contended that jazz fully conceived the black spirit. The word itself is related to “jizz” which in American vernacular refers to semen. Young went


\[326\] Young, *God’s Path and Pan-Africa*, 20-22.

\[327\] Ibid., 23, 24.
on to state that this concept of “semen” “signifies the sacred release of life-force.”

Moreover, it represented, in symbolic form, the reciprocity of the living and the dead. Just like jazz is a mixture of an African substratum with American music, so is Black religion heterogeneous while also maintaining elements from its African background. For this reason, Young presented jazz as a hermeneutical key to a Pan-African theology. It is a way of recognizing unity in diversity.

Young’s intervention to Black Liberation Theology approaches very closely to the methodology used for this dissertation. The notion of transcontextuality is central to the type of analysis the present author will apply. Pan-African theology’s attentiveness to unique contextual matters, while also drawing from global multivocal sources, mirrors the type of investigation this project will perform. While centering on Malcolm X’s critical thoughts on religion, the author will place him in a multivocal conversation with various Africana voices not limited by region; but rather it will be a transcontextual dialogue traversing different times and regions.

Nevertheless, similar to Wilmore above, central to Young’s presentation of Pan-African theology is the requirement to collapse religious barriers and a calling for the acceptance of both the Bible along with African spirituality. As mentioned above, this approach would likely alienate Africana radicals who are also committed to the integrity of their religion. The aim of this author is to create interreligious Pan-African unity for the purpose of revolutionary praxes. Such a theory requires an

328 Young, A Pan-African Theology, 119.
329 Ibid., 118, 120.
330 Ibid., 135.
approach that does not attempt to make changes that are unnecessary for a revolutionary overthrow of the state. While the previous scholars provide key insights that could be useful for the current endeavor, it should be noted that all of them are men. There is another tradition that developed “out” of Cone’s lineage that is vital to consider for the task of theorizing an interreligious Pan-African revolutionary praxis.

**Womanist Theology**

This section focuses on the contributions of Black women scholars who have challenged and developed the discourse on Black liberation theology. In some ways, they might be perceived as both connected to and distinct from the Conian tradition. This is in part symbolized in the distinctive naming practice of this subset of the tradition. While Cone trailed the path for identifying a distinctive Black Theology, Black women sought both to respond to his limitations and provide a space for their own distinctive voices. Looking at the various generations of Womanist theology, the author will highlight their strengths and weaknesses in relationship to the task of this dissertation.

Delores Williams is one of the earliest to utilize and define the concept of Womanist Theology. She defined a womanist as a Black feminist or a feminist of color.\(^{331}\) Williams agreed with the description above when she asserted that many African American women became womanist theologians because they needed their

\(^{331}\) Delores Williams, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Voices” in Cone and Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A documentary History, Volume Two*, 266.
own theological voice to affirm different cultural foundations.” She instructed her readers to see within the slave narratives of Black women, folk tales, contemporary Black poetry and prose, Black women’s imaginative literature, autobiographies, Black women academic production, the testimonies of Black church women, Black folk wisdom, and Black women’s moral wisdom, the authoritative sources to articulate the unique perspectives of a womanist theology. Moreover, she pointed to an emphasis on what she described as “nonbourgeois black folk culture” as a site that reflected less sexist, less male-female role rigidity, and more egalitarian relations than what is found in bourgeois culture.

Williams also mounted a robust critique of one of the central claims of Black Liberation Theology articulated by Cone. Her challenge was to the normative claim in Black Liberation Theology that the Bible validates the perspective that God is on the side of the oppressed to liberate them. She pointed to two examples recorded in the Biblical record that seem to be in conflict with the aforementioned claim: (1) the story of Hagar; (2) the fuller story of the Exodus. The former refers to the incident in the Bible where, out of what might be interpreted as jealousy, Sarah begins to mistreat her servant/slave Hagar and caused her to flee. However, the Biblical text states that God told Hagar to return and submit to Sarah (Genesis 16:5-9). Williams explained:

“The Hagar-Sarah texts in Genesis and Galatians, however, demonstrate that the


333 Williams, *Womanist Theology*, 266—7, 270.

oppressed and abused do not always experience God’s liberating power. If one reads the Bible identifying with the non-Hebrews who are female and male slaves…one quickly discerns a nonliberative thread running through the Bible. In the Genesis stories about Hagar and Sarah, God seems to be...‘partial and discriminating.’ God is clearly partial to Sarah. Regardless of the way one interprets God’s command to Hagar to submit herself to Sarah, God does not liberate her.\(^3\)

Here, Williams feels that she has put her finger on an incident that seems to conflict with the description of God as the liberator of the oppressed. Stated differently, once one identifies with the oppressed person in this story (Hagar), one is then able to perceive that at least on this occasion, God did not take the side of the oppressed. In regard to the latter claim about the Exodus, Williams pointed to a similar hermeneutical move that can influence the reader’s interpretation. That is, the story of the Exodus also includes the violent destruction and genocide of the Canaanite people. If one takes the side of the Canaanites, they are faced once again with the challenge of reconciling this with the concept of God being a liberator of the oppressed.\(^3\) These problems caused Williams to conclude that the “nonliberative strand in the Bible and the tension it apparently places upon black liberation theology’s norm for interpreting scripture (i.e., God’s liberating action on behalf of all the oppressed) make it difficult to understand how the Bible can function today in the way that James Cone suggests.”\(^3\)

Although Williams provided a powerful critique of Black Liberation Theology, it is still inadequate for the task of creating a theory that supports an interreligious Pan-African revolutionary praxis. She pointed out numerous sources of

\(^3\)Williams, *Black Theology and Womanist Theology*, 65.

\(^3\)Ibid., 68.

\(^3\)Ibid., 66.
reflection that should be considered when doing theology that had (is) been (being) traditionally ignored. The exclusion of Black women from the scholarship on Black Theology is a fundamental critique that should cause theologians to consider the voices that are allowed to contribute to the construct of theology. However, Williams’ critique of the consistency of the liberative motif in the biblical narrative is only relevant if one is aiming to justify a theological position. While this has value in most contexts, it is not a major concern for this dissertation. This is because people rarely follow the precepts of their Holy Scripture or theology consistently. The concern of this project is the actions of the individual Africana thinker. In other words, the concern of this author is whether the Africana individual who believes in the biblical narrative is willing to take up arms in revolutionary praxis to fight for the freedom of all Africana people. One may retort that interrogating theological beliefs are central to revolutionary praxis because praxis is guided by belief. While the author is sensitive to this critique and would even affirm its validity in most cases, he also contends that it is not always the case that there is a direct line from belief to action. Thus, if revolutionary praxis is going to be implemented, the main question for the potential Africana revolutionary is whether they are going to participate in the struggle. The process of analyzing and correcting the logic of people’s beliefs would only function to delay the revolutionary moment. If Africana people are inclined to continue on in the process of slowly perfecting the details of each other’s beliefs while the suffocating hands of white supremacy persists in choking them to death, then the theory in this dissertation is not meant for them.

Kelly Brown Douglas is another womanist theologian. She affirmed the
teaching of Cone that God is the God of the oppressed using Jesus’ birth in a manger as indicating such. She posited that the birth of Jesus in a place of insignificance suggests that he has a bond with those outside of society.\textsuperscript{338} Going further, she argued that through his crucifixion he “demonstrated his utter solidarity with those among the crucified class.”\textsuperscript{339} That is, white supremacy is a crucifying reality that produces a crucified class of oppressed people.\textsuperscript{340}

Douglas would also articulate a distinction between the ‘white Christ’ and the ‘Black Christ.’ Enslavers, she explained, worshiped the white Christ who justified the brutality of slaveholders toward Black people. Their interpretation of salvation was one that called for simple belief rather than the transformation of their life and society. The white Christ required the earthly ministry of Jesus’ life to be trivialized and thus, his works of liberation have little significance.\textsuperscript{341}

By contrast, the enslaved community held to a Black Christ that was a liberator. They interpreted Christianity based on Jesus’ ministry to the oppressed, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. This perspective radicalized them with a view of Christian freedom that carried with it secular implications. In contrast to the white Christ that required the enslaved to accept a version of Christianity that suggested there freedom was merely spiritual, Douglas asserted that many believed, rather, that the “freedom that Jesus offered was a reality to be attained on earth.”\textsuperscript{342}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[338]{Kelly Brown Douglass, \textit{The Black Christ} (New York: Orbis Books, 2019), xx.}
\footnotetext[339]{Ibid., xxi.}
\footnotetext[340]{Ibid., xxii.}
\footnotetext[341]{Ibid., 2, 11, 13.}
\footnotetext[342]{Ibid., 20-21.}
\end{footnotes}
add her voice to the near consensus among scholars of Black religion, who contradict the popularly accepted myth about the religion of the enslaved. Douglas contended “slave Christianity was not an otherworldly religion that led the slaves to be docile and obedient—as slaveholders hoped. Rather, it nurtured a rebellion against and resistance to dehumanizing slavery.”

While Douglas gave these characteristics to (the) Black Christ(ianity), she also admitted that the conception had some limitations. She declared that Black theologians identified Christ as unconditionally affirming of Blackness, but, for Douglas, one cannot characterize everything Black as liberating. In other words, the black Christ does not readily challenge black people to free themselves from the various forms of oppression within the black community. She went on to say that the Black Christ seemed to be consumed with his focus on racism but ignored the concerns of Black women. Therefore, in order for the Black Christ to be effective he must address concerns beyond racism such as the unique oppression of Black women.

To accommodate this insufficiency, Douglas presented womanist theology as providing a more complete version of a theology that is liberating for all Black people. She stated that for womanists, the blackness of Christ begins with the experiences of Black women as they have struggled. Wholeness characterizes how she conceived of the social and political analysis of womanist theology. This

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343 Ibid., 24.
344 Ibid., 96.
345 Ibid., 97.
346 Ibid., xxix, 98, 105, 108.
perspective aims to understand the way race, gender, class, and sexual oppression interact with one another in the experience of Black people; especially Black women. Like the notion of determinate negation, the religio-cultural analysis she advocated for required a dialectical approach to Black religion: accepting liberating aspects and rejecting oppressive parts.\textsuperscript{347}

Similar to the work of Williams’ above, Douglas’ understanding of Womanist theology is a much needed correction to the male-centered expression of Black Liberation Theology. Her articulation of the truncated view of liberation represented by the Black Christ who can only see racism warns readers of creating theologies that are only partially liberating. The present writer affirms the reality that liberation for only half of the Black community is insufficient. However, just as was argued about Williams’ perspective, Douglas’ call to reject, what some see as, a central Christian tenet would limit the usefulness of her theology for the type of broad-based revolutionary unity the present project is seeking to present. Douglas rejected the notion of substitutionary atonement in Christian theology, suggesting that it presents Jesus as the ultimate surrogate and supports the notion of both a voluntary and coercive surrogacy; this perspective, for her, is not liberating for Black women.\textsuperscript{348}

Similar to the response given to Williams’ complaint about the Biblical record, the author would simply like to reiterate that it is possible for someone to believe that Jesus died for their sins, while also rejecting the idea that Christians are to now be the “perpetual burden bearers” of the world. Once again, the author is concerned whether

\textsuperscript{347}Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{348}Ibid., 129-130.
a person acts oppressively rather than whether justification of oppressive acts can be deduced from their theology. Furthermore, many (Black) Christians believe that the substitutionary atonement of Christ is not only central to the Christian faith, but, that to reject it would mean they are not Christian.\footnote{For discussions about the centrality of the Substitutionary Atonement of Christ, see, Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, \textit{Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution} (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007); Brian Vickers, \textit{Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Imputation} (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006); H.C. Felder, \textit{The African American Guide to the Bible} (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2015), 15; Thabiti Anyabwile, \textit{The Decline of African American Theology: From Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity} (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2007); Eric Mason, \textit{Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice} (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 41} The mere fact that this belief is not a minority view among Black Christians makes one who believes that Pan-African revolutionary praxis is urgent have to choose between requiring people to reject this theological concept at the risk of alienating many, or determining whether the person is aiming to encourage (or force) Africana individuals (particular Black women) to accept an unjust distribution of burden carrying.

Womanist Theological Ethicist, Emilie Townes contributes a unique approach to Womanist theology. She maintained the belief in the notion that God is on the side of the oppressed. However, she added that this fact means that the attempt to transform unjust structures in the world into just ones is the primary task of the Christian ethicist.\footnote{Emilie Townes, “Ethics as an Art of Doing the Work Our Souls Must have” in Katie Cannon, Emilie Townes, and Angela Sims, eds., \textit{Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 44.} Furthermore, following Roberts, she believed that “an ethic of justice is rooted in two concepts: liberation and reconciliation.”\footnote{Ibid., 39.} Jesus has promised believers wholeness based on the fact that he has liberated them through his death. Therefore, in response to this liberation, believers are to be reconciled with others.
through faithful loving relationships.\textsuperscript{352}

One of Townes central contributions to Womanist Theology is her analysis of the role stereotypes play in the evil of society. She argued that abbreviated narratives about groups of people function culturally to produce and support the evil results that benefit those in power.\textsuperscript{353} For her, the imagination works to “create images that buttress evil as a cultural production.”\textsuperscript{354} She pointed to the uses of the ultimate mammy, the emasculating bitch, the tragic mulatta, the castrating matriarch, and the pickaninny, as examples of stereotypes of Black femaleness that have been used as constructions of history and memory to justify their oppression.\textsuperscript{355} As a means of confronting these cultural productions of evil, Townes suggested the use of countermemory [sic]. She stated that countermemory is a methodological strategy that helps to disrupt ignorance and create subversive spaces that defy structural evil.\textsuperscript{356}

The significance of Townes work cannot be overstated. She identified the relationship between how people are perceived and how they are treated. Her critique of ideology in society and how it functions to support the status quo is similar to the work that many of the Frankfurt School critical theorists aimed to do. Furthermore, Townes is helpful with her claim that the stereotype of the Sapphire, which refers to the “loudmouthed” and rebellious Black woman, should be in some sense embraced

\textsuperscript{352}Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{354}Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{355}Ibid., 3, 17, 18.
\textsuperscript{356}Ibid., 21, 23, 47.
because they are the characteristics needed to “untangle and demystify the intractability of racism. Being polite (dispassionate) about it has not worked.” This perspective supports one of the fundamental assumptions of this project: namely that the implementation of radical methods for Africana liberation must be embraced because history demonstrates that all other methods only obtain very limited results.

Nevertheless, as important as Townes overall premise is, it is not appropriate for the task of this project because it is fundamentally an approach of reform. In other words, Townes’ solution assumes that the social structure will stay in place. Yet, the theory posited for this dissertation assumes the destruction of the present system. One might respond that if all one does is destroy the present society without changing the minds of the people, then the new society that is created will simply reproduce the evil from the previous society. On the contrary, as will be shown in the next chapter, revolutionary violence not only creates a new society but it creates a new humanity for the participants. Thus, Townes’ work is more appropriate for a context where the social system is not to be overturned.

The final Womanist Theologian that will be covered in this section is Monica Coleman. She represents what might be described as the third generation of Womanist scholars. She defined Womanist Theology as a liberation theology that aims for the freedom of the oppressed. She claimed that Womanist Theology added the goals of survival, quality of life, and wholeness to liberation and justice emphasized in Black Theology. Going further, she stated that Womanist theology is a response to the sexism in Black Theology and the racism in Feminist Theology. It

357 Ibid., 62-63.
analyzes what she described as the triple oppression of racism, sexism, and classism that Black women endure.\textsuperscript{358}

Affirming many of the aforementioned sources for doing Womanist Theology, Coleman also added other ideas about the development of the discourse. She named traditional church doctrines, African American fiction and poetry, gospel music, spirituals, personal narratives, conjure, nineteenth-century Black women leaders, poor and working-class Black women, and syncretic Black religiosity.\textsuperscript{359} Coleman also pointed to Black women’s science fiction as a potential source. She explained that this genre of writing offers a critique of contemporary society where utopian/ideal societies are depicted. These presentations can have a prophetic function in theology by proposing what the world should be like without oppression.\textsuperscript{360}

One of the important contributions of Coleman’s work is her insistence on making space for a religiously diverse Womanist theological discourse. Deciding to accommodate the religious diversity of African Americans, she argued that it cannot be required to believe in Jesus for salvation in Womanist Theology. Another step she suggested to respect religious diversity was for womanist theologians to refrain from the use of the name Jesus, and replacing it with God as the word that would be used to refer to the divine agent of liberation. She explained that this attempt to be inclusive is a characteristic of the broader third generation of Womanist

\textsuperscript{358} Monica Coleman, \textit{Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 6, 7, 11.
\textsuperscript{359} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{360} Ibid., 127, 131.
In regard to the doctrine of salvation, Coleman constructed the notion of “making a way out of no way” to describe God’s saving activity among Black women. She stated that this is a summarizing concept that articulates the way womanist theologians have described salvation. For her, “Making a way out of no way’ is an expression that acknowledges God’s presence in providing options that do not appear to exist in the experiences of the past. It is a weaving of the past, future, and possibilities offered by God; a weaving that leads to survival, quality of life, and liberating activity on the part of black women.” Thus, this perspective views salvation in a way that includes expectation and praxis. There is an expectation that God will expose a way out (deliverance/liberation) for his people when they are in need. However, it is also an expectation to challenge the existing order. This is carried out through remembering the ancestors, so that by learning from the past one can try to transform the future.

The author finds Coleman’s theology of expectation (that God will make a way out of no way) as a significant contribution to revolutionary struggle. The idea that God is able to show his people a path forward toward deliverance in a way that may have never been viewed as possible can help challenge those who suggest that either Pan-African unity or that the overthrow of the state are impossible to


362 Ibid., 9, 12, 33.

363 Ibid., 33.

364 Ibid., 33, 105, 121.
accomplish. With the type of posture gained from Womanist theologians, one is able to believe “against the odds” that Africana people can unify and can overthrow the state. However, this perspective may be useful for theists, but Africana people who do not believe in God cannot use Coleman’s approach. Furthermore, just as some listed above, Coleman also made suggestions that might be difficult for those who are not interested in changing core teachings of their theology.365

**Conian Black Liberation Theology and Malcolm X**

Black Liberation Theology is a helpful paradigm to reflect on Malcolm X’s approach to religion. The founder of this school actually engaged deeply with the thought of Malcolm. A very important intervention Cone provided to research on Malcolm X is a significant focus on his role as a critic of religion. Cone noted that Malcolm began his ministry with a “scathing attack upon the white man’s Christianity and the role it played in the physical, mental, and spiritual oppression of black people.”366 Cone repeatedly emphasized that Malcolm’s opposition to Christianity was focused on the actions of Christians rather than focusing on Christian theology. For Malcolm, Christianity was a white-controlled religion and a tool used by whites to trick Black people into being passive about their condition.

In regard to the latter concern, Malcolm spent much of the 1950s focused on critiquing Black preachers for teaching Black people to love white people and for presenting a pie-in-the-sky religion that crippled Black people economically and

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366Cone, *Martin and Malcolm*, 166.
politically.\textsuperscript{367} Cone demonstrated the significance of this current project when he asserted that Malcolm made “the most formidable race critique of Euro-American Christianity in the modern world.”\textsuperscript{368} He went as far as saying that Malcolm “perfected the method of shocking black Christians into a radical questioning of the origin and function of Christianity in their community…He was adept at exposing the moral contradictions of Christianity.”\textsuperscript{369}

Similarly, Douglas approached Malcolm X as a critic of Christianity. She argued that “Malcolm’s scathing criticisms of the white Christ could not go ignored.”\textsuperscript{370} For this reason, she attributed to both Malcolm and Martin Luther King Jr. the forcing of the Black Christ to develop through their challenges to Christianity. Black Power advocates, or those Douglas described as the “angry children of Malcolm,” gravitated to Malcolm and adopted his railing critiques of (white) Christianity.\textsuperscript{371} Although the Black Liberation Theology tradition has recognized the importance of acknowledging the significance of Malcolm’s role as a critique of religion, they have not constructed a systematized and critical account of his critiques of religion in light of a Pan-African intellectual paradigm.

**Joining the Two Traditions?**

Returning back to the work of Rabaka, one will notice that he has sought to join together the two traditions recounted in this chapter. In his book entitled *Du

\textsuperscript{367} Ibid., 167, 171—2, 174, 175.
\textsuperscript{368} Ibid., 167.
\textsuperscript{369} Ibid., 172.
\textsuperscript{370} Douglas, *The Black Christ*, 49.
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., 14, 34, 53.
Bois's Dialectics, Rabaka presented what he called a critical theory of liberation theology. In his chapter on this subject, Rabaka: (1) presented Du Bois as a paradigm for this concept; (2) noted the dialectical position on religion; and, (3) argued that liberation theologians should open themselves up to dialogue with Africana social theorists. Rabaka asserted that as the first American sociologist of religion, Du Bois is a paradigmatic figure for what he envisions as a critical theory of liberation theology. Du Bois’ contribution to this mode of thought, according to Rabaka, is his critique of Christianity and his example of deconstructing and reconstructing liberation theology.372

Observing his approach to Christianity, one is able to gather, according to Rabaka, Du Bois’ dialectical position on religion. He was able to critique religious ideology while also emphasizing the more liberating aspects of religion.373 Du Bois highlighted both the progressive and regressive qualities of religion and placed liberation at the heart of his discourse.374 Taking his example from Du Bois, Rabaka conceptualized Africana critical theory of liberation theology as not Christian, but also not anti-Christian. This theoretical approach aims to be in dialogue with a variety of theologies and religions, particularly in the Africana world. It functions methodologically and meta-theoretically as a way to encompass diasporan diversity.375

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373 Ibid., 122.
374 Ibid., 145.
375 Ibid., 148.
Another intervention Rabaka views himself as making is a call for liberation theologians to dialogue with critical social theorists. Rabaka contended that critical social theory seeks to utilize all available resources to critique all forms of domination. While critical theory of liberation theology begins with thought about God, it should also be grounded in the social and political realities of the oppressed. It synthesizes liberation theology with critical theory; that is, it places liberation theology in dialogue with classical and contemporary critical social theory. 

However, although Rabaka has articulated this ingenious approach, the author is not aware of Rabaka taking it beyond the chapter currently being discussed.

Two things distinguish this current project from Rabaka’s critical theory of liberation theology. First, the present author does not conceive of his project as doing theology. The approach of joining Africana critical theory with liberation theology limits its viability for an interreligious revolutionary social praxis. As seen above, when theologians attempt to flatten religious and theological differences, they inevitably encroach on to theological commitments that must be compromised or transformed in order for the perspective to be widely accepted. For this project, the priority is revolutionary praxis. As long as a person can participate in the revolution the writer finds no need to require adjustments for potential adherents.

Secondly, this project differs from Rabaka’s conception in that its assumed context is the brink of revolution. This is not to say that Rabaka’s theory is not revolutionary. Rather, the point is that the theory being developed in this dissertation “stands-or-falls” on the idea of its immediate application. It is not a theory that

\[376\text{Ibid., 145.}\]
applies to reform or even a gradual movement toward revolutionary praxis. This project is unique because of its posture of urgency.

Conclusion

Although the above traditions have various limitations, there are some insights that will be adapted to the current study. The most fundamental limitation of the Marxist tradition of critical engagement with religion is its ignorance of the Africana perspective. An analysis wrapped up in the experiences of Europeans cannot properly address the needs of Africana peoples. It did, however, offer warnings about the potential of religion to de-radicalize revolutionary groups. In addition, the dialectical approach to religion allows for the author to assess various aspects of religion that have the potential of being liberating or oppressive; this process was described as determinate negation. As an approach to creating an interreligious dialogue, the Marxist tradition of communicative praxis where the discourse community makes room for non-destructive translation of religious concepts into social philosophy is a useful paradigm for an interreligious Pan-African unity.

The most fundamental limitation of the Conian tradition is its encroachment onto religious beliefs that the author is not convinced would affect revolutionary praxis. The process of analyzing and correcting the content of people’s beliefs would merely function to delay the revolutionary moment. Perhaps, the most promising formulation is Young’s conception of Pan-African Theology. His description of a transcultural and transcontextual approach to research fits perfectly with the methodological approach of this dissertation. Before moving into the next chapter, it is important to highlight a key principle that was consistently voiced throughout the assessments of the literature above.
The Priority of Revolutionary Immediacy

The lengthy discussion of two traditions of critical engagement with religion allowed the author to gather some insights for moving forward that he will now set out. Throughout his engagement with various authors, the present writer has hinted at a concept he would like to define as The Priority of Revolutionary Immediacy (TPRI). This refers to the type of analysis where one aims to move immediately into revolution. As a result, concerns and priorities change. It is the process of conducting a “triage” of concerns that one encounters in the process of launching or carrying out a revolution.

To provide an example, the author will contrast actions appropriate under two different circumstances. In a normal day at an individual’s home, one may not be shocked to know that there are certain expectations on how people in the house interact with one another. It may be that there is an expectation for someone to knock before entering a room. There is likely an expectation for individuals to communicate in a way that is perceived as respectful. That is, yelling at one another would be viewed as inappropriate. Forcing someone out of bed might be viewed as overly aggressive; and so on.

However, if an additional variable was added to the circumstance, such as a fire in the home, there is a brand new set of priorities, expectations, and definitions of acceptable behavior. It now seems unsurprising that people are bursting into rooms without knocking. One is unmoved by the fact that parents are yelling aggressively and with urgency to one another and the children. The father snatching his sleeping daughter out of her crib by her hair would leave the reader untroubled if they knew
that the roof was collapsing and the father was rushing to save his daughter’s life. All of these actions would be viewed with horror if the circumstances did not require the type of urgency that would justify the inattention to normal social expectations. Those things are not unimportant; they are simply relegated to the periphery under situations of emergency.

Likewise, TPRI starts with the assumption that the need for revolution is urgent. Some of the decisions and rationalizations that will be articulated in subsequent chapters will only make sense if one keeps this theoretical formulation in mind. It is worth repeating that the arguments that will be presented in this dissertation stand-or-fall on the theoretical presupposition of TPRI. If one assumes that they are on the brink of revolution, some concerns that are legitimate under normal circumstances lose their importance. If an enslaved African ran away and was allowed to take temporary shelter in a “friendly” white family’s shed, whether the white family saw the runaway as an equal human being loses some of its relevancy under the circumstances. The most important question is whether they will allow the runaway to remain hidden in their shed. This is an example of the logics of TPRI. As the author moves forward in the following chapters, he will engage with various topics under the assumption of TPRI.
CHAPTER 3: BETWEEN TURNER AND TOM: VIOLENCE AS A PROBLEM IN RELIGION

Constructing an Africana Critical Theory of Religion: A (Re) Introduction

Although it has already been articulated by the author that revolutionary violence is an assumed component of the theory being constructed in this dissertation, because it is also a central aspect of Malcolm’s critical theory of religion, the author finds it necessary to subject the tension between violence and nonviolence to the present mode of inquiry. The previous chapter highlighted particular methodological approaches to critiquing religion with the hopes of distinguishing the specific type of contribution this project will provide to the discussion of religion and revolution. It may be appropriate here to give one last preliminary word to explain the process and application of ACT before the author proceeds with this model in the present chapter and those that follow.

According to Rabaka, ACT is an offshoot of Africana philosophy. That is, it draws on and grows out of the philosophical traditions of continental and diasporan people. Lewis Gordon, one of the most important articulators of Africana philosophy, defines the concept as a species of Africana thought engaging with theoretical questions that derive from critical engagements with the ideas from

377 Rabaka, Africana Critical Theory, 9, 17.
Africana cultures worldwide.\textsuperscript{378} For Gordon, philosophy is the process of assessing the evidence for assumptions about particular problems using reason. Distinct from the scientist who observes nature and the theologian who engages with faith, Gordon contended, philosophy looks at reason. Philosophy is able to reflect on questions that derive from observing nature or examining theology. It is distinct, however, because its analysis is guided exclusively by reason.\textsuperscript{379} The sources for this type of philosophy, however, is not limited to discourse but includes what philosopher, Michael Sawyer described as “embodied philosophy in motion” or “Thinking in Motion.”\textsuperscript{380} Making a similar argument, Paget Henry asserted that “collective actions such as strikes, insurrections, and revolutions can be viewed as the media in which an oral population formulates its answers to a social problem. Such actions become the books in which they write and therefore should be read as carefully as the written texts…”\textsuperscript{381} This conception of philosophy allows for the use of discourse and history to function as sources of philosophical material.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Rabaka, along with other scholars, have pointed out the overlap, and have sometimes blurred the lines between critical

\textsuperscript{378} Lewis Gordon, \textit{An Introduction to Africana Philosophy} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.


\textsuperscript{381} Henry, \textit{Caliban’s Reason}, 73.
theory and philosophy. As noted above, the task of ACT is to critique and correct imperialism/oppression. While Gordon described Africana philosophy as philosophy created in a hostile world addressing problems such as racism and colonialism, and Theophile Obenga described it (particularly Maatian philosophy) as the corrector of falsehoods and the key to solving social problems, and Leonard Harris argued that philosophy must be “insurrectionist” or born of struggle, and Sawyer suggested that Africana philosophy is oppositional in nature, each one of these descriptions of philosophy seems to aim to critique the problems in society and also find solutions. Moreover, philosopher Lucius Outlaw stated that the practice of philosophy by African Americans should be grounded in the struggle of African peoples in particular. He argued that “A very serious phase of preparation for the task of philosophizing critically in the interest of black people (and others) includes the need to come face to face with the history of the relationships of black thinkers to the historical thrusts of black people and, most importantly, with where this history leaves us today.” It seems safe to infer from these words that for Outlaw, philosophy should serve as a means of exposing and finding solutions for social problems faced by Black people (i.e. the same purpose as ACT).

382 See page 34 above.


385 Ibid., 4.
Thus, for this present project, there is tremendous overlap between Africana Critical Theory of Religion, Philosophy, and Philosophy of Religion. Each uses the tools of reason such as testing the strengths and weaknesses of a position through the use of “common sense,” the comparison of rival theories, and thought experiments. In fact, the only distinction Rabaka makes between ACT and Africana philosophy is that while philosophy is bound to its own discipline and division of labor, ACT transgresses those boundaries and engages with “philosophy, history, politics, economics, the arts, psychology, and sociology, among other disciplines.” For these reasons, the arguments below will be philosophical in the sense that they will be formed by comparing rival theories presented by Africana thinkers and put in dialogue with one another (dialectics). Moreover, the author will use common sense and thought experiments to discern the best explanation based on evidence. Nevertheless, embodied philosophy in motion (history/historical experiences) will be drawn from as well. This will be the process of the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion.

**Malcolm’s Critique of the Religious Teaching of Nonviolence: The Religion of Uncle Tom**

One of the foremost critiques of religion Malcolm presented was directed towards the teaching and advocacy of nonviolence. In fact, he was so strongly

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386 Timothy Williamson explained that common sense refers to what most people know in a society. He goes on to say that a theory is false if it is inconsistent with common sense. Further, he explained that the only way to have the weaknesses of one’s common sense revealed is to engage with others who have contrasting views. In regard to rival theories, Williamson stated that they must give different answers to the same question. The theory that provides the best explanation based on the evidence is the one that is favored. He also asserted that thought experiments can be used to test philosophical theories. For him, the human imagination alerts individuals to future possibilities that they may guard against and helps people learn from hypothetical possibilities. For more information on the tools of philosophy see, Timothy Williamson, *Doing Philosophy: From Common Curiosity to Logical Reasoning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 8, 11, 21, 58, 60, 68, 72, 73, 78.


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opposed to the precept and teaching of nonviolence by religious leaders that he suggested that if a religion contained the demand for nonviolence it was a religion to be rejected. In one statement he made, he asserted that “Any time I have to accept a religion that won’t let me fight a battle for my people, I say to hell with that religion.”\textsuperscript{388} This means that for Malcolm, a religion is useless if it restricts one from “fight[ing] a battle for my people…” One can interpret his use of this phrase literally considering his mention of the concept of an “eye for an eye,” and his assertion that Islam teaches him that if someone steps on his toe that he should chop off their foot, mentioned immediately following the main quote above. A nonviolent religion is a religion that Malcolm will not accept.

While the author argues that Malcolm’s critiques can be generally applied to the broader category of religion, it must be said that much of Malcolm’s critiques of religion are directed toward Christianity specifically.\textsuperscript{389} Malcolm believed that if Christianity calls for a person to accept brutality without defending themselves then it is a criminal philosophy. Using irony and sarcasm, Malcolm declared that the greatest miracle of Christianity in America is that it has kept Black people nonviolent.\textsuperscript{390} In

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item In other words, what I mean is that when Malcolm argued that if Christianity teaches nonviolence it is criminal (see below) then it seems reasonable to conclude that Malcolm would apply that standard to any religion that he believed taught nonviolence. I do not try to shy away from the fact that Malcolm is often attacking Christianity (ex. Chapter 5). However, it might be said that this attack on Christianity is merely contextual; that is, Christianity is the dominant religion in Malcolm’s context. For the purposes of constructing a more general Africana Critical Theory of Religion (not just Christianity) the author will frequently “pull back” conceptually to articulate a theory that is not limited to critiquing Christianity.
\end{enumerate}
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fact, Malcolm chided that the purpose of introducing Christianity to African Americans was to make them “good slaves” by robbing them of their right to defend themselves.\textsuperscript{391}

One of his favorite slogans that he would direct his verbal attacks toward was the phrase derived from the Christian Scriptures where it records Jesus telling his disciples to “turn-the-other-cheek.” Located in the Gospel of Matthew 5:38-39, Jesus says “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”\textsuperscript{392} This teaching was accepted by Black people only because slavery broke their spirit and their will to resist, according to Malcolm. His claim here is important because Malcolm could not conceive of a turn-the-other-cheek (nonviolent) revolution.\textsuperscript{393} Stated differently, an Africana Christian adhering to the apparent teachings of Jesus could not participate in the type of armed revolutionary struggle that this dissertation assumes. Malcolm believed, however, that young Black people in 1964 did not want to hear that “turn-the-other-cheek’ stuff.”\textsuperscript{394} He announced his rejection of this Christian principle all the way to the end of his life.\textsuperscript{395}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{391}Malcolm X, “Meeting in Paris (November 23, 1964)” in Malcolm X, \textit{By Any Means Necessary}, 144–5. According to Byrd, for Malcolm, even if Christianity was stripped of white supremacy, it would still be inadequate for the revolutionary needs of Black people because of its commitment to nonviolence. See, Byrd, \textit{Malcolm X and Revolutionary Religion}, 95-96.
\item \textsuperscript{392}All Biblical passages will be quoted from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.
\item \textsuperscript{394}Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet (April 3, 1964)” in Malcolm X, \textit{Malcolm X Speaks}, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{395}Malcolm X, Spellman Interview, 26; Malcolm X, “With Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer (December 20, 1964)” in Malcolm X, \textit{Malcolm X Speaks}, 112.
\end{itemize}
Another Christian principle Malcolm lambasted, and is often presented as a foundational basis of the teaching of nonviolence, is the command to love one’s enemies. Matthew 5:43-44 records Jesus directing his followers by stating “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ‘But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you…’” Malcolm declared that self-defense is a universal principle and that it is only Black people in America who are asked to love their enemy (“Love” was juxtaposed to using violence; even in self-defense). Teaching at a Philadelphia Temple in the mid-1950s, Malcolm stated that only a fool could love someone who treated them the way white people have treated Black people. Thus, part of his critique was that Black people in America were being fooled into rejecting a principle that was available for all other people (i.e. self-defense).

Going further, Malcolm shifted from critiquing the concept of loving one’s enemies (as a rejoinder to the use of violence), to arguing against the effectiveness of the “loving” approach. Malcolm understood the attempt to love one’s enemy as a tactic, used to bring moral shame on the brutalizer. In other words, Malcolm understood this Christian concept as functioning in a way that is meant to enliven the inherent moral convictions of the one committing harm toward another person. However, he taught that this approach would only work with people who are moral.

396 I will explain this concept in more detail in the section below when other Africana theorists are brought into the dialogue. However, in short, many supported their nonviolent stance by suggesting that it was the only perspective that was consistent with the principle of “love.” That is, for some, to use violence under any circumstances was to be rejecting Jesus’ command to love one’s enemies.

The very rationale of racism (oppressing someone based on the color of their skin) demonstrated that the governing system of the United States (and by definition, those who constructed and supported it) was not moral. To buttress his claim he pointed to history and argued that “polite black people” have never successfully obtained any advantages for Black people in the United States.\textsuperscript{398} Malcolm even quoted the Biblical passage, recorded in Ecclesiastes 3:8, that states that there is “A time to love and a time to hate…” He told his largely Christian demographic of listeners, “Even Solomon said that, and he was in that book too.” He went on and admonished: “You’re just taking something out of the book that fits your cowardly nature when you don’t want to fight.”\textsuperscript{399} And the idea of not wanting to fight, but, rather, desiring to love your enemy, is incompatible with a revolution.\textsuperscript{400}

Although most of his critiques were leveled at Christianity, Malcolm also articulated his disapproval of aspects of the NOI as it related to its praxis of nonviolence (as opposed to its ideological affirmation of self-defense). Many militants, who were attracted to the NOI because of its discursive acceptance of the use of violence, noticed its failure to put those stated principles into practice. Malcolm would assert, on more than one occasion, that some of the most militant Black people joined the NOI and “wanted to get involved in some action; but the


\textsuperscript{399} Malcolm X, “After the Bombing (February 14, 1965)” in Malcolm X, \textit{Malcolm X Speaks}, 162.

\textsuperscript{400} Malcolm X, \textit{Message to the Grass Roots (November 10, 1963)}, 9.
Muslim organization was unable to produce.” What he meant by the word “action” becomes clear when analyzed further.

Malcolm critiqued Elijah Muhammad and the NOI for “holding militants back” from the use of violent “action” in response to anti-Black violence. This becomes apparent when one considers a telegram Malcolm wrote to a racist in January 1965: “To George Lincoln Rockwell: This is to warn you that I am no longer held in check from fighting white supremacists by Elijah Muhammad’s separatist Black Muslim movement, and that if your present racist agitation against our people there in Alabama causes physical harm to Reverend King or any other Black Americans who are only attempting to enjoy their rights as free human beings, then you and your Ku Klux Klan friends will be met with maximum physical retaliation from those of us who are not handcuffed by the disarming philosophy of nonviolence, and who believe in asserting our right of self-defense—by any means necessary.”

Here, and on other occasions, Malcolm characterized the NOI as holding its members in check from using violence in response to anti-Black violence. This is a critique of that religion that fits in his general critical theory of religion that disapproves of a religion that advocates for nonviolence.

Moreover, the quote justifies expanding

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403 For another example of Malcolm referring to being held back from violence by the NOI, see, Malcolm X, “Audubon Ballroom (February 15, 1965)” in Malcolm X, Malcolm X: The Last Speeches, ed., Bruce Perry (New York: Pathfinder, 1989), 122, 126.
Malcolm’s critical theory of religion beyond its contextual application. Whether it is from Christianity or Islam, Malcolm perceived nonviolence as a negative teaching of religion.

This critique of the NOI seems to be directed at a particular incident of nonviolent praxis that took place during Malcolm’s tenure in the NOI. On January 1, 1965 Malcolm declared that the reason for his and others’ split with the NOI was because “Some of our brothers got hurt and nothing was done about it. Those of us who wanted to do something about it were kept from doing something about it. So we split.”404 The incident he is referring to undoubtedly is the murder of Ronald Stokes by the police in 1962. Malcolm desired to physically retaliate against the police. In fact, Malcolm began recruiting an assassination team to target and kill LAPD officers, but when he requested Elijah Muhammad’s approval, he was told to stand down. Moreover, a state official, who apparently realized the hostile situation brewing, contacted Elijah Muhammad asking him to “call Malcolm off.” According to Malcolm’s assistant, Benjamin Karim, Muhammad telephoned Malcolm and told him to “tone down his rhetoric” and that he did not want the NOI involved in any additional violence. Ultimately, according to Karim, Muhammad ordered Malcolm back to New York.405 Karim provided a quote from a private statement Malcolm made in his presence regarding this situation. He recalled Malcolm having said: “You know, we talk about people being bitten by dogs and mowed down by fire hoses, we

404Malcolm X, See For Yourself, Listen For Yourself (January 1, 1965), 105.
talk about our people being brutalized in the civil rights movement, and we haven’t
done anything to help them. We haven’t done anything…And now we’ve had one of
our own brothers killed…and still we haven’t done anything…We spout our militant
revolutionary rhetoric and we preach Armageddon…but when our own brothers are
brutalized or killed, we do nothing…We just sit on our hands. Malcolm wrestled
with this apparent inconsistency between the NOI’s rhetoric and actions for some
time. While Stokes’ murder happened in 1962, in 1964 Malcolm had an article
published where he asked Muhammad why the NOI would try to use violence against
him since their break, but did not attack racists in Los Angeles. Malcolm would
also mention that after the NOI had negotiations with the Ku Klux Klan in 1960, the
Klan agreed not to bother the NOI in the South and Muhammad agreed to keep
Malcolm out of the South beginning in 1961. This incident, once again, fits into
Malcolm’s claim that the NOI restrained the activities of its members from situations
that might lead to violent confrontations.

Rather than allow members to fight a battle for their people, the NOI’s
religious teachings pointed to divine destruction of white racists. In 1963, Malcolm
responded to questions about any distinctions between his beliefs and those of

406 Ibid., 138.
407 Carson, The FBI File, 322; Both Manning Marable and Les Payne, two of his most
recent biographers, argued that the Stokes murder had long-term effects on Malcolm’s commitment to
the NOI. Payne polemically stated that Muhammad did a lot of tough talk but was careful not to move
to action. For more on the effects of the Stokes murder on Malcolm, see, Marable, Malcolm X, 253;
Payne and Payne, The Dead Are Arising, 330, 427.
409 I am using this phraseology to point readers back to one of the initial critiques
articulated in this section on page 119 where Malcolm says “to hell” with a religion that requires him
to refrain from fighting a battle for his people.
Muhammad. He admitted that,

Mr. Muhammad was with Allah, and he has been granted divine patience; he is willing to wait on God to deal with the devil. Well, the rest of us have not seen Allah; we don’t have this divine patience, and we are not so willing to wait on God. The younger Black Muslims want to see some action.410

This quote shows that even prior to Malcolm leaving the NOI in 1964 he publicly expressed subtle critiques of Muhammad’s teachings. Muhammad taught that white people (devils) would eventually be destroyed by Allah.411 This position was unacceptable to Malcolm. Shortly before his assassination, he stated that he felt that Muhammad was not doing what could be done to address some of the issues in the Black community that the NOI was equipped to solve. He would also state that although he still agreed with Muhammad that God would come to “straighten things out” he did not agree that believers should wait on God to come, as Muhammad seemed to encourage. Malcolm went on to contend that the NOI functioned simply as a politically inactive religious organization that focused on moral reform; he did not believe that was enough.412 Thus, Malcolm criticized both Christianity and the NOI for teaching nonviolence; the former did so doctrinally while the latter did so in practice.

The final aspect of Malcolm’s critical theory of religion related to violence that will be covered in this section is the prime exemplar of the House Negro figure:


411Elijah Muhammad, Message to the Blackman in America (Chicago: Muhammad’s Temple Number 2, 1965), 100.

Uncle Tom. This character, Uncle Tom, derives from an abolitionist novel written by Harriet Beecher Stowe entitled *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Most relevant for understanding Malcolm’s use of the phrase is the fact that Uncle Tom was a deeply religious enslaved man who was submissive when his master had him beaten to death. Placing his faith in God, and his reward beyond the grave, Tom responded nonviolently to his killers. 

Similarly, Malcolm articulated a conception of enslaved people that divided them between House Negroes and Field Negroes. While the Field Negroes represented the masses of Black people who were not committed to the master, Malcolm described the House Negro as one who is loyal to his master. The House Negro ate better and lived under slightly better conditions than those enslaved people in the field. Because of this superior treatment, the House Negro loved his master. This might be read as a betrayal of the broader enslaved community because the House Negro was satisfied with having closer proximity to the master than the rest of Black people.

Malcolm then shifted to present similar qualities of what he called the modern House Negro. These were middle-class Black people who desired integration. Malcolm connected the figure of Uncle Tom to the House Negro. In other words, Malcolm presented Tom’s unwillingness to defend himself against his master as akin to the House Negro’s loyalty to the master. Moreover, in regard to the

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modern day Uncle Toms, they reflect their betrayal of the masses of Black people and their commitment to their master (white society) by teaching Black people to be nonviolent. Explaining this phenomenon, Malcolm stated: “Just as the slavemaster of that day used Tom, the house Negro, to keep the field Negroes in check, the same old slavemaster today has Negroes who are nothing but modern Uncle Toms, twentieth-century Uncle Toms, to keep you and me in check, to keep us under control, keep us passive and peaceful and nonviolent. That’s Tom making you nonviolent.”

This concept is central to Malcolm’s critique of religious leaders teaching Black people to be nonviolent. Like Uncle Tom/The House Negro, these figures use religion to justify their betrayal of their people. Utilizing his sharp mind and sense of humor, Malcolm further develops his critique of those who teach nonviolence (i.e. Uncle Toms). He stated:

> It’s like when you go to the dentist, and the man’s going to take your tooth. You’re going to fight him when he starts pulling. So he squirts some stuff in your jaw called novocaine, to make you think there’re not doing anything to you. So you sit there and because you’ve got all of that novocaine in your jaw, you suffer—peacefully. Blood running all down your jaw, and you don’t know what’s happening. Because someone has taught you to suffer peacefully. The white man does the same thing to you in the street, when he wants to put knots on your head and take advantage of you and not have to be afraid of your fighting back. To keep you from fighting back, he gets these old religious Uncle Toms to teach you and me, just like novocaine, to suffer peacefully. Don’t stop suffering—just suffer peacefully.”

In this creative description, Malcolm presented the religious teachers who spread the principles of nonviolence as functioning like an anesthetic that white society used to commit anti-Black violence with no fear of physical consequences. Nonviolence, for Malcolm, makes Black people defenseless before their brutalizers. Therefore, if a

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416 Ibid.
religion teaches people to be nonviolent in the face of violence, that religion supports oppressors and betrays the oppressed.  

Above the author has related many critiques that Malcolm directed toward the religious demand for nonviolence. His critiques of the teaching of nonviolence might be summarized as such:

1. A religion that demands nonviolence in the face of anti-Black violence should be rejected as criminal.
2. A religion that has militant rhetoric but nonviolent praxis is inadequate.
3. People who use their religion to hold Black people back from militant action betray the liberation struggle and should be disparaged.

As noted above, Malcolm believed that a religion that did not allow (physical) fighting is a useless religion. He targeted common religious concepts such as the command to turn-the-other-cheek and to love one’s enemies. These religious precepts were frequently used by those advocating for nonviolence. Thus, Malcolm’s focus on trying, specifically, to challenge and discredit these ideas were a direct critique of a certain expression of religion. In fact, he declared to audiences that you had to be a fool to love someone who was seeking your harm.

Additionally, a religion that called for patience and focused on moral uplift would not meet the needs of Black people. Malcolm understood that calls for patience

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417 Byrd described this expression of religion as “Novocaine religion.” He noted that in “this slumber-induced religiosity, associated with ‘Uncle Tom,’ the victims of history are routinely asked to suffer peacefully while they are victimized. See, Byrd, Malcolm X and Revolutionary Religion, 97.
were often manipulative; especially when coupled with waiting on God to intervene. In this way, he pointed out how God might be used to justify religious people doing nothing and simply “sitting on their hands.”

Malcolm had a particular disdain for Black people who taught nonviolence. To him, their commitments were ultimately with white people who they sought to protect. They used religion to contain the revolutionary potential of the masses of Black people. Malcolm was not satisfied with simply holding this view himself, but through the use of his rhetoric, he sought to encourage other Black people to take the same perspective of these “Uncle Toms.” Having articulated Malcolm’s critique of the religious demand for nonviolence, the author will now bring in the voices of the Africana world to ascertain how they view the question of violence.

**Africana Voices on Violence**

This section might be considered an Africana intellectual archeology that contains the thoughts of both continental and diasporan African people related to the subject of violence. It will not necessarily follow a chronological order of the individuals and their works but simply aims to lay out the data in a fashion helpful for the purposes of this project. Although the author will emphasize thinkers who specifically provide critiques and/or justifications for violence in light of a particular religious tradition, in the interests of capturing a broad range of views on the principle concern surrounding the validity or invalidity of violence in the Africana liberation struggle, the author will include thinkers who may not directly address religion but still offer a framework through which an Africana Critical Theory of Religion must be developed if it intends to engage with the subject of violence.

**From the Continent**

Just as in other locations, continental Africans have various views when it
comes to the question of the use of violence. Kwame Nkrumah (d. 1972), first
president of independent Ghana, came to believe that “[r]evolutionary warfare is the
logical, inevitable answer to the political, economic and social situation in
Africa…We do not have the luxury of an alternative. We are faced with a
necessity.”418 This has become a necessity, according to him, because of the
ineffectiveness of peaceful political action in the pursuit of liberation.419 What
emerges already is the notion that once peaceful approaches to eliminate oppression
have been exhausted, violence becomes necessary.

Nkrumah then engaged with some objections to the call to implement
violence. He mentioned that some try to discredit the turn to violence by suggesting
that Africans are peace-loving and refrain from shedding blood. Therefore, to wage a
revolutionary war would not only be immoral, but against the very nature of African
people. He described the insistence to spread this perspective of the character of
Africans as “psychological propaganda.”420 In response to the claim of the immorality
of warfare, Nkrumah merely pointed to the centuries of wars and revolutions
conducted by Western states that were not judged as immoral. Moreover, the idea that
Africans were naturally against the use of violence is a curious claim in light of what
Ali Mazrui and Michael Tidy described as the Warrior Tradition in African history.421

418 Kwame Nkrumah, Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare: A Guide to the Armed Phase of
419 Ibid., 52.
420 Ibid., 18-19.
421 Ibid. Mazrui and Tidy argue that there was an assertive warrior culture in Africa that
predates colonialism. For example, Nelson Mandela recalled tribal elders recounting stories of
ancestors fought in defense of their land. However, they argue that the Warrior Tradition declined
during the colonial period due to the fear of guns and the hellfire that Christians’ preached about. For
more on the Warrior Tradition in Africa, see, Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, Nationalism and New
Another issue Nkrumah responded to was the notion of the impracticality of revolutionary violence for successfully achieving victory. He stated that there was defeatist arguments being spread that suggested that Africans were incapable of carrying out an armed struggle. In response, Nkrumah asserted that the solution to the military weakness of Africa was the formation of an “All-African People’s Revolutionary Army” that would provide a mutual defense and unified command for revolutionary warfare on a continental scale. For him, this would allow Africans to concentrate their forces and defeat their enemies one by one in armed struggle.422

Bishop Desmond Tutu (d. 2021) of South Africa had a complex understanding of violence. Like many of the individuals that will be discussed in this section, one cannot simplistically place him in either the “for nonviolence” or “for violence” category without giving a lot of nuance. Similar to his contemporary Steve Biko (d. 1977), Tutu, deeply influenced by his Christian faith, believed that a revolution in South Africa was necessary because there could be no legitimate change within the racist system in that country.423 However, Gandhian nonviolent civil

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423 In 1979, Desmond Tutu stated that his commitment to his Christian faith that causes him to fight for the oppressed in South Africa. A few years later he would state that there can be no peace in Southern Africa until there is justice. He noted that the Bible does not allow the two to be separated. Moreover, he also pointed out the absurdity of the claim that one would be able (or genuinely willing) to change the system from within. For him, the prospects of changing the system internally were so outrageous, that he could only conclude that those who declared it as their goal were secretly trying to get what they can get out of the system. He argued that the racist system in South Africa could not be reformed but it must be destroyed. Steve Biko contended that although trying to work within the system may be more attract and safe, taking that path is merely the first step to “selling our souls.” He took this position because he believed that Africans were underestimating the influence the system had on them. He understood it to be a dangerous mistake to be so conditioned by the system to attempt to make their resistance to the system fit within the confines the system had laid out for them. For more on Tutu’s belief in revolution and his criticism of those who sought to work within the system, see, Desmond Tutu, *We Drink Water to Fill Our Stomachs (1979)*” in John Allen, ed., *The
disobedience was another belief that had a deep impact in South Africa prior to 1960. Although numerous South Africans, including Nelson Mandela (d. 2013) during that time, began to see it necessary to adopt a violent approach, Tutu (and Biko) sought to persuade his countrymen to remain nonviolent even in the post-1960 South Africa. For him, he opposed all forms of violence (state sponsored oppressive violence, and revolutionary violence) and saw them as evil and deplorable. However, he often articulated, what I call a “sympathetic nonviolence.” He added to his critique of the use of violence a comment that reflected his sense of understanding toward those who take the violent approach. He communicated that he knew that when oppressed people become desperate they will use desperate methods. Thus, while committed to the liberation of Black South Africans, Tutu’s values were shaped by his belief that the Gospel of Jesus constrained him to not only work for justice, but for reconciliation as well. Therefore, for example, he moved away from his position of


For Desmond Tutu’s comments on his negative, but understanding perspective on the use of violence, see, Desmond Tutu, “The Divine Imperative (1982)” in Allen, ed., The Rainbow People of Go, 72; Tutu, Apartheid’s Final Solution (1984), 92; Desmond Tutu, “Freedom Fighters or Terrorists?” in Charles Villa-Vicencio, ed., Theology and Violence: The South African Debate (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 76. According to Nelson Mandela, by 1961 many people who had utilized a peaceful approach to change were beginning to lose their confidence in nonviolence and began to consider ideas of terrorism. He went on to mention a decision he and others had made to begin to use violence as a means of political struggle. They began with acts of sabotage, then they shifted to guerrilla warfare. However, Biko would continue a call for nonviolence. He was aware of those choosing to use violence, but he felt that it was not the only alternative; he continued to believe that there could be change through peaceful means. For Mandela’s comments on the shift from nonviolence to guerilla warfare, see, Mandela, The Case for a Violent Resistance Movement, 324, 325—6, 327, 330. To explore Biko’s views and commitment to nonviolence further, see, Steve Biko, “The Righteousness of our Strength” in Biko, I Write what I like: Selected Writings, 133—4. For more information on the pre-1960 influence of Gandhian nonviolence in South Africa and how some would abandon that position, see, Mazrui and Tidy, Nationalism and New States in Africa, 167, 168.

This dual commitment to both liberation and reconciliation is very similar to the
sympathy when he condemned an attack made on a suspected informer by Black South Africans. He went as far as threatening to gather his family and leave South Africa if such actions continued. Rather than the violent approach, Tutu called on churches to “mount a massive campaign of support through positive noncooperation with the implementation of immoral, unchristian and unjust laws” and demand that racist laws would be lifted.426

However, Tutu also communicated on several occasions that a nonviolent response to oppression has an “expiration date.” While recognizing, with those like Mandela, that South Africans had tried the nonviolent approach since 1912, Tutu believed that the time to forsake nonviolence had not arrived. He even stated that South African organizations did not move to armed struggle until the government declared these nonviolent organizations illegal.427

In the interim before nonviolence would expire, Tutu committed himself to being a warner of the impending violence that would naturally occur if Black South Africans were not given liberation. At one point, he rhetorically asked, “[h]ow long can a people, do you think, bear such blatant injustice and suffering?”428 He warned that he was growing to believe that bloodshed was inevitably on the horizon. He went

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426 Tutu, We Drink Water to Fill Our Stomachs (1979), 35. For more on Tutu’s commitment to the Gospel of Jesus and how that limited his ability to affirm certain actions, see, Desmond Tutu, “A Deep and Passionate Love for Our Land (1980)” in Allen, ed., The Rainbow People of God, 42; Tutu, The Divine Imperative (1982), 64; Tutu, You Don’t Reform a Frankenstein (1985), 98.

427 Tutu, Apartheid’s Final Solution (1984), 91; Tutu, You Don’t Reform a Frankenstein (1985), 100. See also, Mandela, The Case for a Violent Resistance Movement, 321.

on to say that “a people can take only so much and no more.” In the type of “prophetic warning” similar to the African American Jeremiad tradition, Tutu pleaded:

Please believe us when we say that there is much goodwill left, although we have to add that time and patience are running out. Hatred, bitterness and anger are growing. Unless something is done to demonstrate your intentions and those of your government to bring about fundamental change leading to political power sharing, then we are afraid that the so-called ghastly alternative will be upon us…please let the government commit themselves to a common citizenship for all South Africans in an undivided South Africa. If this does not happen, then I am frightened, we are frightened that we will have to kiss goodbye to peaceful change.

Tutu’s love for peace and justice are apparent in this plea. As a Black South African, he knew that people were becoming very impatient with the call for nonviolence. While Mandela and others had already come to the conclusion in 1961 that preaching peace and nonviolence was unrealistic and wrong, Tutu would admit in 1977 that “[w]e who today still advocate peaceful change and still talk about reconciliation and justice are in grave danger. The danger is that our credibility is being seriously eroded.” However, Tutu wanted to ensure that before it got to the point of violence, there would be a record demonstrating that Black South Africans did everything they could to avoid armed struggle.

429 Ibid.
430 Tutu, A Deep and Passionate Love for Our Land (1980), 43. The Jeremiad refers to a strain of thought, most associated with the book of Jeremiah in the Hebrew Bible, that shows the prophet’s ministry focused on warning a people who were hardened in sin that they could expect disaster soon. While I am not making a dogmatic case that Tutu believed that disaster would come regardless of whether the South African government changed, but, as one will see below, Tutu has serious doubts about the possibility of the government changing. For more on the concept of the Jeremiad prophetic tradition, see, Christopher Hobson, The Mount of Vision: African American Prophetic Tradition, 1800-1950 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 40-41.
432 Tutu, A Growing Nightmarish Fear (1976), 12.
It must be said that the warning of impending violence was not merely Tutu making it clear that other South Africans would eventually forsake nonviolence. His Jeremiads were also meant to declare that although he wanted to obtain freedom for Black South Africans through peaceful means, if change did not come, he would actually reach the point of approving a violent overthrow of the state. There are hints of this position along with clear articulations of it in Tutu’s discourse. Comparable to comments made by Biko, Tutu made some statements that can be interpreted as subtle warnings that he is not completely opposed to revolutionary violence. For example, in 1980, Tutu asserted that “I do not wish to be the one who is going to provoke the revolution…” Furthermore, Tutu criticized calls for nonviolence by those from Western countries who obtained their independence through bloody struggles. There are also individuals, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who is lauded by Westerners as a modern-day saint for his involvement in the plot to kill Adolf Hitler. Tutu noted that he affirmed that sentiment, but contended that “when it comes to black liberation, the West wakes up and suddenly finds it has become pacifist.” Thus, for him, the West is hypocritical for honoring the actions of Bonhoeffer while demanding nonviolence; but he also felt that Bonhoeffer’s actions were honorable. With these words he, in some sense, exposed his own ambivalent relationship with nonviolence.

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433 Tutu, *A Deep and Passionate Love for Our Land (1980)*, 44. Biko stated while there are some people who have been convinced that military violence would be the only productive way to unseat the racist government, “I don’t know if this is the final answer . . . whether this [obtaining greater results] is going to be through the form of conflict or not will be dictated by the future. I don’t believe for a moment that we going to willingly drop our belief in the non-violence stance—as of now. But I can’t predict what will happen in the future, inasmuch as I can’t predict what the enemy is going to do in the future.” His statement that he would be committed to nonviolence “as of now” and that his stance on that would depend on what happens in the future seems to be a way of asserting, similarly to Tutu, that his commitment to nonviolence has a limit. See, Steve Biko, “Our Strategy for Liberation” in Biko, *I Write what I like*, 148—9.

There were also explicit statements that pointed to Tutu’s belief that there could come a time where he would announce that the time of violence had arrived and he would forsake nonviolence. In response to a question raised by someone about whether he continued to affirm the position that a day may come when it would be necessary to utilize violence for the liberation struggle, Tutu answered, “Oh absolutely. Yes. I would say that I will tell you the day I believe we must tell the world that now we have reached a point where we must use violence to overthrow an unjust system. I do not believe we are there yet. And the onus really lies with the international community.”

Here Tutu clearly presented his view that if the international community did not assist the Black South Africans to pressure the government to end its oppressive policies toward them, he would then announce his support for a violent revolution.

While he still held to his previously stated view of violence as negative, he admitted that in some cases, violence to stop oppression is the lesser of the two evils. He even stated that peaceful resistance and protest in South Africa were virtually impossible. For nonviolence to be effective, Tutu claimed, the oppressor must show at least a minimum level of morality. As an example, he was willing to admit that although Gandhi’s nonviolent approach was effective in one context, he did not think that it would have helped to prevent the holocaust.

Tutu even responded to the apparent conflict of his willingness to accept that it is appropriate to use violence in

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436 Tutu, You Don’t Reform a Frankenstein, 100; Tutu, Freedom Fighters or Terrorists?, 72, 73, 76.
some cases with his Christian faith by arguing:

There are some remarkable people who believe that no one is ever justified in using violence, even against the most horrendous evil. Such absolute pacifists believe that the Gospel of the Cross effectively rules out anyone taking up the sword, however just the cause. I admire such persons deeply, but sadly I must confess that I am of less noble stuff. I am a lover of peace and I try to work for justice because only thus do I believe we could ever hope to establish durable peace.  

This quote encapsulates Tutu’s critical theory of religion as it relates to violence. He demonstrated that he is a man of peace and reconciliation; it might be said that this is his first inclination. However, he does not believe that violence is always inappropriate in the liberation struggle. What is mirrored by Tutu is a cautious acceptance of violent struggle. He always showed sympathy toward those who had decided to implement violent resistance. It seems, however, for him, there must be a long interim period of a Jeremiad warning of impending violence. He also highlighted the limits of nonviolence by charging that it would have likely never worked if someone hoped to stop the holocaust.

Thomas Sankara (d. 1987) was a revolutionary in Burkina Faso and made an important contribution to an Africana Critical Theory of Religion through his claim that religion is ineffective for revolutionary change. Perhaps, reflecting his radicalism, Sankara declared “Homeland or death.” In regard to religion’s relationship to the revolutionary struggle, he asserted that no religious belief, book or practice will bring liberation to the poor; it is only violence that is effective. He stated that “Jesus himself had to take the whip to chase them from his temple” because “that

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

According to Sankara, speaking the language that was understood by those in power, Jesus made use of violence when he picked up a weapon to remove people from the temple in Jerusalem (John 2:13-16). This was in contrast to the “turn the other cheek” approach that is often encouraged. The nonviolent tactic, Sankara asserted, only increased the violence they experienced. He stated that “[t]he word of Christ was betrayed” and that “[h]is cross was transformed into a club.”\textsuperscript{440} Thus, what one learns from Sankara is that nonviolence does not work and that Jesus himself used violence as a means to effect change.

\textbf{From the Diaspora}

Just like their continental African counterparts, Africans in the diaspora have presented complex understandings of the legitimacy of violence. For example, David Walker (d. 1830), an African American who was a radical abolitionist, taught that “groveling servile and abject submission” was against the nature of Black people.\textsuperscript{441} He maintained that when faced with the prospect of being enslaved, the Black person must understand that they are in a position where it is either “kill or be killed.”\textsuperscript{442} He believed that it was through God’s help that enslaved people killed their enslavers to obtain their freedom. Although he took the position that God would ultimately be the one to finally destroy oppressors, he also argued that oppressed people “must go to

work and prepare the way of the Lord.”

That is, while oppressed people anticipated the ultimate destruction of their oppressors in the future, in preparation for that day they should begin killing their enslavers in the interim. Moreover, anyone who would seek to prevent the death of enslavers should be considered as “fighting against the Lord.”

Walker believed so strongly in the need for enslaved people to use violence in the fight for their freedom that it caused him to have no pity for those who were unwilling to take up arms. He declared that the “man who would not fight under our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in the glorious and heavenly cause of freedom and of God…ought to be kept with all of his children or family, in slavery, or in chains, to be butchered by his cruel enemies.” Similarly, he also asserted that “the man who will stand still and let another murder him, is worse than an infidel, and, if he has common sense, ought not to be pitied.” What this reflects is a disdain for those who commit themselves to nonviolence. Stated plainly, those who submit nonviolently to oppression deserve the oppression they receive. He would likely agree with the sentiment articulated in the following century by poet Claude McKay when he wrote:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs…While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs…O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe! Though far outnumbered let us show us brave, And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow! What though before us lies the open grave? Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack, Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back.

443Ibid., 22.
444Ibid., 18, 19.
446Walker, Affray and Murder (1829), 19.
While Walker’s assertion that those who are unwilling to take up arms deserve to be oppressed might not be fully accepted, he still has some important contributions that should be taken under consideration. Although this author is very sympathetic to Walker’s perspective, he rejects the notion that nonviolent people deserve to be oppressed. Even though the Africana Critical of Religion constructed here assumes the use of violence for revolutionary praxis, the author also wants to leave room for figures like Tutu, who at least are active in the struggle and provides a Jeremiad warning of the impending violence. Nevertheless, Walker provided a perspective that suggests that the Christian God supports and empowers violent resistance. Whether one agrees with him or not, his perspective makes room for revolutionary Christians to participate in the armed struggle.

William Whipper (d. 1876) on the other hand, was an absolute pacifist. He taught that “non-resistance to physical aggression” was the only way to obtain “true universal peace.” Moreover, he believed that war and self-defense were in conflict with the Christian Bible and the religion of Christianity itself. He argued: “I believe that every argument urged in favor of what is termed a ‘just and necessary war,’ or physical self-defense, is at enmity with the letter, and spirit of the scriptures, and when they emanate from its professed advocates should be repudiated, as inimical to the principles they profess, and a reproach to Christianity itself.” In his opinion, one could not be a faithful Christian while also espousing the use of violence.

His rejection of violence had a teleological impulse. That is, he believed

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449 Ibid.
that if humanity was ever to get to a time of peace, they would have to adopt complete nonviolence. His logic was that one could not end violence with violence. He continued by stating that violence cannot be conquered by its own elements. It can only be eliminated by the “destruction of the principle that animates, quickens, and feeds it.” In other words, only peace/nonviolence can bring about the ultimate peace that humanity longs for. If peace is not adopted, mankind will continue down a cycle of violence and destruction.

He pointed to the abolitionist movement as an example of the superiority of nonviolence. He commended them for their willingness to submissively accept being beaten, mobbed, and persecuted. Rather than respond violently, Whipper adds that they simply prayed for their prosecutors. Because of this approach, according to Whipper, war had not erupted. “Had they set out in this glorious undertaking of freeing 2,500,000 human beings, with the war-cry of ‘liberty or death,’ they would have been long since demolished, or a civil war would have ensued.”

Ironically, however, shortly after he had penned these very words there was a civil war and its result was the freeing of enslaved Africans. Although the premise of this current project already rejects nonviolence, Whipper’s discussion about the need to obtain lasting peace is something that an Africana Critical Theory of Religion must consider. Thus, his contribution raises the question of whether violent revolution simply perpetuates violence.

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450 Ibid., 98-99.
451 Ibid.
452 Ibid., 100.
Maria Stewart (d. 1879) is another African American who embraced armed struggle. Much of her discourse on the legitimacy of violence was made in comparison to the American fight for independence. She stated that African Americans fought and died in the revolutionary war for the independence of America. She went on to query: “But where is the man that has distinguished himself in these modern days by acting wholly in the defense of African rights and liberty?” In other words, if it was honorable for Black people to use violence for the purpose of maintaining the independence and freedom of white people, there should be those who are willing to take up arms in the defense of the freedom of Black people.

On multiple occasions she spoke approvingly of those who would use violence to obtain their freedom. She recounted numerous examples of people who revolted against tyranny using violence including the Greeks, the French, the Americans, and the Haitians. She explained that it was not prayers alone, but that through their own efforts, God eventually raised someone up to defend them. At one point she declared that God would raise up a “David Walker type” person to lead their struggle. What one must consider is that Stewart did not simply view the radical abolitionist David Walker, who called for the killing of enslavers, as a positive person, but she suggested that God would raise up a Walker-type figure (again).

Examples like these caused Marilyn Richardson to state that Stewart embraced armed


454 Maria Stewart, “Lecture Delivered At the Franklin Hall, September 21, 1832” in Richardson, ed., Maria Stewart: America’s First Black Woman Political Writer, 49; Maria Stewart, “Religion and The Pure Principles of Morality, The Sure Foundation On Which We Must Build, October 8, 1831” in Richardson, ed., Maria Stewart: America’s First Black Woman Political Writer, 30; Maria Stewart, “An Address Delivered Before The Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America” in Richardson, ed., Maria Stewart: America’s First Black Woman Political Writer, 53-54.
struggle and saw herself in the line of figures such as Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser, David Walker, and Nat Turner. Her contribution to a critical theory of religion is her belief that God approved of armed struggle against oppression.

Although Frantz Fanon (d. 1961) allowed for some utilitarian benefits of religion, he largely saw it as, at best, problematic for the violent revolutionary struggle. He believed that revolutionary violence was the only way for the colonized to find true liberation. For him, exploited people soon discover that it is not compromise or the possibility of concessions, but violence is the only thing that pays. He went on to argue that the oppressed must never hope or trust in the generosity, good faith of the colonizer, or the potential that they may “soften up” their oppression. Fanon contented that “[o]ur mistake, the mistake we Africans made, was to have forgotten that the enemy never withdraws sincerely. He never understands. He capitulates, but he does not become converted.” Thus, rather than seeking to persuade, Fanon stated that “the war must be carried to the enemy, who must be given no rest, pursued, knocked out.”

Fanon’s insistence on violent revolutionary struggle also served a broader purpose than obtaining physical/political liberation. Fanon went as far to say that nonviolence, or “pacification” caused mental and behavioral disorders for those who

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456 Fanon, Wretched, 23.
458 Ibid., 196.
459 Ibid.,
practiced it. For Fanon, the denied humanity of the colonized caused a constant mental battle to discover their identity. He taught that the colonized can only liberate themselves from this internal mental battle in and through revolutionary violence. This perspective is not limited to Fanon. Philosopher Leonard Harris also stated that the mental well-being of oppressed populations may gain from the murder, pillage, and the destruction of property of those in power. Explaining this further, Fanon asserted that this “violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence.” From this, one should see the importance of revolutionary violence for Fanon. Its significance is reflected in his critical theory of religion.

As a result of the centrality of revolutionary violence for Fanon, his critical theory of religion addressed the effects of the religious practices of dance and spirit possession on the pursuit of violent struggle. He stated that the “colonized’s way of relaxing is precisely this muscular orgy during which most brutal aggressiveness and

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460 Fanon, *Wretched*, 181.
461 Ibid., 182.
462 Ibid., 44, 182.
464 Ibid., 51.
impulsive violence are channeled, transformed, and spirited away. Moreover, he argued that spirit possession directly functioned in a way that ensured the stability of the colonized world. He observed that prior to this activity the people had a level of impatience and were on edge. Yet, following their experience of possession the people were serene and peaceful. Rather than using that aggression, built up from the frustration of colonial existence, the bodily movements that are a result of possession function as a “release valve” to rid the people of their revolutionary spirit. While it cannot be disputed that rapid physical body movements may deplete the energy of the individual, Fanon’s theory that this somehow drains the revolutionary spirit breaks down when one explores the function of dance in spiritual harm practices among Africana peoples elsewhere. Even more, the experience of possession has never stifled the Africana revolutionary spirit; in fact, while adhering to this type of worldview, as C.L.R. James has stated, Africana people have revolted continually.

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465 Fanon, Wretched, 19.

466 Ibid., 20. An example of the criticism that religion functioned as a way to distract oppressed people from their condition is reflected in Richard Wright’s Novel entitled Native Son. After having been caught for an accidental murder he committed, the main protagonist, Bigger Thomas, is conversing with someone in his cell where he is asked if his family went to church a lot. Bigger responded that they went to church all the time. He was then asked why he stopped going. He responded, “all they did was sing and shout and pray all the time. And it didn’t get’em nothing. All the colored folks do that, but it don’t get’em nothing. The white folks got everything…The white folks like for us to be religious, then they can do what they want to with us.” See, Richard Wright, “Native Son” in Arnold Rampersad, ed., Richard Wright: Early Works (New York: The Library of America, 1991), 778.

467 In her research on hoodoo, Zora Neale Hurston found that a “hoodoo dance” was common in “killing ceremonies” among practitioners. For more on this see Zora Neale Hurston, “Mules and Men” in Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 198—9, 213, 222.

468 C.L.R. James, A History of Pan-African Revolt (Chicago: C.H. Kerr Publishing, 2012), 57. Dr. Christopher Hobson adds that few African Americans historically have assumed that because God allows suffering that they should not oppose it. See Hobson, The Mount of Vision, 61. This can be seen also in Trinidad where Orisha communities built paths toward ideas of freedom, liberation and social justice. In fact, her research among Orisiha communities in Trinidad led Dr. N. Fadeke Castor to
With the above critiques of religion it may be shocking to realize that Fanon, perhaps, unwittingly, highlighted a positive aspect of religion. Fanon’s discourse on the veil worn by women in Algeria ironically immolates how he simultaneously saw the benefit of religion to revolutionary praxis, while missing the religious presence therein. Just as the veil covered the revolutionary activities of the women in Algeria, Fanon’s European intellectual development covered the religious influence in the revolutionary praxis Fanon observed. While in Algeria Fanon highlighted the way the veil (Algerian Muslim women’s clothing that covers their bodies) had been manipulated into a technique for the revolutionary struggle. The female body in this society became a contested cite of resistance. The colonizing power disliked the veil because the “woman sees without being seen.” Thus, Fanon explained, the colonizers were bent on unveiling these women. This emphasis on what colonizers framed as freeing Algerian women of their veils caused them to associate an unveiled woman with the notion of rebellion against Muslim traditions and an acceptance of the occupiers’ stated aim of freeing women. These circumstances moved Algerians to utilize this narrative for their own revolutionary purposes. Some women were called to unveil themselves as a means of lowering the defenses of the colonizers; this allowed them to easily transport grenades and messages because they were not viewed as threats to the colonial system. In fact, these women were seen as


470 Ibid., 44.
appreciative of the colonizer.\textsuperscript{471} Author of \emph{Fanon: The Militant Philosopher of Third World Revolution}, Leo Zeilig, described how these incidents would occur:

Frequently a man and a woman would work together,—‘one supporting the other but apparently strangers to each other’—the man walking confidently ahead of the woman, unarmed, to a prearranged target in a European sector. The woman, ‘radically transformed into a European woman, poised and unconstrained,’ would not have been searched. At the given moment the woman would hand over her hidden gun to the man, who could then execute his orders.\textsuperscript{472}

In this way, the apparent absence of adherence to the religious custom of veiling provided cover for revolutionary activities. Algerians used a religious symbol, or rather the absence of such, to mislead their colonizers. Nevertheless, under torture some women revealed this tactic to the colonizers.\textsuperscript{473}

The discovery of the strategic use of the veil caused the Algerians to adjust their strategy and use the veil in a different way. Now, revolutionaries would hide explosives, guns, cash, and other materials for the revolution under their veils. This time they used the colonizers’ assumption that a veiled female was submissive and harmless.\textsuperscript{474} Fanon explained that after 1957, when the veil reappeared, the women began training on how to carry heavy objects under their veils while still seeming to have their hands free. The women went as far as swelling their bodies so that they became shapeless so it would better conceal revolutionary items under their veils.\textsuperscript{475}

Although Fanon acknowledged that the veil was a religio-cultural item, according to

\textsuperscript{471}Ibid., 50-60, 63.
\textsuperscript{472}Leo Zeilig, \emph{Frantz Fanon: The Militant Philosopher of Third World Revolution} (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 148.
\textsuperscript{473}Fanon, \emph{Colonialism}, 50-60.
\textsuperscript{474}Zeilig, \emph{Militant Philosopher}, 149
\textsuperscript{475}Fanon, \emph{Colonialism}, 61-61.
Settler, he still refused to see any significance in religion in the anti-colonial struggle; beyond its limited utilitarian value. Analyses on Fanon’s views about religion become more complicated at this point. While he seemed to have celebrated the creative use of the veil, Fanon still described the religious beliefs of the Algerians as infantile. It seems like Fanon constructed a view that while religion is problematic for revolutionary praxis, he implied that, at least in the case of the use of the veil, religion played an accidental role in revolutionary praxis.

This interpretation gains a bit more credibility when one considers the way Fanon would often downplay the positive role of religion in revolution. Some scholars have pointed out that religion is an elephant in Fanon’s work, so to speak. That is, Fanon failed to connect the fact that the anti-colonial culture he described was an Islamic culture. Fanon’s imprecision is even more glaring when one takes into consideration that “in the Algerian context the struggle between the colonizer and the colonized was framed in explicitly religious terms.” Rather than attributing the successful revolutionary praxis of the Algerians to the tradition of Islamic resistance to colonialism there, Fanon suggested that these results were a product of spontaneity and organization. In fact, the anti-colonialism active in the 1940s and 1950s can be

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477 Fanon, Colonialism, 110.


479 Settler, Religion in the Work of Fanon, 176.

480 Slisli, Elephant, 97.
traced back to the nineteenth century and was entirely Islamic in nature.\textsuperscript{481} One scholar, Fouzi Slisli, contended that “Fanon simply used revolutionary terminology familiar to Western readers and cleansed from his content all references to Islam.”\textsuperscript{482} Similarly, Settler stated, “It seemed that either he was engaged in weeding out all explicit references to Islam, or he possibly lacked the rhetorical and interpretive tools to give expression to the significance of these traditions.”\textsuperscript{483} It seems then that Fanon depreciated the value and role of religion in the revolutionary struggle.

Although Fanon’s radical commitment to violent revolutionary praxis caused him to absolutely negate religion, there are some principles from his discourse that are helpful for a construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion. First, the idea that violence plays a positive force in the psychology of the oppressed. This is a claim that those who promote nonviolence must contend with. While the author has challenged this claim, it is still important for a critical theory of religion that they can demonstrate that their religious beliefs and practices do not deplete the aggression that must be targeted toward their oppressors. Lastly, as Fanon acknowledged the use of the veil, a critical theory of religion must allow for the creative use of religious symbols that might aid violent revolutionary praxis.

Fannie Lou Hamer (d. 1977) is another figure that warrants consideration for a discussion of violence. She rebuked the type of minister that would instruct his congregants not to march in pursuit of justice. Moreover, she noted that although she

\textsuperscript{481}Ibid., 99.
\textsuperscript{482}Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{483}Settler, \textit{Religion in the Work of Fanon}, 178.
formerly had a lot of respect for preachers, she had lost her admiration of them because in Mississippi they were one of the scariest groups of people. Thus, one of her critiques of religion was that religious leaders were often not radical enough.

Hamer’s notion of radicalness also included the approval of violence. In part, her acceptance of the legitimacy of violence is partially perceptible in light of her association with Malcolm X. She articulated her admiration of him in the following way: “Malcolm X was one of the best friends I ever had. A remarkable man. Oh, he was a great man!” While this is not an explicit approval of Malcolm’s view on violence, coupled with her characterization of an armed group of Black people, who protected Black communities, as “one of the greatest things that ever happened,” it becomes clear that Hamer saw armed resistance as valid.

In fact, on one occasion she seemed to imply that the only reason she was not involved in some of the riots carried on by many urban Black youth was because of her age.

Similar to Tutu, Hamer admitted to having a complex relationship to the concept of nonviolence. She stated that she could accept the nonviolent approach for some situations, but that there were others that required a militant approach. Going further, she clarified that the alternative approach she was referring to did not include turning the other cheek. For her, racism would have to be dealt with either by “men

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484 Fannie Lou Hamer, “We’re On Our Way,’ Speech Delivered at a Mass Meeting in Indianola, Mississippi, September 1964” in Maegan Parker and Davis Houck, eds., The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell it Like It Is (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 55.


486 Ibid.

and government” or by “men and guns.” Ultimately, Hamer contributes to a critical theory of religion a critique of conservative religious leaders and a recognition that violence is valid in certain circumstances.

A central interlocutor in a discussion of violence within the African American context is Martin Luther King Jr. (d. 1968). King explained that his journey to nonviolence began in seminary and would blossom after he read the philosophy of Gandhi on the power of love and nonviolent resistance. He then realized that the Christian doctrine of love could use the Gandhian method of nonviolence as a tool to create one of the “most potent weapons available to an oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.”

However, his reading of criticisms of pacifism by Christian Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr caused him to admit that his pacifist position was not devoid of all moral problems. For example, Niebuhr argued that Christian pacifism overestimated human goodness and underestimated human depravity. Expounding on this claim, he stated that Christian pacifists have accepted “faith in the goodness of man [and] have rejected the Christian doctrine of original sin…” Thus, according to Niebuhr’s understanding of the Christian Bible, humans are sinful and are only expected to

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488 Fannie Lou Hamer, “If the Name of the Game Is Survive, Survive,’ Speech Delivered in Ruleville, Mississippi, September 27, 1971” in Parker and Houck, eds., The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer, 142.

489 Martin Luther King Jr., Strength to Love (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 158—9.

490 Reinhold Niebuhr, “Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist” in Mark Juergensmeyer and Margo Kitts, eds., Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 47-48. For King discussing the impact his study of Reinhold Niebuhr had on him, see, Martin Luther King Jr., Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 87. The Doctrine of Original Sin refers to the belief among some Christians that humans are now born sinners as a result of the original sin of Adam and Eve. It is argued that this sinfulness that humans are born with bends their nature toward disobedience and a propensity to sin. For more on the Doctrine of Original Sin, see John Frame, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2013), 860—3.
achieve a tentative harmony with the principles of scripture that are “less than the best.” Niebuhr, Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist, 49. This means that the standard of love and peace must be applied realistically in light of the sinfulness of mankind. Because humans are sinners, according to Niebuhr, justice can only be obtained through a certain amount of coercion (i.e. force).  

However, despite his initial sympathy for Niebuhr, King began to believe that there were weaknesses in his critiques. It was at Boston University where he came to the conclusion that Niebuhr had overemphasized human corruption and did not balance it with an optimism of what God could do in a human heart. Nevertheless, King arrived at what he called a “realistic pacifism” that considered the pacifist perspective as the lesser of two evils. He obtained a deeper understanding and commitment to nonviolence through his experience of implementing the principle in a boycott he led in Montgomery, Alabama.

One of King’s principle claims in the discourse about violence is that it is immoral. On one occasion, he declared that “[v]iolence as a way of achieving racial justice is…immoral.” Once again, he explained that the principle of nonviolence allowed for the means to accomplish justice to be moral. Thus, the nonviolent approach, according to King, was morally superior to the violent one. This

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491 Niebuhr, Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist, 49.
492 Ibid., 52.
494 Ibid., 208.
superiority, according to King, stemmed from the reality that violence is associated with anger and hatred. On numerous occasions King connected violence with hatred and bitterness so frequently that it might be said that he saw them as inseparably linked.496

Herein lays one of the weakest points of King’s philosophy of nonviolence. The present author wonders on what basis King can discursively attach all forms of violence to hatred and bitterness. King connected hatred to violence ontologically. That is, he suggested that the very existence of hatred is tethered to violence on an essential level. This can be represented in a simple formula: Violence = Hatred. Thus, if a homeowner is awoken by a person who has broken into his or her home in the middle of the night, and uses violence to protect their family and remove the intruder from their home, according to the above formulation, the homeowner is acting out of hatred and bitterness. The present writer views this position as absurd. It would seem that the motivating factor would be self-preservation and the protection of one’s family rather than hatred.

As a thought experiment, imagine an adult son brings his wife over to meet his alcoholic father. Upon entering the home, the father in a drunken rage attacks his son’s wife. The son strikes his father several times in the face until the father has been subdued and no longer attempts to attack his son’s wife. Would the son’s use of violence suggest that he hated his father or was bitter toward him? While plausible, it is unlikely that the son’s violent response reflected a hatred for his father. This is one

example that highlights the philosophical weakness of King’s perspective on violence.

However, shifting to one of the stronger points of King’s philosophy of nonviolence, he believed that nonviolence was more effective than the violent approach to liberation. He made his case based on his experiential success of obtaining legal changes, and the avoidance of actions that would cause more long-lasting bitterness between the races through the loving sacrifice of nonviolent activists. King acknowledged critiques by militants such as Robert F. Williams (d. 1996), but characterized them as shortsighted. He argued that Williams’ presentation of options for Black people allow only for either cringing submission or armed struggle. However, King described nonviolent direct action as another alternative that could be used to create a crisis that dramatized concerns of injustice with the hope that, by exposing these moral failures, it would prick the consciences of white people and cause them to willingly change the oppressive conditions they allow.\(^{497}\)

Comparing the conditions of injustice to a disease, King utilized analogy to articulate the process and effectiveness of nonviolent direct action. He stated: “Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.”\(^{498}\) For King, the effect of the stirred consciences of white America had, and would continue to, result in the transformation of laws; as


\(^{498}\)King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 19, 1963*, 98.
was accomplished by the movement he led in Montgomery, Alabama. He believed that even if the law could not transform how white people thought of Black people, it could regulate their behavior and prevent them from discriminating against them based on their race.\textsuperscript{499}

However, King seems to have overestimated the effectiveness of this approach and the significance of changing laws to reflect a perspective of race-neutrality (on paper). In fact, Williams pointed out that even the lauded victory of the King’s Montgomery bus boycott, was limited because many Black people in that city were starving even though they could ride on the front of the bus. He went on to say that the “victory” did not have the result of changing the economic conditions of Black people or the educational opportunities for Black children.\textsuperscript{500} In addition, various scholars have highlighted the way that politicians and legislatures were able to use race-neutral language to continue their intentional oppression of Black people following the legal gains of the Civil Rights Movement that made explicit racial discrimination illegal. For example, “culture of poverty” arguments have remained very popular even to the present day. This approach discursively rejects biological claims of Black racial inferiority to justify disparities, but uses claims about the destructiveness and backwardness of Black culture to justify the status quo.\textsuperscript{501}

Scholars have also highlighted the U.S. government’s collaboration with

\textsuperscript{499}King, \textit{Strength to Love}, 29; King, \textit{Why We Can’t Wait}, 32.


major drug dealers to allow the funneling of drugs into Black communities and its subsequent performative panic that resulted in what has been termed the War on Drugs. Both Michelle Alexander and Carol Anderson map out how there was an intentional and overly punitive response to drugs that looked over its more prevalent usage and distribution in white communities, and targeted Black communities to create the mass-incarceration, disproportionately of Black men, in a context where all involved can easily adhere to the post-Civil Rights standards of race-neutral laws. For these reasons, one might challenge, albeit in hindsight, the confidence King placed in the success of his approach. This author does not deny or belittle the sacrifices of the Civil Rights Movement. Their work forced racists to go “underground” and work harder to find discrete ways to harm Black people. He only argues that racists can still have their way with many Black people (particularly those who would likely never get their hands on this writing).

Moreover, King declared that the ability of the nonviolent approach to save and win the friendship of white people is additional evidence of its superiority over the violent approach. Similar to the argument of Whipper above, King contented that even defensive violence, or violence to deliver oppressed people, simply ensures that the cycle of violence will continue. He explained that “[c]asualties of war keep alive postwar bitterness.” Rather than contribute to this pattern, for King, “someone


503 King, Stride Toward Freedom, 176.
must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate."\textsuperscript{504} The onus seemed to rest on Black people because white people’s personality and soul had been distorted by segregation. King argued, that the “Negro must love the white man, because the white man needs his love to remove his tensions, insecurities and fears.”\textsuperscript{505} Thus, King argued that the love of Black people would be demonstrated by their willingness to patiently endure bombings of their homes, the threatening of their children, and near fatal beatings; he believed that Black people would wear white people down by their ability to suffer.\textsuperscript{506} In fact, he went as far as saying that “if physical death is the price that a man must pay to free his children and his white brethren from a permanent death of the spirit, then nothing could be more redemptive.”\textsuperscript{507}

To say it mildly, the present author finds the aforementioned perspective troubling. It places the burden of reconciling social fissures created by white people on suffering Black people. While remaining problematic, King’s perspective might be more easily acceptable if the only people who would have to endure the suffering were those who knowingly committed themselves to that responsibility. But, there were numerous people who suffered who were not active participants in the direct action campaigns, such as small children. Referring to a similarly nonviolent approach, Harris persuasively retorted, that the “[l]ives of millions were destroyed as

\textsuperscript{504} Ibid., 92.
\textsuperscript{505} Ibid., 93-94.
\textsuperscript{506} Ibid., 213.
\textsuperscript{507} Ibid., 212.
abolitionists engaged in debates and protests.”  

Going further, he added, “that pregnant women, children, old men, and young men were lynched, beaten, raped, threatened, and coerced while the world of relatively civil abolitionist discourse and protest occurred.” Whether applied to antebellum slavery in the United States, or the Jim Crow South, while King and other nonviolent activists who shared his view were trying to end the cycle of violence and bitterness, many lives of Black people were sacrificed for this ideal of becoming friends with white people and saving them. The author agrees with the claim made by Williams in response to a man who had been lynched in 1959: “I venture to say that if Mack Parker had an automatic shotgun at his disposal, he could have served as a great deterrent against lynching.”

While the author could, perhaps, accept this tactic as a noble, yet misinformed, task for the willing, too many lives of Black people were visited with violence who did not agree to those terms. Moreover, the current author might affirm the need for the reconciliation of Black and white people, but he adamantly rejects the notion that the friendship and/or salvation of white people are worth the lives of Black people. What is ironic is that King himself seemed to also discursively reject this approach when he argued that “it is an immoral act to compel a man to accept injustice until another man’s heart is set straight.”

Although defenders of King and Harris, Insurrectionist Ethics: Advocacy, Moral Psychology, and Pragmatism (2002), 185.

Ibid., 185.


King, Stride Toward Freedom, 192—3.
advocates of nonviolence might insist on a distinction to be made between “accepting injustice” and “accepting violence while nonviolently resisting injustice,” the difference is not that significant. In both cases the suffering person is waiting for “another man’s heart” to be “set straight.”

However, King’s position on nonviolence also stemmed from his belief that a violent approach to obtain justice was impractical. Not only did he accuse those who advocated the use of violence as having an unclear program, he also argued that “the Negro cannot achieve emancipation through violent rebellion.”512 He pointed to Black history and the history of the armed resistance of Native Americans as proof that violent resistance would only end in defeat.513 His rationale was based on the population disparity between Black people in the United States and white people. For him, to be outnumbered as much as Black people in the United States are and try a violent rebellion would be futile.514

However, Harris helps again when he convincingly argued that the prospects of successfully overthrowing an oppressive system by violence should not determine whether an attempt is made or not. Even if one rejected the counter-examples provided by Williams about the effectiveness and positive results of armed resistance, the probability of success should not dissuade people from taking risks.515

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512 Martin Luther King Jr., Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 96; Ibid., 41-42.
513 King, Why We Can’t Wait, 147.
514 Ibid., 27.
515 Williams provided several examples of armed resistance being used to obtain results that the nonviolent approach was unable to produce. For example, he described an incident where local officials ignored the pleas of “Negro minister” to restrict the Klan from the Black community to prevent them from shooting guns into their homes and terrorizing Black people. However, when armed Black people began to defend the community, city officials then prevented the Klan from those
Harris explained, “If high probability of success were a precondition for insurrectionist actions, one would find it very difficult to justify the American revolution, nonviolent direct action protests, anti-lynching pamphlets by Black and white women, or membership in any of the insurrectionary forces that fought against colonialism, apartheid, or the Third Reich.” He disrupted the logic of pragmatism because, if consistently followed, it would bind all people to their present conditions. His articulation of this perspective is so persuasive that it might be helpful to quote him again at length:

[I]t is arguable that hope for ending the misery of existing generations is highly unlikely. If an individual has no duty, from a pragmatist standpoint, to alleviate the existing misery of strangers, will that absence of action negatively influence that individual’s flourishing and moral development? Assuming we have duties that are not contingent on the successful outcome of action or on effective predictions of what will become successful, what duties are there for the pragmatist standpoint to overthrow slavery? No American had good reason to believe that their heroic acts to destroy slavery would, as an isolated set of acts, produce the desired results for themselves or for persons they loved. Nor had they any historical evidence to suggest that highly risky social acts would substantively encourage others to fight for abolition or result in successful outcomes. The unpredictability of outcomes does not stand as a sufficient reason to defeat the justification that oppressed individuals or groups can offer for pursuing instrumentally useful paths. There is no human progress without the discord of social conflict insurrections, and revolutions.

neighborhoods. He also recounted a story where being armed saved him from being lynched by a group of angry white people who attacked him because they claimed that a “nigger” tried to hit a white man. However, according to Williams, the white man had tried to run him off the road and caused them both to ride into a ditch. After numerous people had announced that he should be burned to death for trying to harm a white man, Williams’ guns prevented them from carrying out their will. He even pointed out that when he and those associated with him conducted protest demonstrations, there was not a single incident of a person simply being spat upon. He contrasted that with the fact that in other communities, Black people received skull fractures and other injuries because they were known to be nonviolent. For more on Williams’ counter-examples on the effectiveness of violent resistance, see, Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, 45-46, 48-49, 67-68; Williams, *Is Violence Necessary to Combat Injustice? (September, 1959)*, 111.

516 Leonard Harris, “Honor and Insurrection or A Short Story About Why John Brown (With David Walker’s Spirit) Was Right and Frederick Douglass (With Benjamin Banneker’s Spirit was Wrong (1999))” in McBride, ed., *A Philosophy of Struggle*, 170.

In other words, members of society must have social obligations that rise above their ability or inability to successfully alleviate suffering. Just as there is no evidence that humans will end world hunger, this does not make the goal to do so an unworthy or invalid cause to pursue.

Moreover, there is evidence that even “unsuccessful” revolts of enslaved people caused many to reconsider the question of slavery. For example, by October 1831, after the violent rebellion led by Nat Turner in Southampton, Virginia, there were white Virginians pushing for the gradual emancipation of the enslaved population. The issue was debated by legislators in the Virginia General Assembly. Although they ultimately decided to allow slavery to continue, the fact that the rebellion made a significant amount of white people consider whether slavery was still worth the threat of rebellion shows that those who died during that rebellion made an important contribution toward the path of freedom for African Americans.\footnote{Vanessa Holden, *Surviving Southampton: African American Women and Resistance in Nat Turner’s Community* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2021), 6, 40, 53.}

In fact, even as far as in North Carolina, it was reported that some whites were so affected by the fear of rebellion in the aftermath of the insurrection of Nat Turner, that three white men died due to heart failure.\footnote{Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 309.} In a battle to end such a wicked system, one might argue that this is the type of condition one would want all whites to be in who either support or are indifferent to slavery. Moreover, although the Mau Mau fighters in Kenya were eventually subdued, according to Mazrui and Tidy, their insurrection helped to break the “British Imperial will” in Africa.\footnote{Mazrui and Tidy, *Nationalism and New States in Africa*, xviii, 122.} In either case,
violent resistance caused oppressors to reevaluate whether it was worth it to continue to oppress Black people. In contrast to King’s assertion cited above, for the armed revolutionaries, it might be said that “we will wear you down by causing you to suffer.” In this case, instead of Black people dying for the purpose of saving white people, if there must be Black death, it will be exclusively for the freedom of Black people.

The final concept from King that will be explored here is his complicated relationship to violence. Beginning with, perhaps, unconvincing, but proximately relevant material, the author will then shift to material more problematizing to King’s view of violence that might be a helpful alternative posture that would make room for Africana peoples who insist on remaining nonviolent. Following the work of David Justice, the author believes that it is significant to point out the type of theological language King used to refer to God’s activities in relation to injustice. For example, King would frequently highlight his belief in God’s violent intervention into the affairs of humankind. He referred to God cutting down those who support injustice. Moreover, he would describe love as a weapon, and compared non-violent protest, on one occasion, to a “blazing six shooter.” God is said to use “fire and sword” to rip out roots of injustice. These examples are described by Justice as “Kingdom Violence.” Justice defined “Kingdom Violence” as the notion of the destruction of things that stand in the way of God’s Kingdom (i.e. injustice). Thus, for him, King’s language of

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521 King, Why We Can’t Wait, 65; From the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Archive Collection Box 22 Folder 4 Draft of A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart, Boston University Libraries, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center; From the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Archive Collection Box 22 Folder 4 Gandhi Society for Human Rights Speech, 1962, Boston University Libraries, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center; From the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Archive Collection Box 24 Folder 1 Address on the Occasion of the Formation of the Gandhi Society for Human Rights, May 17, 1962, Boston University Libraries, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center.
weaponry and his discourse on the destruction of segregation, rather than its reform, fits into his concept of “Kingdom Violence.” In this way, Justice places King in the tradition of people like Nat Turner and those connected to militant Black Christianity.⁵²² Although not convinced of the efficacy of “Kingdom Violence” as a substitute for physical violence, the present author admits that Justice’s argument warrants some consideration. However, it is his contention that “Kingdom Violence” could be better used to give legitimacy to physical violence in pursuit of liberation.

There are other actions and comments by King that forces those who discuss his view of violence to approach the topic with nuance. For example, at one point in his life he applied for a license to carry a gun. He also acknowledged that all societies have viewed self-defense as morally legitimate. King even asserted that the use of self-defense by Black people could possibly win support and display self-respect.⁵²³ Further, he described the violent slave revolts as heroic.⁵²⁴ It is difficult to try to reconcile these last few comments with some of the statements recounted by King above. The most one can do is simply admit that King’s view on violence cannot be articulated simplistically.

Yet, there is one comment made by King that might create a space for those who are inclined to remain nonviolent. On one occasion, King is reported as stating, “Maybe we just have to admit that the day of violence is here, and maybe we have to just give up and let violence take its course. The nation won’t listen to our

⁵²²David Justice, “King and Kingdom Violence: Thinking with and Beyond Martin Luther King Jr. Towards the Beloved Community” (Ph.D) dissertation, in “author’s possession.”

⁵²³King, Stride Toward Freedom, 131; King, The Social Organization of Nonviolence.

⁵²⁴King, Why We Can’t Wait, 142.
voice—maybe it’ll heed the voice of violence…we live in a sick nation…Maybe we will just have to let violence run its course.” Even if this was a momentary lapse of judgement during a time of frustration, it still points to a way forward for a form of praxis that even nonviolent Africana people could display in support of the Africana revolutionary struggle. While King likely would not have wanted these words to be utilized as such, the present author is aiming to move beyond King’s nonviolence by proposing what might be called “passive revolutionary praxis.” What the author means here is the idea of Africana people who desire to remain nonviolent, to serve their people by, as King stated, “let(ting) violence take its course.” In other words, one might not participate or even approve of the revolutionary violence, but the person also does not do anything to sabotage those who will utilize armed resistance. Frederick Douglass is another great example of this “passive revolutionary praxis.” Although he refused to participate in John Brown’s revolt, he was well-informed of the plans beforehand, being a close associate with Brown, but he did not do anything to ruin those plans. As another example, Mandela mentioned a South African organization that remained, officially, nonviolent, but they agreed to no longer “disapprove of properly controlled violence” nor would they discipline members who participated in violence. This reflects a type of “middle-ground” that the person committed to nonviolence can stand in. They may not participate in guerilla activities,

525 Special thanks to David Justice for pointing me to this statement by King. See, David Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: Quill and William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1999), 611—2.
but they will also not condemn, nor inform the authorities of those who do.

While there are many things that King presents that cannot be adopted for this present project, it is the author’s contention that for a balanced Africana revolutionary praxis, King must be heard. One thing that must be gathered from King’s discourse is that Africana revolutionaries should ensure that their desires are for liberation rather than the annihilation of white people. Even if King’s Christian assumptions are not adopted, it seems right from a human perspective to always leave room for the humanity and potential redemption of white people. Another concept from the above analysis of King that should be adopted is that Africana revolutionaries must provide some explanation for a strategy that will account for the population disparity of Africana people who live in white majority contexts. Even if one rejects the idea that a low-probability of success invalidates the attempt, it is still a legitimate query that revolutionaries should be responsible to address. Finally, an Africana Critical Theory of Religion that is aiming to create an Africana revolutionary praxis must make room for passive revolutionary praxis.

With all of the above considerations, the author is now prepared to summarize the standards that an Africana Critical Theory of Religion must meet if it is engaging with the question of violence. Harmonizing and updating the standards Malcolm set that were listed above, and adding them to what has just been developed in the Africana voices section, the standards of the Africana Critical Theory of Religion developed here includes:

1. A religion that demands nonviolence and opposes violent resistance in the face of anti-Black violence should be rejected.
2. A religion that has militant rhetoric but nonviolent praxis is inadequate.

3. People who use their religion to hold Black people back from militant action betray the liberation struggle.

4. A religion must allow for Pan-African interreligious alliances to account for military disparities.

5. Africana peoples from all religious or non-religious perspectives should allow space for a temporary attempt to obtain freedom by nonviolent means.

6. Africana people who are religious should demonstrate that their religious practices do not deplete their properly placed militant aggression.

7. Africana peoples should make room for the belief that the Divine approves of and assists those who kill their oppressors.

8. Africana peoples should (if time permits) consider whether violent revolution merely perpetuates the cycle of violence, and, if so, how they can mitigate those effects if possible.

9. While recognizing that nonviolence is not ideal, Africana peoples should leave space for Africana peoples who implement Passive Revolutionary Praxis.

10. Africana peoples must use violence with the humanity of white people still in mind.

These concepts will guide the assessment of the solutions Malcolm X offered for the tension between religion and violence. Subsequently, the author will present Malcolm’s solutions and determine whether they meet the criteria of the Africana Critical Theory of Religion and Violence guide listed above.
Malcolm’s Solutions to the Violence/Nonviolence Dialectical Conflict: The Religion of Nat Turner

In the beginning of this chapter, the author articulated Malcolm’s critiques of a religion that required nonviolence. Following this, he presented the views of various Africana thinkers on violence and religion. In this final section before the conclusion of this chapter, the author will articulate the solutions Malcolm offered for the issue of religion and violence. Shedding some light on this issue is the way Malcolm approvingly discussed how a religious leader addressed Black suffering during the time of slavery. He stated:

I read about the slave preacher Nat Turner, who put the fear of God into the white slavemaster. Nat Turner wasn’t going around preaching pie-in-the-sky and ‘non-violent’ freedom for the black man. There in Virginia one night in 1831, Nat and seven other slaves started out at his master’s home and through the night they went from one plantation ‘big house’ to the next, killing, until by the next morning 57 white people were dead and Nat had about 70 slaves following him. White people, terrified for their lives, fled from their homes, locked themselves up in public buildings, hid in the woods, and some even left the state. Malcom’s positive response to this historical incident reflects the way he envisioned religious people should address oppression. It will be argued here that although Malcolm mentioned alternatives to violence, he ultimately believed that Pan-African revolutionary violence was the only effective solution to the African American problem.

Theoretically Possible Solution: The Ballot

There is apparent evidence that Malcolm saw the vote as a potential nonviolent solution to the problem African Americans faced. On numerous occasions Malcolm highlighted a particularly strategic way that Black people could use their votes in order to actually obtain results. He argued that if the Black bloc vote strategy

was utilized, it could eliminate the need for Black people to beg because then they could make demands. In an unpublished chapter from his autobiography, Malcolm explained that the Black bloc vote could be used by demanding a clear statement of intent from politicians in regard to the struggle of Black people. Then qualified Black leaders could assess responses from candidates and determine which one should be supported by the Black bloc. Rather than voting for a particular party, Black people would vote for their special interests. Moreover, the NOI’s anti-electoral politics notwithstanding, Malcolm had openly expressed this view as early as 1957 all the way up to the final months of his life.

Thus, it is understandable, in some sense, that numerous scholars have interpreted these comments at face value. Although Malcolm had articulated on numerous occasions his view that Black people could not obtain liberation through working within the system, many scholars have not applied a more creative interpretive approach to better understand and reconcile Malcolm’s presentation of the ballot as an actual option for Black liberation. For example, both Sawyer and Eugene Wolfenstein contended that Malcolm saw the ballot as an effective path for Black people. Moreover, Robert Franklin believed that “[b]y urging to register and vote, he [Malcolm] was embracing another conventional civil rights strategy for change. This posture was a far cry from the condemning prophet of Temple Number Seven in Harlem, who, years earlier, had urged blacks to withdraw from participating in American politics.”

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531 To keep a smooth flow of my argument here, I will offer examples of Malcolm’s rejection of Black liberation through the American system below.

532 Sawyer, Black Minded, 199; Wolfenstein, *The Victims of Democracy*, 324.
in the white man’s government.” Thus, for many, along with the other apparent changes in Malcolm’s life [i.e. his departure from the NOI, his conversion to Sunni Islam, his “newfound” openness to white people, etc.] he began to gain more confidence in obtaining change for Black people through nonviolent means. However, an in depth analysis of one of his most famous speeches provides insight on Malcolm’s actual ideas about the effectiveness of the ballot.

**The Ballot or the Bullet: Two Tenable Paths?**

Malcolm’s *The Ballot or the Bullet* speech, delivered on April 3, 1964 (and a second version on April 12, 1964), can be used as a framework to think about his overall view of the potential for nonviolent systemic change. Looking at the “discursive moves” Malcolm made in this speech will provide an important “interpretive key” for understanding the message embedded therein. The contention of this present author is that the message presented by Malcolm in this speech is that violent revolution is the only solution that will free Black people from their oppression in America. The reader will notice, once again, that even in this speech, Malcolm made the argument that a Black bloc vote had the potential of changing the circumstances of Black people in America. Following other scholars mentioned above, one may be tempted to think that Malcolm had faith in the ballot. However, the rest of the speech Malcolm renders the “ballot approach” as ineffective.

For example, he pointed out that although the democrats control the House and the Senate they have not solved the problem for Black people. He went on to say that both liberals and conservatives are in cahoots with one another and playing a political con-game on Black people. In places where Black people were able to vote,

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according to Malcolm, white people simply changed the district lines to render their potential political power ineffective. What one should be aware of is that Malcolm presented the ballot as an option in theory, but then demonstrated throughout the speech how it would never work in practice. His view of the possibility of Black people obtaining freedom through the U.S. system was explicitly expressed nearly two months later when he stated:

You’ll see terrorism that will terrify you... Why will you see them? Because as soon as people realize that it’s impossible for a chicken to produce a duck egg even though they both belong to the same family of foul—a chicken just doesn’t have within its system to produce a duck egg. It can’t do it. It can only produce according to what that particular system was constructed to produce. The system in this country cannot produce freedom for an Afro-American. It is impossible for this system, this economic system, this political system, this social system, this period. It is impossible for this system as it stands to produce freedom right now for the Black man in this country. And if ever a chicken did produce a duck egg, I’m certain you would say it was a revolutionary chicken!

In this analogy, Malcolm is communicating two main ideas. First, he is arguing that it is impossible for the U.S. (i.e. the chicken) to produce freedom for an African American (i.e. produce a duck egg). The explanation he gives is that the U.S. does not have within any aspect of its system the capability to produce freedom for Black people. Although this will be explored in more detail below, it is important to at least bring to reader’s attention that the second concept Malcolm articulated in that quote was a hint for the process he believed would actually be effective for Black liberation.

He warned that people would see “terrorism that will terrify you” once people fully understand the futility for pursuing change within the system. Moreover, at the end of the quote Malcolm argued that it would take a “revolutionary chicken” to produce the

535Ibid., 27-30.
specific egg they desire (i.e. freedom for African Americans). This interpretation allows for more consistency with what Malcolm had continually expressed even after this particular speech.

In fact, just four days after he made the statement quoted above, Malcolm provided, perhaps, indisputable evidence for the current assertion that Malcolm never saw the ballot as a real option. During an interview, Malcolm repeated the chicken and duck egg analogy he had used a few days before and reiterated that the American political system was “absolutely incapable” of providing freedom for Black people.\footnote{Malcolm X, “Robert Penn Warren Interview (June 2, 1964)” in Malcolm X: The Most Complete Collection of Malcolm X Speeches, Debates, and Interviews ever Assembled [Downloaded Online Digital Collection]. Retrieved from: Malcolmxfiles.blogspot.com/2015/02/the-complete-malcolm-x-40-hours-of.html.} He continued stating that even if Black people obtained political maturity and tried to begin the process of sweeping out racist politicians from their communities, the system was so corrupt that racists would fight even harder than they were currently fighting the integrationists’ efforts. This led him to answer “no” when his interviewer asked him whether there was any chance for political gains for Black people through political action [i.e. political action within the system].\footnote{Ibid.} What this means is that less than a month after Malcolm was recorded stating that it would be the “ballot or the bullet,” he was explaining, again, that it would be impossible for the former to work.

In fact, as late as December 3, 1964 (just a little over two months before his death) at Oxford University, Malcolm would once again reiterate that Black people were in a situation where they were unable to trust in the legal system because there had been civil rights laws passed that had not been implemented. Going further, he
argued that Black people were being abused simply for trying to get the government to enforce the laws it had passed. Thus, he concluded that people in a context of a society built on laws that cannot enforced those laws to protect them, have a right to resort to any means necessary to obtain justice.\footnote{Malcolm X, “Oxford University (December 3, 1964)” in Malcolm X, \textit{Malcolm X Talks to Young People}, 46-49.} If he still maintained that the changing of laws (working within the system) was ineffective, it should be easy to imagine the alternative “means” Malcolm had in mind when he affirmed them pursuing “any means necessary.” So, why does Malcolm discursively present the ballot as an option if, as this author suggests, Malcolm never believed in the effectiveness of change from within the U.S. system? The reason for Malcolm’s apparent support of the ballot as a viable option for the pursuit of Black freedom was implied in the above quote as well. He argued that “as soon as people realize that it’s impossible” for the system in the U.S. to produce freedom for Black people, then they would begin to take the approach that he already believed was the only effective way. In other words, if Malcolm was going to help lead African Americans to what he perceived as the most effective solution, he would have to patiently and humbly wait alongside them and allow the experience of failure to guide them to his perspective. His approach to accomplish this aim was pragmatic. Sawyer’s work is helpful here when he argued that Malcolm’s “first philosophy” was “goal-related rather than epistemological.”\footnote{Sawyer, \textit{Black Minded}, 14-15.} That is, he privileged the goal more than
the method of success.\textsuperscript{541} Malcolm even said as much on various occasions.\textsuperscript{542} Thus, if you can determine what Malcolm’s goals were, you can more readily make sense of his actions and statements. The interpretive key, then, to this issue can be stated as such:

- Goal = Broader Acceptance for his solution
- How to get broader acceptance of his solution? = Be connected/alongside and respected by Black people \textit{when} their solutions fail.
- How to get connected to broader Black movement and gain their respect? = ?

In short, Malcolm sought to gain the respect and acceptance from the broader movement through diplomacy. He employed what might be described as “tactical cooperation with nonviolent activists” (TCNA). Similar to the complaint some people make, decrying that people mistakenly interpreted the use of nonviolence as a tactic for a philosophical commitment to nonviolence, many who engage with the thought of Malcolm mistakenly interpret his employment of TCNA as proof that he gave philosophical assent to the legitimacy of pursuing Black liberation through the ballot. Although this will be explained further in the next chapter, his goal was to connect with the mainstream Black civil rights movement. So he had to present himself as at least willing to respect them enough to \textit{try} their route.

\textsuperscript{541}Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{542}Malcolm told his listeners on multiple occasions that he would support things that could produce practical results. For more on this, see, Malcolm X, \textit{Answer to Questions at the Militant Labor Forum (April 8, 1964)}, 39; Malcolm X, “‘There’s a Worldwide Revolution Going On (February 15, 1965)” in Malcolm X, \textit{Malcolm X: The Last Speeches}, ed., Bruce Perry (New York: Pathfinder, 1989), 143.
However, it was always his goal to inject his revolutionary philosophy into the larger movement. Malcolm stated multiple times that his aim was to enter into the civil rights movement and provide a reinterpretation of the movement; one quality he would inject is the rejection of nonviolence. Nevertheless, he was keenly aware of the futility of trying to change the direction of the movement from the outside. He stated, “You will not get anywhere by standing on the sideline, saying they’re doing it wrong [i.e. practicing nonviolence]. I spent twelve years doing that in the Black Muslim movement, condemning everybody walking, and at no time were we permitted to get involved to show a better way.”

Again, Malcolm noted that “if I was there with [Martin Luther] King…I’d show him, see, he’s doing it the wrong way [i.e. using nonviolence]—this is the way you do it.” However, the only way he would have been able to “gain a hearing” like that would be by displaying humility and a willingness to try it their way. Support for this claim can also be found in a statement made by Max Stanford, a close associate of Malcolm especially after he left the NOI. Stanford stated: “It was decided that Malcolm would infiltrate the civil rights movement and later transform it into a black revolution.” But ultimately, the goal was to let them see that this path would fail and he would be right there to point them in the subsequent direction of Pan-African revolutionary violence.


545Ibid., 53.

Ultimate/Gradual Solution: Conversion to Islam

While in the NOI and after converting to Sunni Islam, Malcolm saw Islam as the ultimate solution to the dialectic in religion between violence and nonviolence. Because he saw racism as “the earth’s most explosive and pernicious evil” that caused hostility, he believed that Islam was the needed solution. In 1959, while still in the NOI, Malcolm argued that “[t]here is no color prejudice among Moslems, for Islam teaches that all mortals are equal and brothers.” Moreover, in 1963 Malcolm declared that in Islam people are viewed as humans rather than by their race. Thus, it is clear that even prior to his Hajj (ritual pilgrimage to Mecca) where he declared that he was introduced to the racial egalitarianism of Islam, Malcolm had already contended that Islam was a solution to racial antagonism.

However, the full and more mature expression of Malcolm’s belief in the ability of Islam to remove racism was articulated during and after his Hajj in 1964. He explained that while on his pilgrimage experience he had witnessed a display of unity between races that he did not believe was possible. In fact, he asserted that one was unable to distinguish between a king and a beggar; all were equal during this

550 Louis DeCaro, scholar of Malcolm X, also affirmed the claimed that even prior to Malcolm’s Hajj experience, he already believed that Islam was a religion of brotherhood that did not recognize skin color. For more on this, see, Louis A. Decaro, Jr., On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 164.
ritual. This experience caused him to declare, “The only true world solution today is governments guided by true religion—of the spirit. Here in race-torn America, I am convinced that the Islam religion is desperately needed.” He went on and stated, “America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases the race problem from its society.” Thus, one way Islam functioned as a solution between the conflicting views between violence and nonviolence is that it would solve the social problem upon which these debates are depended on. While limitations of such a view will be explored more fully in regard to its tension with the desire for interreligious Pan-African unity, one must also point out that historical evidence does not bare this assumption out. Many scholars have highlighted the reality of anti-Blackness among some Muslims and the involvement of some Muslims in the enslavement of African people. This is not to say that Islamic ideals that might be performed during religious rituals do not encourage the elimination of racism; it is simply to say that Malcolm may have conflated the beauty that a ritual is meant to reflect, with the actualization of the eschatological hope that it may point to.

This critique, however, is perhaps premature. It must be stated that Malcolm recognized that there was a distinction between the theological truths and


social ideals of Islam, and the reality of human beings in society. Less than a week before his death, Malcolm affirmed his belief in orthodox Islam and the unity of all human beings. He went further, however, and stated that he was a realist and recognized that in America, unity is not practiced between humans. Thus, he formed an organization to help eliminate the injustices faced by Black people.\footnote{Malcolm X, “Not Just an American Problem, But a World Problem (February 16, 1965)” in Malcolm X, \textit{The Last Speeches}, 157.} About a week prior to this, he made a similar statement: “It is only being a Muslim which keeps me from seeing people by the color of their skin. This religion teaches brotherhood, but I have to be a realist—I live in America, a society which does not believe in brotherhood in any sense of the term.”\footnote{Malcolm X, “London School of Economics (February 11, 1965)” in Malcolm X, \textit{Malcolm X Talks to Young People}, 53.} One can notice that even during his pilgrimage trip he had already articulated a realization that the theological truths and ritual performances associated with the religion of Islam had to be accompanied by race-conscious actions for Black people to obtain freedom.\footnote{Malcolm X, \textit{The Diary of Malcolm X}, 19.}

While Islam’s racial egalitarian principles may not immediately solve the problem of human racial hostility (and thus, violence), Malcolm still viewed it as offering a different kind of solution. For Malcolm, Islam was the solution to the question of violence because it allowed for the use of violence in certain circumstances. He explained:

\begin{quote}
There is nothing in our book the Koran, that teaches us to suffer peacefully. Our religion teaches us to be intelligent. Be peaceful, be courtesy, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts his hand on you send him to the cemetery. That’s a good religion…an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, and a head for
\end{quote}
Here, Malcolm contended that a “good religion” was one that permitted violent resistance. Islam, then, is that “good religion” because it does not promote nonviolence. In fact, some have persuasively argued that the morality of violent resistance in Islam was, perhaps, the most attractive quality of the religion to Malcolm. That is, because he was convinced that violence was necessary for Black liberation, the subject of violence held a chief position in his religious epistemology. For him, if a religion required nonviolence “to hell with that religion.”

Realistic/Immediate Solution: Pan-African Revolutionary Violence

Responding to the attempt to “Tame” Malcolm in Malcolm X Studies

Making an argument that directly associates Malcolm with revolutionary violence confronts major contradictory hurdles. On the one hand, there is a tendency, throughout American history, to suppress calls for and acts of violent resistance by Black people. Whether it is slave rebellions or the use of armed resistance during the Civil Rights Movement, white people have sought to censor news or information that could potentially incite Black people to violent resistance and conflict with the image of submissiveness they desired to propagate. On the other hand, there has been an attempt to present Black people as potentially dangerous and prone to violence. What should become clear is that neither stereotype was based on reality;

560 Charles Cobb, This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights
they only served the purpose of limiting/controlling the actions of Black people.

Thus, one of the responses to the attempt to present Malcolm X and the NOI as promoting indiscriminate violence toward white people is the softening of some of Malcolm’s more radical views to make him more palatable to the general public. For example, Robert Jenkins asserted that

Indeed, perhaps no phrase has become more synonymous with Malcolm than the frequently expressed ‘self-defense.’ It was largely because of his articulation of it that many during the period of his leadership and thereafter greatly misunderstood Malcolm, falsely labeling him an apostle of violence. But Malcolm, though he often expressed himself in the most threatening language, was hardly an advocate of violence for the sake of violence.561

Based on the quote above, it is evident that scholars who engage with the topic of Malcolm X and violence are speaking into a matrix of a priori assumptions that attempt to invalidate Malcolm’s perspective on violence. One can perceive that the stereotype about Malcolm’s view of violence often functions as an unstated interlocutor being accounted for in the way various scholars address the topic.562

Even Sawyer, who is otherwise insightful, declared that one of the goals of his work was to disrupt what he perceived as a stereotype about Malcolm. He asserted:

“Malcolm X has been, reductively, understood to be a proponent of the employment of violence as an inevitable stage in any practical political project. If nothing else is accomplished with this book, I would hope that it would dismantle categorically that

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Because of this kind of reaction in the scholarship of Malcolm X to the stereotype of the “violent Black man,” it makes the specific argument of this dissertation more controversial.

What separates this current project from many others that have addressed this topic is that the present author has absolutely no concern with the perception of violent Black people by the broader culture. He has addressed the concerns of violence presented by Africana thinkers above, but he will not give a moment of attention to critiques of violence that originate outside of that context. For him, the temptation some have, to accommodate Black radical views for the broader public, is a part of the larger project of censoring the Black radical perspective. The culture has delegitimized violent Black resistance so completely that they can now simply rely on the self-censoring of individuals who hope to discuss Black people and violence. Because this is a Black Studies project, the present author rejects those expectations.

In previous sections, he has argued against utilizing Malcolm’s deployment of TCNA as “proof” that Malcolm believed in an alternative to revolutionary violence. The following section will include a discussion about how Malcolm argued for and defended his belief that Pan-African revolutionary violence was the solution for the problems Africana people faced in the modern world.

Violence is the Solution: Malcolm X in the NOI

In this section and the ones to follow, the author will aim to demonstrate that throughout Malcolm’s public ministry he always advocated for violent resistance in general, and Pan-African revolutionary violence in particular. There is a tendency

Sawyer, Black Minded, 114.
in Malcolm X Studies to point to alleged transformations in Malcolm’s view on numerous issues. This author departs from that inclination and insists the relative consistency of Malcolm’s views pre- and post-Hajj. Thus, he will show that Malcolm’s perspective on revolutionary violence remained consistent during his time in the NOI, after leaving the NOI in 1964, and all the way to his death in 1965.

Even while under, what he would consider, the restraining watch of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm consistently advocated for various forms of violence. For example, in May of 1959, Malcolm was reported as saying that if a Black man is lynched then a white man should be lynched. This was how he understood the principle of an eye for an eye. Moreover, in 1963 at Michigan State University, he spoke approvingly of what he considered as the “new Black man” who believed in retaliatory violence. Malcolm also assured his audience that Muslims believed in self-defense. While Malcolm often referred to Divine violence during his time in the NOI, he also pointed his listeners to the effectiveness of revolutionary violence.

In spite of the fact that Malcolm felt “held in check” while in the NOI, he still found ways to express his affirmation for revolutionary violence. One early indication of Malcolm’s inclination toward revolutionary violence was a trend that he would develop of using principles from the Mau Mau insurrection in Kenya. The Mau Mau were guerilla fighters who were active in the 1950s working to obtain their freedom from British colonialism. According to one of the guerillas named Waruhiu


565 For examples of Malcolm discussing God violently intervening to avenge the enemies of Black people, see Carson, The FBI File, 111, 112, 221; Malcolm X, The Message to the Grass Roots (November 10, 1963), 11; Malcolm X, America’s Gravest Crisis Since the Civil War (October 11, 1963), 75-76; Marable, Malcolm X, 189, 212.
Itote, fighters took part in a sacred ritual where they had to take an oath to give their life as a sacrifice for independence, to be willing to kill a family member if they betrayed the nation, and to willingly “cut off the head of a European or any of our enemies” without shrinking back from fear or cowardice. Moreover, they were promised preservation in heaven with God if they died fighting for independence, but punishment after death if they died as a coward. Thus, Malcolm’s mention of the Mau Mau in 1954, roughly two years after he was released from prison, and his assertion that some of the tactics they used would appear in America seem to present a subtle sympathy for revolutionary violence.

Furthermore, in Malcolm’s final months in the NOI, he once again employed the Mau Mau in a way that appealed to Black people to utilize revolutionary violence. In his Message to the Grass Roots speech, Malcolm instructed his listeners that revolution was inherently violent by using examples from history. However, this was not meant to simply be a history lesson. Malcolm was providing what might be called a “sankofic imperative.” From the Akan tradition, sankofa can be translated as “return and fetch it.” It is the concept of using the past to inform the present. For the author, “sankofic imperative” refers to pointing to historical events

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as a means of commanding certain actions. Malcolm articulated and demonstrated this paradigm when he stated:

Of all our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research. And when you see that you’ve got problems, all you have to do is examine the historic method used all over the world by others who have problems similar to yours. Once you see how they got theirs straight, then you know how you can get yours straight…In Kenya, the Mau Mau were revolutionary…they believed in scorched earth, they knocked everything aside that got in their way…

First notice that Malcolm makes the claim that history is a guide to solving contemporary problems. In fact, once you discover how people in the past have solved their problems, according to Malcolm, then you have the tools to solve similar contemporary problems. Thus, Malcolm’s claim can be placed in the form of an equation:

A. The solution to contemporary problems = the solutions to similar problems in history.

Therefore, if one applies his equation to the specific audience he was referring to, it becomes:

B. The solution to African American problems in 1963 = the solution used by the Mau Mau.

This ultimately interprets to mean:

C. The solution to the problems faced by African Americans in 1963 is to implement revolutionary violence.

Historian, Peniel Joseph, agreed that in Malcolm’s *Message to the Grass Roots* speech he suggested that revolution was the antidote to Black oppression.\(^{572}\) It is also important to point out that less than a month later Malcolm approvingly described the Black revolution as a global fight against white supremacy.\(^{573}\) This was not his first articulation of Pan-African violent revolution. In May 1962, he was reported to have stated that Black people all over the world with different philosophies were uniting to “get rid of the common enemy with white skin.”\(^{574}\) As a result of what has been presented above, the author can conclude that throughout Malcolm’s entire time in the NOI, he envisioned Pan-African revolutionary violence as the solution to Black oppression. It may be assumed, however, that after he converted to Sunni Islam, Malcolm’s view on the solution for Black liberation fluctuated or changed. It is to that consideration we now turn.

**Violence is the Solution: Malcolm X as Sunni Muslim (1964)**

After being suspended in late 1963 and eventually leaving the NOI in early 1964, Malcolm converted to Sunni Islam and continued to view Pan-African revolutionary violence as the solution to the condition Black people found themselves in. Immediately following his departure from the NOI, on various occasions, Malcolm consistently communicated to his audiences that the solution to government dereliction in its ability to protect Black people from racists, was for Black people to

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\(^{574}\) Carson, *The FBI File*, 220.
take up arms and use violence because violence was the only language racists understood.\footnote{Malcolm X, “Statement to Press Conference on the Break from the Nation of Islam (March 12, 1964)” in Malcolm X, Two Speeches, 6; Malcolm X, Answer to Questions at the Militant Labor Forum (April 8, 1964), 53; Malcolm X, The Founding Rally of the OAAU (June 28, 1964),” in Malcolm X, By Any Means Necessary, 65; Malcolm X, The Second Rally of the OAAU (July 5, 1964), 131; Malcolm X, The Homecoming Rally of the OAAU (November 29, 1964), 186; Malcolm X, With Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer (December 20, 1964), 108.} Moreover, he continued to advocate for retaliatory violence and on multiple occasions even went as far as encouraging a fund to be raised for the purpose of paying someone to murder police officers who brutalized Black people.\footnote{Malcolm X, “Speech on Black Revolution (April 8, 1964)” in Malcolm X, Two Speeches, 11; Malcolm X, “At the Audubon (December 13, 1964)” in Malcolm X, Malcolm X Speaks, 104; Malcolm X, With Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer (December 20, 1964), 113; Carson, The FBI File, 320—1.} Additionally, he told his audience at Oxford University in December of 1964 that the solution to end Black oppression is for them to take up arms.\footnote{Malcolm X, Oxford University (December 3, 1964), 50.}

An analysis of his speeches and activities throughout 1964 will demonstrate that Malcolm, once again, used the strategy of the sankofic imperative and his “philosophy in motion” to advocate for revolutionary violence as the solution for Black liberation. In April of 1964 Malcolm pointed to the American Revolutionaries George Washington and Patrick Henry and contented that Black people would be justified to use the same violent approach as Washington and Henry did to obtain independence. In the following month, Malcolm directed his audience’s attention to the revolutionary violence used by the Chinese, Cubans, and Algerians and implied that there examples should be followed in America by Black people.\footnote{Malcolm X, Speech on Black Revolution (April 8, 1964), 13-14; Malcolm X, “The Harlem ‘Hate-Gang’ Scare (May 29, 1964)” in Malcolm X, Malcolm X Speaks, 65-68.} His use of the sankofic imperative is evident when he stated, “The next thing you’ll
see here in America—and please don’t blame it on me when you see it—you will see the same things that have taken place among other people on this earth whose position was parallel to the 22 million Afro-Americans in this country.”579 The imperative is located in Malcolm’s insistence on a parallel of conditions between people in history who had used revolutionary violence with the conditions faced by Black people in 1964. The conditions that caused Algerians to resort to “terrorist-type tactics” to gain their freedom existed in every Black community in America, according to Malcolm.580

An important point to emphasize is that Malcolm’s discourse on the need to implement revolutionary violence was not mere rhetoric. As Angela Davis contented, Malcolm’s invocation of the “bullet” was not merely for oratorical purposes; “Malcolm certainly meant what he said.”581 Events leading to the formation of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) in June of 1964 support this claim. Founding member and leader of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), Max Stanford, pointed out that the organization began working with Malcolm in 1964 and that they suggested that Malcolm should be their spokesman. RAM was organized in Ohio in 1962 and advocated guerilla warfare and mass rebellions. In 1964, Malcolm agreed to be their spokesman, but believed that his affiliation with the group should be kept secret because of the numerous government agencies that had

580 Ibid., 29.
been watching him closely.  

As explained above, Malcolm’s role was to infiltrate the civil rights movement and transform it from the inside. According to Stanford, RAM made preparations for Malcolm to go to the South and join demonstrations. He would continue to be an advocate for the right of self-defense and would be the spokesman for armed defense units that would be developed. To facilitate this process, there was discussion of a new organization to be established. Malcolm desired to name this organization The Afro-American Freedom Fighters or the National Liberation Front. Moreover, he asserted the right for the use of guerilla warfare. However, other nationalists believed that it would be premature to openly expose the group’s aims because it would potentially scare people away. Thus, it was agreed that the new organization would be called the OAAU and would function as the “above-ground” organizational platform connected to “below-ground” guerilla units. Nevertheless, at the founding rally of the new organization, Malcolm again encouraged his audience to take up armed revolution through his insistence that they study how “our African brothers” were obtaining their liberation. This is another example of his use of the sankofic imperative method.

While this will be explored in more detail below, the connections Malcolm made with African leaders were also a part of the attempt to shift the broader movement to armed revolutionary struggle. Stanford added that another task Malcolm

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583 Ibid., 102—3. See also, Sales, From Civil Rights to Black Liberation, 99, 106.

584 Malcolm X, The Founding Rally of the OAAU (June 28, 1964), 60.
took on during his second trip to Africa in 1964 was to secure places for eventual political asylum and military training for groups of potential guerillas.\(^{585}\) While one can only speculate, it is likely no coincidence that while in Egypt at the Organization of African Unity Summit of 1964, Malcolm was allowed to board a large yacht that was reserved for African liberation movement leaders.\(^{586}\)

As hinted at above, a key aspect of Malcolm’s vision of revolutionary violence was a Pan-African coalition. Readers may remember that one of the critiques King directed toward the violent approach to Black liberation was the fact that Black people were a minority in the United States. However, Malcolm’s solution for that problem was Pan-Africanism. He argued that those in power did not want African Americans to unite with continental Africans because if they did they could accomplish anything.\(^{587}\) Thus Malcolm was encouraging African Americans and Africans to see their issues as interconnected and that they should be concerned about one another.\(^{588}\)

Malcolm articulated this Pan-African perspective in detail in an appeal he made to African Heads of State in July of 1964. In a memorandum he submitted to the OAU Summit meeting in 1964, Malcolm asked leaders of African countries to bring the issue of African American oppression before the United Nations to

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\(^{585}\)Stanford, *Revolutionary Action Movement*, 103.


investigate the United States for human rights violations.\textsuperscript{589} Sales provided an insightful critique of the apparent aims of Malcolm that may require a different interpretation of Malcolm’s stated intentions.\textsuperscript{590} Sales argued that it was unlikely that Malcolm’s pursuit of international support from the U.N. would actually be effective because of several factors. First, the majority of African states were not in a position to actually challenge the treatment of African Americans by the U.S. Secondly, even though the U.N. had condemned and called for sanctions against apartheid South Africa, it was ignored and had little impact. Furthermore, the U.S. was a significant funder and host of the U.N. and could block any action that might be directed toward their country.\textsuperscript{591}

These assertions may cause an observer to question the political insight Malcolm possessed. For someone who thought carefully about solutions for African American oppression, it would seem surprising that Malcolm would be unaware of the limitations of his aims highlighted by Sales above. However, there are two alternative interpretations that may account for both the low possibility for success of his U.N. campaign and the careful and critical thinking that is typical of Malcolm. On the one hand, it is possible that Malcolm was using the TCNA approach. In other words, just as Malcolm sought to connect with the broader Civil Rights Movement by cooperating with their nonviolent tactics with the hope of injecting revolutionary

\textsuperscript{589} Malcolm X, \textit{Appeal to African Heads of State (July 17, 1964)}, 76-77.


\textsuperscript{591} Sales, \textit{From Civil Rights to Black Liberation}, 143–4.
violence into the movement, it is possible that Malcolm requested the assistance of African leaders with a petition to the U.N. as a first step to creating relationships and forging a Pan-African unity that he would then seek to transform into their support for a violent revolution in the U.S. It is also possible that the pursuit of the U.N. petition was simply the “above ground” front for underground support for an armed revolutionary struggle.

While some might view the above possibilities as far-fetched, there are indications that the potential interpretations above may not be as implausible as they may first seem. For one, even in Malcolm’s appeal to the Heads of State he referred to African Americans as being defenseless but also ready to retaliate against their oppressors whatever the odds. He also warned that if the African leaders wanted to prevent a world-wide race war, they should recommend that the U.N. investigate the condition of African Americans.\(^{592}\) This last comment might be interpreted in light of what was stated above in regard to Malcolm’s discussion of the ballot or the bullet. It was argued that while Malcolm presented the ballot as an option in theory, he did not believe it would work in practice; that is, he really was presenting the bullet as the only option. Similarly, although he presented the U.N. and a world-wide race war as two possible options, he might have actually been presenting the world-wide race war, or a Pan-African violent revolution as the only real option. This interpretation is strengthened further if one considers that, according to Stanford, it was already settled before Malcolm left that his task was to secure potential places for political asylum and military training for guerillas. This, along with Malcolm’s consistent advocacy of

revolutionary violence, makes it unlikely that Malcolm actually based his hopes on the U.N. transforming the condition of oppression for African Americans.

What can be discerned from the above is that Malcolm did not simply develop an armed revolutionary theory, but he was also preparing to implement an armed revolutionary praxis. Moreover, he was seeking to inject this approach into the broader civil rights movement. If one is tempted to believe that Malcolm moved away from the view of the need to implement revolutionary violence, it must be stated that as late as December 20, 1964, using sankofic imperative, Malcolm told his audience, that included activists from Mississippi, that they should study how the Mau Mau obtained their freedom and then they would know what they needed to do in Mississippi.\textsuperscript{593} Furthermore, there is indication that he continued to encourage support for Pan-African revolutionary violence. He also stated in December, that “I firmly believe in my heart that the day that the Black man takes an uncompromising step and realizes that he’s within his rights, when his own freedom is being jeopardized, to use any means necessary to bring about his freedom or put a halt to that injustice, I don’t think he’ll be by himself.”\textsuperscript{594} Although after this statement he pointed to the potential that some white people might aid Black people, it seems evident, based on what has already been covered, that his ultimate hope (and expectation) was that African people globally would come to their aid.

\textbf{Violence is the Solution: Malcolm X as Sunni Muslim (1965)}

Malcolm was assassinated in February of 1965 and his view of Pan-African

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{593}Malcolm X, \textit{With Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer (December 20, 1964)}, 106.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{594}Malcolm X, \textit{Oxford University (December 3, 1964)}, 45.
revolutionary violence remained consistent throughout that time. In January and February of 1965, Malcolm had the exact same view of violence that he held during his time in the NOI, and immediately following his break with the group. On January 7, Malcolm told a Detroit audience that oppressors would never relent in the face of nonviolence or a loving approach.\(^{595}\) On the 27\(^{th}\) of that month he declared that African Americans were descendants of warriors; the nonviolence and forgiving approaches are aberrations from their African backgrounds. He stated that “we forgave our enemies in those days—after we killed them, we forgave them.”\(^{596}\) In both January and February, Malcolm continued to support self-defense and retaliatory violence.\(^{597}\)

More relevant to for the task of disrupting interpretations that suggest Malcolm relented from his initial statements about violence is his continued reliance on the sankofic imperative and his call for revolutionary violence. On January 24, Malcolm stated that white people had more respect for Native Americans because, unlike Black people, they were not nonviolent.\(^{598}\) Here he pointed to the historical violent resistance of Indigenous people and contented that their response to oppression was more worthy of respect. The imperative is situated in his assertion of the more honorable reaction to oppression: violent resistance. He also implicitly


pointed to the American Revolution when he declared that the “reaction of the black man to oppression will be the same as the reaction of the white man to oppression. The white man will not turn the other cheek when he’s being oppressed.” This is, once again, pointing back to examples in history to justify or direct the way Black people respond to their condition in 1965; through revolutionary violence, as white people have. Furthermore, just like he did in 1954, 1963, and 1964, in January of 1965, Malcolm declared that “I say we need a Mau-Mau and I’ll be the first to join it.” What’s more, just days before his assassination, Malcolm encouraged his listeners to study guerilla warfare. Thus, Malcolm was a supporter of revolutionary violence throughout the entirety of his public ministry. And this was consistently supplemented by a vision of Pan-African support for violent revolution throughout January and February of 1965 as well.

These statements demonstrate that despite the claim about the difficulty of pinpointing Malcolm’s views during his last year, one is able to see a consistent thread in his discourse and actions throughout the entirety of his public ministry. Rather than being fickle on his position of violence, Malcolm always advocated for Pan-African revolutionary violence. Moreover, the evidence presented suggests that he never believed a nonviolent approach to Black liberation would ever work. When Malcolm’s words and deeds are analyzed critically, surface-level readings of his


“advocacy” for voter registration and an U.N. campaign become inadequate. As long as the interpreter is not seeking to “protect” the legacy of Malcolm X from mainstream disapproval, the primary sources provide a clear picture: much to the chagrin of liberals who desire to co-opt the legacy of Malcolm, he saw the U.S. system as completely corrupt and unable to produce Black liberation. Malcolm was an advocate for revolutionary violence and he saw Pan-Africanism as a means to answer the problem of being outnumbered in the U.S.

**Conclusion: Assessing Malcolm's Contribution to an Africana Critical Theory of Religion**

This chapter began with a presentation of Malcolm’s critiques of religion and its relationship to violence. Those criticisms were summarized into three statements that sought to capture his main objections. Following this, the author critically engaged with Africana thinkers on the subject of religion and violence. These were also summarized into seven additional statements. Furthermore, in his construction of the standards for an Africana Critical Theory of Religion related to the question of violence, the author also dialectically adjusted some of the original standards Malcolm offered in light of broader Africana thought. For example, for the first standard, the idea of nonviolence being a “criminal” teaching was discarded based on some of the important contributions of thinkers such as Tutu and King that had to be accounted for. Also, while maintaining the claim that people who use religion to “hold Black people back from militant action” betray the liberation struggle, the possibility of Passive Revolutionary Praxis caused the author to negate the notion of disparaging those who advocate the nonviolent approach. Thus, an Africana Critical Theory of Religion related to violence was constructed. It must now
be determined whether Malcolm provided solutions to the problems/concerns he raised and those raised by representatives of the broader Africana world.

In response to the standard of rejecting a religion that requires nonviolence, the solution Malcolm offered was conversion to Islam. He believed that Islam was a good religion because it did not promote or require nonviolence. This solution, however, is limited to those willing to convert. If one’s religious epistemology requires evidence for the legitimacy of a religion that goes beyond its affirmation of violent resistance, the solution offered here does not account for those further inquiries. This is not to say that Islam does not offer satisfactory answers to other questions that may arise when considering a religion. The author is simply arguing that the solution offered by Malcolm begs the question of religious epistemology. This solution would only work for people who either have already been convinced of the truth claims of Islam, or those who share Malcolm’s almost singular focus on violence as a legitimating factor for a religion.

Malcolm also saw (orthodox) Islam as offering a solution to the search for a religion that allowed for armed militant praxis and was not confined to verbal militancy. Malcolm made a distinction between the NOI and what he saw as orthodox Islam. The former regulated its militancy simply to words of eschatological doom for oppressors. Orthodox Islam, for Malcolm, made space for the use of physical violence in defense of freedom. However, as demonstrated above, there are also a significant amount of Christians who see no conflict with armed resistance for Black liberation and their Christian faith. Thus, rather than limiting the solution to Islam, a more interreligious solution might suggest that Africana people should choose
expressions of any particular faith that allows for revolutionary violence; albeit an expression of Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religions, or other traditions.

While Malcolm began to see the limitations of his condemnation and mocking of advocates of nonviolence, he rarely passed up an opportunity to present a biting criticism of their betrayal. Connecting standard three and nine, Malcolm could not balance the tensions between recognizing their betrayal, while also making space for Passive Revolutionary Praxis. Although he desired to patiently guide people to revolutionary violence, he did not quite reach the point where people like Tutu or Douglass could feel comfortable at one of his speeches. Although Tutu and Douglass sought a nonviolent solution, they both were sympathetic to violent revolutionaries. However, Malcolm’s rhetoric would have potentially alienated Africana figures (especially Douglass) who may have not totally agreed with him, but would have at least supported his movement by not sabotaging it.

Similarly, Malcolm’s critiques of religion and exclusive advocacy of Islam would have made it difficult to satisfy the need highlighted in standard four (Pan-African interreligious alliances). As has been shown, Malcolm continuously advocated for Pan-Africanism as a means of resolving the problem of African Americans using violence in a context of being a minority in the United States. However, this was an area where his theory and praxis did not agree. The theory of Pan-Africanism must be interreligious because of the religious diversity among Africana peoples. Thus, although his criticisms of Christianity provide very important material for this project of constructing a Critical Theory of Religion, it does not create an atmosphere conducive to the unity he purported to have been aiming for.
In regard to the fifth summary principle, although Malcolm might be said to have *allowed for* a temporary nonviolent approach, he did not believe it would be effective. He presented both the Black bloc vote and the campaign to the U.N. as nonviolent attempts to obtain freedom for Black people. However, as explained above, these *temporary approaches* were *provisional* only insomuch as they functioned to convert the broader movement to revolutionary violence. That is, Malcolm’s theory included a temporary nonviolent approach only as a form of pedagogy through experience. If Africana people were already all on board for violent revolution, there would be no temporary respite offered by Malcolm’s theory. Thus, in regard to this standard, Malcolm’s theory falls short; but his praxis [his continual criticisms of advocates of nonviolence notwithstanding] allowed space for temporary nonviolent solutions.

Malcolm consistently satisfied the sixth standard through his descriptions of Islam as allowing for an eye for an eye. Rather than calling its adherents to wait on God to defeat their oppressors in the afterlife, Malcolm asserted that Islam was a religion that supported violent physical retribution. His frequent affirmations that Islam did not pollute his assessment of the real world presented the religion as not depleting militant aggression of its adherents. He stated that he was an orthodox Muslim, but also a realist. Connected to the seventh standard, Malcolm believed that God would come and straighten things out in the future; this, nevertheless, did not become an opiate for him; he remained an advocate of armed struggle.

Malcolm did not offer an adequate solution to the critique about the
perpetual cycle of violence raised in the eighth standard. Because he saw Islam as the only solution to the problem of racial hostility, and the violence it caused, he once again limited the effectiveness of this remedy. This would require a massive conversion of the world’s population. Since he realized that this was unlikely to happen, he simply advocated for revolutionary violence while leaving the question of eventual peace unanswered. The reader, however, must be made aware that there is some room in this standard because it is not stated in an absolute sense. It is qualified by the statement “if time permits.” It might simply be better to admit that oppressed people are often in a situation where they have to choose between solving the world problem of violence or solving their immediate problem of suffering. Because this dilemma places an unfair burden on the oppressed, one might say that it is better to consider this question when you are not suffering.

Finally, Malcolm’s Islamic belief caused him to affirm the equality of all human beings. He declared that Islam taught the brotherhood of all humanity. Satisfying the tenth standard, this influenced Malcolm to reject indiscriminate violence against white people. Rather, he advocated what he called “intelligently directed extremism.” The type of revolution he would support was not one that desired the total destruction of the white race, but the destruction of white people who refused to stop harming Black people. While the interreligious nature of this project won’t allow for a solution that requires adherence to a certain religion, what can be accepted from Malcolm’s solution is the view that all humans are equal and none are invariably evil.

603 Malcolm X, *Oxford University (December 3, 1964)*, 45.
From the above discussion it can be concluded that Malcolm offered some solutions for the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion related to violence. Nevertheless, there is more work to be done. This section should function as a conversation started rather than the end of the discussion on these matters. Other thinkers who engaged with the topic of religion and violence should be consulted and added to the dialogue. However, the author has sought to present the application of his method and provisional solutions to the problems it unearthed.
CHAPTER 4: BETWEEN BANDUNG AND BALKANIZATION: UNITY AS A PROBLEM IN RELIGION

Faced with an enemy with access to, and control over, various technologically advanced weapons of war, one of the most important strategies for the oppressed is to work together as a unit. Throughout Africana history, the value of a unified struggle has been highlighted, but, all too often, the ideal of unity does not materialize. What hinders this unity becoming a reality? Are there social forces or unrealistic expectations that contribute to this failure? These are some of the questions taken up in this chapter.

Although the aim here is not to suggest that Malcolm provided a comprehensive study of unity, it is rather pursuing the more modest assertion by declaring that his discourse presented religion as an important site of analysis for that topic. Because the author has already set out with the task of searching for a solution to the antagonism between religion and revolutionary struggle in the Africana experience, this inquiry about religion and unity is not limited to a general discussion of that tension. Alternatively, the emphasis will be on the effects of religion on a unified Africana revolutionary struggle. Thus, along with presenting the problem(s) Malcolm highlighted on this issue, and the contributions of other Africana thinkers, the author will engage with the discourse on interreligious dialogue, and, in addition to his continued use of Africana Philosophy, he will deploy and weave into his dialectical analysis concerns and concepts from Black Feminists and Afropessimists.
to try to think through the problems and refine the solutions offered.

Malcolm’s Critique of Disunity: The Problem with Religious “Balkanization”

One aspect of Malcolm’s critique was his belief that divisions are sown by oppressors because it is known that disunity enfeebles resistance. Malcolm asserted that European colonizers used the “divide and conquer” tactic on their subjects to keep them separated and weak (The validity of this claim is well documented among scholars of African history). As a result, he warned his listeners that they should not allow their thoughts of Black people to be shaped by others; especially the press. This is dangerous because the same tactic white oppressors used in Africa were being used in the United States to keep Black people divided.

Speaking to a group of youth from McComb, Mississippi, Malcolm instructed them to learn how to think for themselves rather than accepting how others described any particular person. He declared that “if you form the habit of taking what someone else says about a thing without checking it out for yourself, you’ll find that other people will have you hating your friends and loving your enemies.” He continued, “you’ll always be maneuvered into a situation where you are never fighting your actual enemies, where [sic] you will find yourself fighting your own


605 Malcolm X, To Mississippi Youth (December 31, 1964), 137.
These youth were part of a group that was sponsored by the mainstream civil rights organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and came to hear Malcolm speak. Thus, these statements must be read in light of the desire Malcolm had to inject himself (and his philosophy) into the broader movement. What becomes apparent, then, is that Malcolm is appealing to these students to reject attempts by those who aim to present him in a negative light; he is their friend/self.

Riffing on one of the biblical passages that was mentioned in the previous chapter, he not only projects the idea of “loving your enemies” in a negative light, but also “hating your friends.” To him, this is backwards thinking. And it functions intentionally to keep the Black community divided. Rather than encouraging loyalty to other Black people, there is an effort to “maneuver” them into directing that loyalty to white racists.

Giving an example, Malcolm told the story of an encounter he had on an airplane. He stated that about forty minutes into the flight a fellow passenger, who was white, asked him his name. After he told her who he was, she exclaimed that she could not believe he was really Malcolm X. He went on to say that the press had shaped her thinking about him; she had expected something else. Although this was a white lady who was influenced by the image presented of Malcolm in the press, he sought to use this experience to alert them to the danger of the image of Black people that was created by the white controlled press. This example was meant to strengthen his larger message that white people want Black people divided because it

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606 Ibid., 137—8.
607 Malcolm X, See for Yourself (January 1, 1965), 78.
weakens their ability for collective resistance.

Focusing more directly on the issue of religion, Malcolm taught that some religious people and beliefs are so strict they either directly cause divisions, or limit the possibility of unity. He seemed to distinguish this critique from the idea that religion is inherently divisive. To give an example, Malcolm argued that if he sought to engage in the struggle “as a Muslim,” there would be a significant amount of Black Christians who “aren’t broad-minded enough” and would stir up arguments about religion.\(^6\) First notice that his use of the phrase “as a Muslim” is an important aspect of his critique. His statement here would make no sense if he was suggesting that he could not enter the Black freedom struggle with it openly known that he was a Muslim; especially since he had always been open about his commitment to Islam. It seems then, that a better interpretation would be that if his Muslim faith was the leading grammar in his interactions with Black people as he sought to build coalitions, it would hinder his effectiveness.

However, Malcolm believed that his religion would create a problem with others because they are narrow-minded. That is the implication of his comment of some not being “broad-minded enough.” In other words, it was not religion that was the problem, per se, but Malcolm contended that religious people who allow faith differences to hinder unity are parochial. Therefore, a religion that dissuades Black unity should be rejected. This critique was not limited to Black Christians, however.

Malcolm criticized expressions of Islam that hindered Black unity. Announcing his departure from the NOI, Malcolm explained to the press that he did

\(^6\)Ibid., 95.
not “leave of my own free will.” Rather, it was internal differences and inflexibility “within the Nation of Islam [that] forced me out of it.” As noted in the previous chapter, the intransigence Malcolm highlighted here is in reference to Muhammad “holding them in check” from participating in the broader movement and utilizing retaliatory violence. It is, then, this religious dogmatism that was the source of his separation from the group. Thus, the religious dogmatism of the NOI not only divided its members from unifying with Black people in the larger movement, it eventually divided some of its members, including Malcolm, from its own group. As a result, it can be said that Malcolm believed that a religion that does not leave room for interreligious Black unity is inadequate.

Similarly, Malcolm pointed out how a stiff and intractable focus on theology can distract people from the moral imperative to come to the aid of suffering people and join them in their struggle for liberation. While Malcolm was still in the NOI, a questioner who was presumably an Egyptian Muslim, asked Malcolm questions about the theology of the group. Malcolm seemed to detect that these questions were actually meant to be criticisms from an “orthodox” Muslim’s perspective. Responding to his critic, Malcolm asserted that Muslims from areas that are often viewed as the traditional lands of Islam (Middle East and North Africa), must appreciate the unique challenges faced by African Americans. Moreover, he contended that “when you see us being chased by a dog, the best thing for you to do is wait until the dog stops chasing us and then ask us some questions. Especially when you should have come a long time ago and helped your little brothers whip the

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What he intimates here can be viewed as an argument about priority. He suggested that it is wrong to be consumed with the theological conformity of a suffering people. That is, for Malcolm, the type of unity that would require intervention on behalf of Black people was being neglected by “orthodox” Muslims based on distinctions in theological teachings. Once again, Malcolm showed that he was aware of the potential of certain aspects of religion to stifle unity.

However, Malcolm’s critique of this aspect of “orthodox” Islam would continue after his conversion to that expression of the faith up until his death. Malcolm would consistently receive pressure from “orthodox” Muslims because of his zealous commitment to Black liberation. Many of them saw Malcolm as an opportune vehicle to spread their version of Islam in the United States but viewed his continued dedication to Black liberation as a stumbling block. For example, according to DeCaro, Malcolm’s “desire to contextualize it [principles of the Qur’an] in the case of the black struggle…was a tender issue.” That is, “it seems that certain Muslim officials were put off by Malcolm’s image as a ‘violent’ revolutionist…and his continued commitment to the black struggle in the United States.” The disconnect some non-Black “orthodox” Muslims had with the reality of African American Muslims’ unity with the larger Black community for its liberation stems from a lack of awareness of the unique circumstances they face, according to Aminah McCloud. Unlike its arrival among other peoples with established cultures, Islam

\[610\text{Malcolm X, Twenty Million Black People (January 23, 1963), 47.}\]
\[611\text{DeCaro, On the Side of My People, 242.}\]
\[612\text{Ibid., 249. Also see Ibid., 250, 254.}\]
among African Americans did not come to a people with a secure nationhood. For this reason, there has been a dialectical tension that tended to emphasize nation building over a commitment to the universal vision of Islam and the global Muslim community. In McCloud’s estimation, “this tension is dramatized most explicitly in the life of Malcolm X.”

Knowing this context helps facilitate a more accurate interpretation of Malcolm’s frequent declarations throughout his last year of life that no religion could cause him to ignore the particular plight of African Americans. For example, he argued that

No religion will ever make me forget the condition of our people in this country. No religion will ever make me forget the continued fighting with dogs against our people in this country. No religion will make me forget the police clubs that come up side our heads. No God, no religion, no nothing will make me forget it until it stops, until it’s finished, until it’s eliminated.

Thus, these and other similar pronouncements are likely indirect jabs toward his “orthodox” Muslim critics. In effect, he subtly communicated that a religion that did not permit a Black-focused revolutionary agenda was deficient.

In answers he provided for one of his last interviews before his assassination, Malcolm addressed this issue head on. He was questioned by a Muslim inquiring why a man of his intellect and global vision would maintain a focus on race after breaking away from the NOI. The interviewer claimed that Islam confirmed the

614 Ibid., 5.
“ethnological oneness and quality of all races.”\textsuperscript{616} In his response, Malcolm’s critical theory of religion in regard to Black unity is laid bare. He stated that “[a]s a Black American I do feel that my first responsibility is to my twenty-two million fellow Black Americans who suffer the same indignities because of their color as I do. I don’t believe my own personal problem is ever solved until the problem is solved for all twenty-two million of us.”\textsuperscript{617} He went on to say that the Muslim world ignored the problems faced by Black people in the United States.\textsuperscript{618} Here he proclaimed that the egalitarian ideals of Islam would not cause him to divorce himself from the Black struggle. Although Malcolm did not reject, in principle, the need to eventually unite with all, including white people, he was adamant that Black unity had to come first.\textsuperscript{619}

Moreover, he contrasted his own commitment to remaining unified with Black people to what he saw as the Muslim world’s indifference to Black suffering. This undying commitment may have been best expressed when he asserted that “No matter how much respect, no matter how much recognition whites show toward me, as far as I am concerned, as long as the same respect and recognition is not shown toward every one of our people in this country, it doesn’t exist for me.”\textsuperscript{620} In short, “unity” may not be an adequate word to describe Malcolm’s perception of his


\textsuperscript{617}Ibid., 101—2.

\textsuperscript{618}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{619}Malcolm X, \textit{Harlem ‘Hate-Gang’ Scare (May 29, 1964)}, 70. See also, Breitman, \textit{The Last Year of Malcolm X}, 49-50.

relationship to other Black people. It may be better to use the term “oneness.” On a
certain level, Malcolm could not conceive of himself as a separate entity distinct from
other Black people. This level of intimacy with his race made any religious doctrine
that sought to excise him from Black people anathema.

A final element covered here that reflected the tendency of dogmatic
religious people to be divisive, according to Malcolm, was their envious response to
proselytism. He noted that people get nervous if they believe that you are trying to
draw members out of their organization. Therefore, the very act of seeking converts is
something that will potentially make some people jealous and cause divisions and
prevent broad base coalitions.\textsuperscript{621}

Thus far, readers have been exposed to Malcolm’s discourse on the issue of
unity. The current task to construct an Africana Critical Theory of Religion requires
that his thoughts be distilled into summary statements that allow for subsequent steps
of analysis. The standards that can be retrieved from Malcolm are as follows:

1. A religion should allow for vigilance toward the ways oppressors
   manipulate and exasperate divisions.
2. A religion that dissuades Black unity should be rejected.
3. Religious proselytism is a potential hindrance to Black unity.

These are important elements to the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of
Religion as it relates to the issue of unity. Malcolm maintained a general suspicion of
those in power and particularly their use of the press to shape the perception of its
consumers. If a revolutionary struggle will be waged, participants must be aware of

\textsuperscript{621}Malcolm X, \textit{The Ballot or the Bullet (April 3, 1964)}, 40-41.
the tactics used by their oppressors. Malcolm was also aware of the way that zeal for doctrinal fidelity can discourage interreligious cooperation. Moreover, he saw himself as united to the Black community in such an intimate way that he refused to allow his religion to separate him from his people and their struggle. Finally, Malcolm noticed the way envy could sabotage the pursuit of unity. When religious groups see themselves as in competition with one another, the notion of recruiting new members becomes an area of tension in regard to unity. Any solutions to the tension between religion and Black unity must take these principles into consideration. In the following section, the author will present the insights from Africana activist-intellectuals who will add to and refine what has been already articulated. After a complete list of standards is constructed, the author will then return back to the thought of Malcolm X to see whether his solutions are adequate or if they need to be stretched or improved.

**Africana Voices on Unity**

**From the Continent**

The earliest thinker that will be considered in this section is the Muslim leader Uthman Dan Fodio (d. 1817). Heavily influenced by the militant Maliki jurist, Abd al-Karim al-Maghili (d. A.D. 1505), in 1794 Dan Fodio claimed to have experienced a vision where he was enturbaned and given the ‘sword of truth’ to use against the enemies of Allah by an important Sufi leader in the presence of the Prophet Muhammad. This led him to carry out a *jihad* from 1804-1810 to purify

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622 Al-Maghili’s militancy can be established by considering categories of three groups of people he determined could be targeted with *jihad*: unbelievers, apostates, and professed Muslims who live like unbelievers. He also believed that a *jihad* against an oppressive Muslim ruler was permissible.
was a collective obligation for every able-bodied male.\textsuperscript{624} Providing more
clarification, Dan Fodio stated that “To make war upon the heathen king who will not
say ‘There is no God but Allah’ is obligatory by assent, and that to take the
government away from him is obligatory by assent.”\textsuperscript{625} Even more, however, he
declared that it was an obligation for Muslims to fight a jihad against a king who does
not practice a pure version of Islam.\textsuperscript{626} Thus, for Dan Fodio, it was inappropriate for a
Muslim to consistently submit to a non-Muslim ruler. While it seems clear that there
could be no interreligious unity among Africana peoples if they followed the precepts
of Dan Fodio, however, it is important to know whether he allowed unity to be forged
with religiously diverse Africana people under Muslim leadership?

Dan Fodio rejected all forms of genuine interreligious unity. He asserted
that the only type of friendship with unbelievers that is permitted is friendship with
the tongue, but not friendship of the heart. He went as far to say that they should be
thought of badly and must be fought unless they pay for protected status under

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\textsuperscript{624}Uthman Dan Fodio, \textit{Handbook on Islam}, trans., Aisha Bewley (Granada: Madinah
Press, 2004), 100—1.


\textsuperscript{626}Ibid.
Muslim rule.\textsuperscript{627} If however, the Muslim is under a non-Muslim ruler, and it is presumably imprudent to fight, then flight is obligatory.\textsuperscript{628} This expression of religion seems to be counter-intuitive to the project of interreligious unity among people of African descent. For Dan Fodio, Africana Christians, adherents to traditional religions, and what he perceived as unorthodox Muslims should be fought. Although his perspective seems void of any helpful principles, one aspect of his view might be used if modified.

While, perhaps, doing violence to Dan Fodio’s position, the author detects the seed of what might be called “strategic temporary allegiance.” The author will put forward an argument below that, in light of PRI, there may be times when temporary strategic conformity is not settling for partial liberation, but being realistic about a workable path toward liberation. In other words, there may be surface-level compromises that must be made to push one’s internal agenda forward. Minorities oppressed by a majority are in greater need for complete unity among its members if they want to obtain liberation. Thus, in the most cynical circumstances\textsuperscript{629} where there seems to be unending intragroup oppression, a subset of that group may determine, similar to what Dan Fodio stated, to peacefully collaborate with, perhaps, irredeemably oppressive people within your group, only to deal with them after the larger/more powerful enemy has been destroyed.

\textsuperscript{627} Dan Fodio, \textit{Handbook on Islam}, 96-98.

\textsuperscript{628} Dan Fodio, \textit{The Wathiqat Ahl Al Sudan}, 240.

\textsuperscript{629} I say “cynical circumstance” here to refer to the worst case scenario. I personally believe that a significant amount of Black people can be imperfect, but genuine partners in the struggle. Yet, if a group of Black people will present problems in the aftermath of the revolution, then it may be permissible to allow their assistance in defeating the world dominance of white supremacy and then destroying them. More will be said about this perspective below.
Ahmed Sekou Toure (d. 1984) was the first president of the Republic of Guinea and was aware of the importance of unity for a liberation struggle. He declared that the strength of the Democratic Party of Guinea (P.D.G) was the fact that it united Muslims, Christians and animists. Further, it was able to mobilize those who spoke Foul, Soussou, Toma, Guerze, Baga, and Malinke who were all seeking the same goal. Describing the nation’s path to independence, Toure intimated that groups “and classes of society, in close-knit solidarity, acted and reacted in unison. Religious and lay persons, workers and farmers, businesses and consumers, all victims of the same oppression, ensured their salvation in a patriotic communion which consecrated a hard-won and long awaited victory.” Notice that he identified various groups among the colonized as “victims of the same oppression.” The logic he seemed to be presenting was that their recognition of a common experience of oppression was correlated to their unity and victory.

Consequently, he pointed to two specific dangers to national unity; one external and one internal to the people. One threat to unity was the fact that colonial agents waged an external attack with the desire to divide the people. For him, imperialists were vigilantly searching for a means to cause a rift among the people so they could disrupt the Guinean revolution. This was a continual danger imposed from the outside and revolutionaries must be cognizant of such, he thought.

A related issue Toure cautioned his readers about was the trap of

631 Ibid., 143.
632 Ibid., 60, 159.
emphasizing overly specific identities that would cause sub-groups to form among themselves. If these sub-groups form, tensions between them and the broader collective might result in isolated attempts for liberation that only include a subset of the nation. He explained that all “doctrines of isolation or of cultural multiplicity, be they the result of arrogant feelings of superiority or of unacceptable group egoism conceal a vital fault which will cause the downfall of the isolated particle.”

Providing a specific example, Toure contented that liberation from foreign domination must precede the social liberation of women. He believed that as circumstances improved for the collective as a whole, the conditions of women would improve as well. If nothing else, according to Toure, it should be recognized that isolated action carried out by subgroups, “even if it is valid, is never superior to joint action and team work.” For this reason, there must be a “militant awareness” among revolutionaries about the various potential threats to unity so an “impenetrable barrier” would be erected “against…all the attempts at subversion, division, deception and corruption on the part of the imperialists and their lackeys...”

While a more critical evaluation will be taken up later, it is important to highlight here that this perspective would be viewed as lacking among some Black feminists and Black LGBTQ scholars. They would view his critique on the formation of subgroups robbing them of their ability to organize around their unique collective

633 Ibid., 455.
634 Ibid., 266, 269-270.
635 Ibid., 163. Nkrumah also stated that “In our war, isolation is one of the greatest dangers. See, Nkrumah, Handbook on Revolutionary Warfare, 56.
636 Ibid., 280—1.
agency. Furthermore, many Black feminists would not approve of his suggestion that women’s liberation should receive more attention after independence from colonialism.\footnote{I am using the acronym LGBTQ to refer to Black people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/sexual, or Queer/Quare. A theorist that will be covered below places a finer point on the perspective presented by Toure. For that reason, I will provide a more critical evaluation of this form of argument elsewhere.} It is important to state that Toure also asserted that African liberation is “not effective unless it brings about liberation of African women.”\footnote{Toure, \textit{Africa on the Move}, 262.} Nevertheless, his view remains controversial. However, if nothing else, Toure pointed to the need for an Africana Critical Theory of Religion to have a standard on unity that requires a revolutionary awareness to both external and internal threats to unity.

A central figure in the 1954 founding of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), Amilcar Cabral, provided an intellectual corpus that is deeply significant. He argued that Africans in Guinea and Cape Verde were colonized with ease because they were divided. Moreover, colonizers stirred up hatred and spread lies in order to weaken the strength of anti-colonial resistance through divisions.\footnote{Amilcar Cabral, “Armed Resistance” in Amilcar Cabral, \textit{Resistance and Decolonization} (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd., 2016), 144; Amilcar Cabral, “The eighth year of armed struggle for national liberation” in Amilcar Cabral, \textit{Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings of Amilcar Cabral} (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 188; Mazrui and Tidy, \textit{Nationalism in the New States in Africa}, 138.} One way they did this was by promoting the celebration of ethnic distinctions.

According to Cabral, colonists favor separation and conflict between ethnicities to divide and conquer their colonial subjects. A lengthy statement from Cabral brings this issue in full view:

\begin{quote}
Lately the Portuguese colonialists have resorted to another tactic to try to stop
\end{quote}
our struggle: dividing the people and setting Africans to fight against Africans. It is an old and much used tactic, both by colonialists and in imperialist colonial wars, but we must denounce it and fight it energetically, so that this new criminal initiative by the enemy results in a telling defeat. The colonialists invented what they call the ‘ethnic congresses’ for our country. Their aim is to win over some of our brothers with appointments as chiefs and with honours, but above all to destroy the awareness and national unity which our Party and struggle have already created. By holding the so-called ‘ethnic congresses’ and promising that each ethnic group should have its own chief, the colonialists are seeking to stir up once more tribal feelings we have already extinguished.  

Similar to Toure, Cabral insightfully argued that sometimes, what seems to be the encouragement and celebration of unique intragroup identities is actually an attempt by the oppressor to create divisions among dominated subjects. For him, colonizers skillfully played on the human inclination to elevate their unique demands to the center as a way to obstruct the pursuit of broader shared demands from a larger collective.

Consequently, Cabral suggested for a successful liberation struggle, a form of unity that would eliminate intragroup differences was necessary. The bond of unity, therefore, would have to come at a national level rather than an ethnic level. He desired for the people to unite together as if they were one individual.  

Describing this one-ness, he stated, “Ten years ago, we were Fula, Mandjak, Mandinka, Balante, Pepel, and others. Now we are a nation of Guineans...During these ten years we were making more and more changes, so that today we can see that there is a new man and a new woman, born with our new nation and because of our fight. This is because of


\[\text{641}\] Amilcar Cabral, “Cultural Resistance” in Cabral, Resistance and Decolonization, 121, 123.
our ability to fight as a nation.”642 In other words, the experience of anti-colonial revolutionary struggle led Africans of various unique identities to see themselves differently. Prior to the violent revolutionary struggle, locals had the convenience of individual self-expression that highlighted some of the individual’s most immediate attributes; yet, the revolution taught them that they needed to subsume themselves into a broader category more conducive for obtaining independence. They no longer focused on their intragroup identities that would distinguish them from others; rather they saw themselves as a part of a broader collective. Nevertheless, this national unity was not universal for Cabral. For example, he believed that national unity was meant to combat the enemy, but there was also a need to struggle against traitors, opportunists, liars, thieves, or anyone immoral.643 This is an important caveat to the significance Cabral placed on unity. It may be accurate to assert that for him, national unity did not include harmful individuals.

With the above limit notwithstanding, Cabral still believed there had to be compromises made because there was strength in numbers. For him, “the first step of political resistance is to join together the maximum number of people possible for the struggle.”644 Thus, if, as he stated, the most important objective of political resistance is to recruit allies, then there had to be a praxis of unity that did not require personal individual conformity to one’s standards and beliefs.645 For example, Cabral believed

643 Amilcar Cabral, “Political Resistance” in Cabral, Resistance and Decolonization, 80.
644 Ibid., 82.
645 Cabral, Political Resistance, 83.
that certain religious rules and taboos (which included the subordination of women) should be rejected because they hindered the liberation struggle. Moreover, he declared that Guineans needed to develop beyond the belief that religion could aid in war. Even so, he described compromises that he had to make for unity with religious people: “One of the great Vietnamese leaders said that they had to accept their peoples’ amulets in order to lead the struggle. With those who scratch their heads, we also have to think before we do anything with them. We participated in ceremonies with them, but with the certainty that it was wrong—we only need to encourage such things rationally to avoid misfortunes.”

What he conveyed is an understanding that in broad-based coalitions it is required for one to accept that all of their standards will not be satisfied. While he believed that religion was of no use to the liberation struggle, he argued for an embrace of what he saw as both a waste of time and a potential threat in order to maintain unity in the liberation struggle.

Cabral presented an important contribution to the erection of an Africana Critical Theory of religion and unity (i.e. interreligious unity). What he offered can be summarized in two points. First, unity must be developed by emphasizing a broad-based identity rather than intragroup identities. As stated above, the value of this concept is contested among some Black scholars and the author has yet to delineate and dialectically engage with those arguments. Thus, it is not clear yet whether this principle should be adopted. However, his second principle that declared that a praxis of unity requires freedom of (religious) belief can immediately be accepted at this time.

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647 Cabral, *Cultural Resistance*, 120.
point. Although it conflicts with Dan Fodio, Cabral’s perspective on this point seems more consistent with the goals of this project.

Biko was another theorist who was suspicious of Black people organizing around subgroup identities within the Black struggle. He taught that subgroup identity movements in South Africa were “deliberate creations by the Nationalist government to contain the political aspirations of the black people and to give them pseudo-political platforms to direct their attention to.”

Explaining further, he asserted that these subgroup movements of Xhosas, Zulus, and Coloureds were being maneuvered into a fragmented politics and “in the meantime the enemy bestrides South Africa like a colossus laughing aloud at the fragmented attempts by the powerless masses making appeals to his deaf ears.” Thus, Biko perceived that white South Africans could simultaneously undermine Black resistance to their rule, while on the surface supporting the individual agency of various ethnic identity groups in the country. He presented it as oppressors offering the oppressed certain “freedoms” and “gains” as bait to emphasize differences among them and stir up division; weakening the struggle.

Rather than fall for this strategy, Biko encouraged South Africans to view themselves as a combined whole and direct their resistance to a common enemy. Anyone who desired to disrupt that unity was to be rejected. Moreover, he desired that all resistance organizations would form one liberation group that would be able

\[\text{648} \text{Biko, } \text{Our Strategy for Liberation}, \text{ 146.}\]
\[\text{649} \text{Biko, } \text{Fragmentation of the Black Resistance}, \text{ 36.}\]
\[\text{650} \text{Ibid., 38-39.}\]
\[\text{651} \text{Biko, } \text{Our Strategy for Liberation}, \text{ 146—7.}\]
to obtain greater results. Biko thus joins the list of theorist-practitioners who viewed the formation of subgroups among Black people as falling into the hands of the oppressors’ trap to divide and rule.

Focusing more directly on the issue of religion, Tutu asserted that claims to exclusive truth in religion caused divisions. Although religion should promote unity and peace, it has often done the complete opposite; fueling alienation, conflict, intolerance, and oppression. This is caused by some people who believe they have a monopoly on God, according to Tutu. He went on to say that people are afraid of religious diversity. Rather, humans have tended to create God in their own image and project their own narrowness and exclusivity on to the Divine.

To avoid such religious hostilities, one should adopt an inclusive view of religion. Articulating this position, Tutu suggested that religious adherence was simply a matter of “the accidents of birth and geography.” If one was born in Pakistan, there is a good chance they would be Muslim; in India, they would be a Hindu. This reality should influence people to be less dogmatic about something that fate decided for them. He then went on to say “God can’t want people to be Christians and then seem to punish them for their failure. Such a God is too perverse for me to want to worship him. I am glad that the God I worship is other than this.”

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652 Ibid., 148.
654 Ibid., 8.
655 Ibid., 6.
656 Ibid., 16. See also Ibid., 6.
A God that rejects Gandhi and is exclusive to only Christians, for Tutu, would be too small and blasphemous. For these reasons, Tutu proclaimed that God is not a Christian. “His concern is for all his children.”

Therefore, because exclusive forms of religion divide people, Tutu suggested that a true pursuit of unity required one to adopt an inclusive understanding of religion that viewed God as approving all forms of worship or relation to the Divine. He stated, “Now, my brothers and sisters, my dear children, let us not allow the enemy to divide us. The enemy is doing everything to divide us. We must not allow the enemy to come between us.” This required not only that people would be willing to recognize that believers of one faith could learn from a person of another faith, but also that they would willingly accept allies from people of any faith. Some people have accepted the idea that those who differ from them are their enemies. However, according to him, he has “been able to walk arm in arm with adherents of other faiths in the cause of justice and freedom…” This perspective is encapsulated in a comment he made when he stated “[s]omeone once said that when you have fallen into a well and a hand is stretched out to pull you out, you don’t ask for their credentials. You grab that hand joyfully.” In other words, in a revolutionary moment, what a person believes is not as important as how they act. A person may

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657 Ibid., 7-8, 14.
658 Ibid., 12.
659 Desmond Tutu, “We Must Turn the Spotlight on Ourselves: On Hatred, Revenge, and the Culture of Violence [Pastoral Visit to Sebokeng (1990)]” in Tutu, God is Not a Christian, 168.
660 Tutu, God is Clearly Not a Christian, 6, 18, 19. See also, Tutu, We Must Turn the Spotlight on Ourselves, 170
661 Tutu, You Don’t Reform a Frankenstein (1985), 100.
hold to beliefs that may be abhorrent, but if they actually assist in the liberation of Africana people, then we can join hands with them in the struggle.

Tutu highlighted the importance of religion in regard to unity. The most important intervention he made for the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion and unity is the assertion that what someone does is more important than what they believe. Put differently, unity in the revolutionary struggle must be based on a person’s willingness to assist the struggle rather than their personal beliefs about religion (or other matters). However, although a significant amount of other scholars agree with Tutu that exclusive truth claims about religion are arrogant, narrow, and has often caused violence, his notion that an adoption of religious inclusivism is necessary for unity presents some philosophical assumptions that might hinder unity itself.662

To explicate the point above, it will be useful to reflect on the notion of interreligious collaboration through the rubric of interreligious dialogue. According to Timothy Tennent, interreligious dialogue is not truly interreligious if it demands adherence to religious relativism. For him, the literature on dialogue between people of different religions frequently required participants to relinquish the truth claims of their faith commitments as a prerequisite of genuine dialogue.663 He then queried: “[h]ow can one have genuine dialogue without a faith commitment? How can


interfaith dialogue exist without faith?" In other words, interreligious dialogue, for many [including Tutu] is predicated on one’s actual commitment to religious relativism rather than to any particular religion. The author’s task, at this point, is not necessarily to suggest that relativism is wrong, but to expose the unstated assumptions that must be substantiated rather than assumed.

The claim of religious relativism is itself an exclusive truth claim. For example, Charles Kimball stated that although “people in all religious traditions may wish to know all of God’s truth, none of us can make such a claim. We do not possess the mind of God.” He went on to state, “I believe absolute truth exists, I believe it rest with God, however, and not with human beings.” Yet, there are numerous presuppositions within these comments. If one sets aside the fact that this view presupposes the existence of a God, and thus, conflicts with non-theistic religions such as Buddhism, Kimball also makes the assumption that there is a personal God that has the ability to possess knowledge. Furthermore, he declared that this personal God has access to absolute truth that humans do not enjoy. But these statements beg the questions: How does he know these things? Are these not truth claims that conflict with religions that believe that the Divine is impersonal? The point here is simply to demonstrate that before one can demand religious relativism they would need to present an argument that the Divine has not revealed the Divine-Self to any human beings. This is necessary because part of the argument of religious relativism

664Ibid., 14.
666Ibid., 117.
is that a person is arrogant to suggest that they have some special access to or about the Divine that justifies their exclusive truth claim about this Being. Ironically, however, the religious relativist is also claiming the same thing; namely that they know that the Divine has not declared one religion as the only true religion. Thus, by its own standards, this aspect of religious relativism is arrogant, narrow, and just as dogmatic as one who claims something different about the Divine.

It must be understood that people often dogmatically rail against religious dogmatism and exclusivity with exclusive claims of truth. This conundrum cannot be avoided, however, because, as African philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, has explained, “Humans cannot live by particulars or universals alone, but by some combination of both.”

For him, all human communication (especially, but not limited to intercultural communication) and the very act of thinking itself presupposes some universal truths. He explained:

the objectivity of meanings is absolutely essential to the possibility of communication, for if meanings were subjective, that is to say, if they depended irregularly on the peculiarities of individuals, there could be no conventions, no socially established rules, correlating symbols to meanings. Accordingly, no one could converse with anyone else. Worse, no one could converse with himself or herself, for any kind of conversation at all presupposes syntactical and semantic rules which if they are available to any one individual, would argue the existence of regularities of which others, too, could, in principle, avail themselves for the purpose of communication. Indeed, if meanings were subjective, thinking would be impossible, for what has been said about conversing with oneself applies to thinking itself. A thought is a conceptual construct. And such construction is impossible except in accordance with a certain minimum of rules, and a rule is the very antithesis of subjectivity.


668 Ibid., 21.

669 Ibid., 14.
One such universal rule/truth is what he called the Principle of Noncontradiction. That is, “to recognize something as an X is to perceive it as X rather than a non-X, which implies that it is not both X and non X.” Moreover, rather than this being a “Western” concept, Wiredu stated that the ability to distinguish X from non-X is fundamental to what it means to be a human. However, this flies in the face of the type of religious relativism expressed above because it forces one to accept the premise that statements such as “God is X” and “God is non-X” are both equally valid. It seems that the only way out of this tension is to appeal to agnosticism. But, once a person appeals to religious agnosticism (i.e. the idea that truth about the Divine or whether there is a Divine is unknowable) they can no longer affirm religious relativism because that view holds to a truth claim about the Divine. For these reasons, an Africana Critical Theory of Religion cannot rest on the standard that unity requires the forgoing of exclusive religious truth claims and the adoption of religious relativism.

Perhaps, one of the most important interventions in the discussion of unity was presented by Sankara with his demand that African unity must consist of true unity that reflected the equal partnership of African men and women. It must first be stated that he seemed to believe that unity was something that would be developed in combat. Furthermore, he argued that the “goal of the revolution is not to scatter

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670 Ibid., 22.
671 Ibid., 23.
revolutionaries. The goal of the revolution is to consolidate our ranks.” He did not have the illusion that revolutionaries would be able to immediately have complete unity; this, he believed, would come about through the struggle itself. He also recognized the responsibility not to create divisions among the people. Consequently, it should be apparent that he understood the importance of unity for revolutionary praxis.

Nevertheless, he made women’s equality a priority in his vision for the revolutionary struggle. He declared that he spoke on behalf of women suffering from the exploitation of men. Moreover, he declared that he was open to any suggestions that would help him assist in the full liberation of Burkinabe women. For him, a people could not have a truly triumphant or authentic revolution if women are not authentically emancipated as well. As a result, he taught that revolutionaries had the responsibility for gaining a familiarity with the holistic concerns of women. Going further, he explained that the revolutionary need for unity does not justify ignoring unique forms of oppression among the people:

Woman’s fate is bound up with that of the exploited male. This interdependence arises from the exploitation that both men and women suffer, exploitation that binds them together historically. This should not, however, make us lose sight of the specific reality of women’s situation. The conditions of their lives are determined by more than economic factors, and they show that women are victims of a specific oppression. The specific character of this oppression cannot be explained away by equating different situations through superficial and childish simplifications. It is true that both the woman and male worker are condemned to silence by their exploitation. But under the current system, the worker’s wife is also condemned to silence by her worker-husband. In other words, in addition to the class exploitation common to both of them, women

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Ibid., 443.

Sankara, *Freedom must be conquered (October 4, 1984)*, 170.

must confront a particular set of relations that exist between them and men, relations of conflict and violence that use physical differences as their pretext.  

While Sankara was able to acknowledge that the fate of the people was wrapped up in one another (both men and women), he did not believe this justified the exclusion of a consideration of intra-group harm. He demonstrated that the liberation of African states and the liberation of African women were not mutually exclusive. That is, one can see unity as essential for revolution while simultaneously giving attention to the specific concerns of women.

Presenting a distinct emphasis from some of the previous theorist-practitioners, Sankara’s attention to internal group concerns must be a central component to consider for an Africana Critical Theory of Religion and unity. While a fuller discussion will be presented below, it is appropriate here to simply point out one limitation in his approach. The framework Sankara utilized is the concept of the “worker.” While this concept misses a key component of the modern Africana experience, it does not take away from his point of a distinct form of oppression experienced by Africana women. Yet, it remains to be seen if the shared suffering among Africana persons can be encapsulated in the term “worker” or is it something more fundamental than that concept that might shape the way the idea of Africana unity interrogates the possibility of the development of sub-group politics.

**From the Diaspora**

Those in the diaspora also have articulated the importance of unity for their struggle. Stewart’s commitment to unity was so pronounced that she denounced the disharmony among African Americans. She proclaimed that “no people under the

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676Ibid., 368
heavens so unkind and so unfeeling towards their own, as are the descendants of fallen Africa.” She continued, “I have been something of a traveler in my day; and the general cry among the people is, ‘Our own color are our greatest opposers.’” Regardless of its potential accuracy or inaccuracy, what is obvious is that Stewart saw disunity as a negative feature of oppressed people.

In fact, speaking three decades prior to the legal emancipation of enslaved Africans in the U.S., she declared that the chains of slavery would never be broken until African Americans united as one. She saw the history of the Greek resistance to tyranny as evidence of the utility of unity for the purpose of a successful revolution. In fact, she asserted that the day African Americans united it would end their degraded experience in the world. What Stewart adds to this project is the claim that disunity among African Americans is not just unhelpful, but that a successful revolution is impossible while disunited.

For the military veteran, Martin Delany (d. 1885), unity among Africana people was so urgent that it must be prioritized above other concerns. Similar to Stewart, he pointed to history as support for his position. He presented a hypothetical argument by asking whether the American Revolution would have been successful if the military leaders had not cooperated together. He went on to contend that Black people fighting for freedom should liberally accept all Africana people as partners in the resistance struggle. Moreover, rather than “objections, we should welcome with

677 Stewart, An Address Delivered Before The Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America, 53.

678 Stewart, Religion and The Pure Principles of Morality, The Sure Foundation On Which We Must Build, (October 8, 1831), 30, 37; Stewart, An Address Delivered Before The Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America, 53-54.
pride the coming among us of people of our own race, of intelligence, culture, and
respectability.” Delany felt that racial unity had to precede attempts at unifying
with other people. Merit, should be the only distinction made in the pursuit of
unity. To clarify his position even further, Delany maintained,

A people wholly oppressed, all making struggling effort for liberty and elevation
among their oppressors, have no time to spend in personal hostility towards each
other, especially among their leaders. We cannot afford to be divided—it cost
too much. The expense is greater than we can bear. It may do for others, but it
will not do for us nor any people circumstanced as we are.

With this, Delany brings the issue the author has been putting off to a head. He
formulated it in direct terms that Africana people are not in a position to alienate each
other if they truly want liberation. In another place, he asserted that rejecting people
for nonessential reasons is social and political death. However, the centrality of
unity for Delany may create problems for those who believe that it is necessary to
confront potentially divisive concerns among Africana peoples.

**Intersectionality and Black Unity: Gender, Sexuality, and Afropessimism**

Black feminists and Black LGBTQ scholars have challenged the
conception of unity described by Delany above. As philosopher Tommie Shelby has
pointed out, the idea of Black political solidarity that is commonly associated with

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679 Martin Delany, “Delany and Frederick Douglass, Letter Exchange, 1871” in Robert
Press, 2003), 436. See also, Martin Delany, “To Samuel R. Ward, Pittsburgh, June 13, 1850” in


681 Delany, *To Samuel R. Ward, Pittsburgh, June 13, 1850*, 176. Roughly a century later,
Maulana Karenga would also state that “individualism is a luxury we cannot afford.” See, Maulana
Karenga, “Black Cultural Nationalism” in Bracey, Sanchez, and Smethurst, eds., *SOS—Calling All
Black People*, 53.

Black Nationalism is viewed by some Black feminists as necessarily bound to patriarchy and a masculinist vision of Blackness. Black Nationalist organizations, including the NOI, were known to teach women to accept a subservient role for the purpose of Black men retrieving their lost manhood. Moreover, they were said to have “pushed Black women to the margins of nation-building” by assigning them the roles of homemakers and breeder of revolutionaries. According to scholar of revolutions, Jack Goldstone, “[i]n return for their exemplary courage and sacrifices, revolutionary leaders frequently promise equal roles for women in the new revolutionary regime. Yet without exception to date, once the revolutionary regime takes power, men seize most of the major political, military, and economic leadership posts, while women are encouraged to return to their families and focus on domestic duties.”

For these reasons, it makes it imperative for any theory contending for Black unity on the basis of race (i.e., race only) to confront these challenges. What makes this responsibility even more pressing for the current project is that, despite the substantial amount of evidence that he began to move away from these ideas in his last year of life, Malcolm had a deeply problematic history of discourse on gender

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and sexuality. Since some Black feminists have connected ideas of sexuality and gender hierarchy to religion, these facts make the current excursive necessary if a standard for an Africana Critical Theory of Religion and unity will be responsibly constructed.

A corollary of the marginalization of Black women and LGBTQ individuals in movements calling for Black unity was the suppression of their perspectives. Both Kimberlee Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins have expressed that Black women have often been silenced in movements for Black freedom. A similar reality has been articulated by scholars discussing the Black Queer experience. It has been declared that Black male leadership during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements implemented an “exclusionary agenda that effectively cordoned off all identity categories that were not primarily based on race.” They went on to charge that even within the discipline of Black Studies, the category of “(homo)sexual” was “subordinated to that of race in the discourse…due principally to an identitarian

686 Malcolm has often been viewed as the epitome of Black masculinity in general, and revolutionary Black masculinity in particular. He had a hierarchal understanding of Black masculinity that was frequently expressed in challenging the legitimacy of the manhood of other Black leaders by what Riche Richardson described as “misogynistic and homophobic bantering.” For example, Richardson argued that Malcolm’s epithet “Uncle Tom” had a homophobic undertone based on his characterization of Tom as a “handkerchief-head” that presented him as feminine and as a cross-dresser. Thus, for Richardson, when Malcolm described Martin Luther King as an Uncle Tom, in essence he was pejoratively calling him gay. For a more complete discussion of Malcolm’s views on gender and sexuality, see, Riche Richardson, Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007), 163, 165, 168, 173; Estes, I Am A Man!, 91, 105.


politics aimed at forging a unified front under racialized blackness.” Moreover, they asserted that the prioritizing of race “demanded the deployment of a sexist and homophobic rhetoric in order to mark, by contrast, the priority of race.” Not only did this suppression result in exclusionary and offensive discourse, but it also left others at what Sandra Harding described as an “epistemological disadvantage” because the socially situated knowledges developed from these ignored standpoints did not receive adequate attention. Further, when the concerns raised by these perspectives are ignored, according to Crenshaw, people tend to reproduce those exact forms of oppression described by the most effected individuals.

The limitations mentioned above have caused some Black feminists and LGBTQ identifying people and/or scholars to call for an intersectional approach to theory and praxis. For example, writers such as Collins, Crenshaw, Angela Davis, Kimberly Springer, and bell hooks have all called attention to the need to explore the experience of Black women through a lens that considers both race and gender. Similarly, Cathy Cohen, Enoch Page, and Matt Richardson have expressed the need for sexuality to be included in any analysis of race. Explaining this further, E.

690 Ibid., 4.
691 Ibid.
Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson stated, “Lesbian, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people of color who are committed to the demise of oppression in its various forms, cannot afford to theorize their lives based on ‘single-variable’ politics…to ignore the multiple subjectivities of the minoritarian subject within and without political movements and theoretical paradigms is not only theoretically and politically naïve, but also potentially dangerous.”

Thus, as alluded to in the immediately preceding quote, both Black feminists and Black LGBTQ identifying people and/or scholars, asserted that an intersectional approach must be reflected in political movements through a simultaneous effort to disrupt forces of oppression targeted toward Black people based on race, gender, and sexuality.

However, there have been some challenges to what might be perceived as an approach to different types of identities (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, etc.) that presents them as if they were equal or comparable. Some have viewed statements such as those used at the Stonewall protest like “Gay Power,” the “Pink Panthers,” and the comment made by trans activist, Sylvia Rivera, that “the trans community is still at the back of the bus” as illegitimate. Similarly, some would likely disapprove


of the way one writer argued that Blackness, heteronormativity, cissexism, trans-antagonism or trans-phobia, and ableism are all commensurate. The same author went on to describe “Blackness as trans” and “transness as Black.” There have been various rejoinders to these understandings of the way identities work and intersect.

One of the more nontechnical and polemical responses to these types of formulations was represented in an article where the writers charged the “homosexual movement” with co-opting the Civil Rights Movement by packaging “its demands in the rhetoric and images” of that political struggle in an attempt to “overturn thousands of years of universally recognized morality and practice.” They went on and stated that these homosexual activists were using the Civil Rights Movement to “advance the goals of generally privileged groups, however much they wish to depict themselves as victims.”

To differentiate the two movements, the authors maintained that “there has never been an effort to create a subordinate class subject to exploitation based on sexual orientation.”

Although mixed with contentious ideas, the main argument the authors offer is not at all limited to outright opponents of LGBTQ rights. For example, in the first study that explored the widespread use of the memory of the Civil Rights Movement for a political strategy, Hajar Yazidiha argued that since the 1960s various groups such as women, Latinos, Asians, the disabled, LGBT, and even white people

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701 Ibid.

702 Ibid.
and former opponents of the movement have viewed its usage as “a natural strategy in claims-making around civil rights, a ready-made set of tools for their common circumstances…associating themselves with the movement and its legacy.”

Describing this phenomenon as the “Civil Rights Memory Strategy” Yazdiha contended that it has distorted the collective memory of the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, the serious scholar cannot hastily disregard the claim that the grammar and logic of Black people fighting against racism has been unfairly and uncritically applied to other identities.

A more sophisticated critique of the use of the logic developed to understand and fight anti-Black racism for other forms of identity has been presented (and/or gathered from the work) by Afropessimist scholars (Frank Wilderson and Jared Sexton) and those who may fall outside of that tradition but whose ideas deeply shape it (Calvin Warren, Orlando Patterson, and Sadiyya Hartman). One of the main claims of this tradition is that Black people are socially dead non-humans. According to Calvin Warren, Black people lack Being; they are the incarnation of nothing and function as nonhuman equipment. Moreover, he stated that “Black being is the

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704 Ibid., 5.
705 Throughout Warren’s text, when “being” is used as a subject to the adjective “black” he has the word “being” with a line drawn through it to connote his assertion that Black people do not have actual “being.” Nevertheless, he uses the term strategically; to visually represent the function that Black people occupy in the universe: as a “being” that represents “non-being.” He makes this designation through the crossing out of the word. I will try to represent this when I am discussing Warren’s ideas by italicizing the word “being.”
706 Calvin Warren, Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 12, 15, 27
zero-degree position of nonvalue.”\textsuperscript{707} In this way, Black people function as the limit upon which humanity is defined. Or, as Wilderson declared, Black people are “the living, breathing contradistinction to life itself.”\textsuperscript{708} Explaining this further, Warren asserted that “[s]omething new emerges with the transport of the African. The African becomes black \textit{being} and secures the boundaries of the European self—its existential and ontological constitution—by embodying utter alterity (metaphysical nothingness).”\textsuperscript{709} Thus, this characterization of Black people is not one of self-debasement, but a critical reflection on the transformation of the Black person into the quintessential slave.

For Afropessimists and those associated with this tradition, the experience of slavery was the experience of social death; the degradation of an individual into a nonperson.\textsuperscript{710} Moreover, this reality did not end after legal emancipation, but, it is believed that Blackness and Slaveness are coterminous; that is, inextricably bound. In other words, according to Wilderson, Black people continue to be socially dead and thus, subject to routine violence.\textsuperscript{711} While not disputing the concept of social death, Saidiya Hartman provided the additional nuance that Black people are recognized as human only for the purpose of ensuring their criminal culpability.\textsuperscript{712}

\textsuperscript{707}Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{708}Wilderson, \textit{Afropessimism}, 41. See also, Ibid., 164, 167.
\textsuperscript{709}Warren, \textit{Ontological Terror}, 38.
\textsuperscript{711}Wilderson, \textit{Afropessimism}, 41-42.
\textsuperscript{712}Hartman, \textit{Scenes of Subjection}, 33. Zakiyyah Jackson provided a different nuance and
With the foundation presented above, it may now be easier to understand the claim of Afropessimists that anti-Black suffering is categorically different than the suffering of any other group and, thus, should not be analogized with any other identity. Wilderson explained that Afropessimism is pessimistic toward theories of liberation that would make a comparative link between Black suffering and the suffering of other beings that are oppressed.\(^ {713}\) For him, “[t]here is no antagonism like the antagonism between Black people and the world.”\(^ {714}\) Even Jared Sexton claimed that anti-Blackness was the “ground floor” of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.\(^ {715}\) Here he maintained an intersectional lens while also declaring that there was something foundational and essential about anti-Blackness even while recognizing the presence of capitalism and patriarchy. Wilderson put it this way: “The essential antagonism, therefore, is not between the workers and the bosses, not between settler and the Native, not between the queer and the straight, but between the living and the dead.”\(^ {716}\) Therefore, because Black people are the nonhumans through which all other humans recognize their own humanity [ex. “You can associate me with anything, just don’t associate me with Blackness; I am not Black!” That is, “I am human, therefore I am not Black.”] then there is a uniqueness to their experience that cannot be applied to or analogized with other forms of identity; even


\(^{714}\)Ibid., 40.


\(^{716}\)Wilderson, *Afropessimism*, 229.
those that are oppressed. Although it interacts and intersects with other identities, it plays a fundamental role through which these other positionalities are filtered. While these claims may still seem controversial, this presentation of the uniqueness and centrality of race in the social order is not limited to Afropessimists.

In fact, many Black feminists and Black LGBTQ identifying people and/or scholars have made similar arguments. Consider Black feminist scholar, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, who noted that Black women saw the pervasiveness of white supremacy as validating the urgency of focusing on racial concerns.717 Similarly, the Black feminist group called The Combahee River Collective, argued, “[o]ur situation as black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men…we struggle together with black men against racism, while we also struggle with black men about sexism.”718 What is significant here is the acknowledgement that there was something unique about race (and Blackness in particular) that required the Black feminists of this Collective to believe they had to have solidarity organized fundamentally around race, as opposed to gender. They seem to suggest that in the matrix of their oppression, which included both race and gender, that race was an independent variable, while gender was a dependent variable. In other words, their Blackness presented a condition for them in the social world that required their solidarity with Black men on the basis of race. While for white women, the social world presented


them a set of circumstances that allowed them to separate from their men on the basis of gender. The equation below demonstrates the point more clearly:

1. If “no need for racial solidarity” = “relative privilege”, then,
2. The “need for racial solidarity” = “lower-level of privilege.” Thus,
3. If races of women differ in their relationship to privilege based on their race, even though they share gender, then,
4. Race is the fundamental form of oppression, not gender.

Supporting the above claim that white women are relatively privileged and that race is the fundamental form of oppression, one finds in Black feminists discourse the assertions that white women are oppressors too, and that the oppression white women experience is trivial compared to the life experience of all other groups regardless of their gender. According to Mikki Kendall, “while white women are an oppressed group, they still wield more power than any other group of women—including the power to oppress both men and women of color.”

She went on to argue that Black men have been killed and had their careers destroyed based on the tears of white women.

Linda La Rue offered a biting critique that presented the suffering of white women as negligible in comparison to the suffering of Black people [regardless of gender]. She noted that “[w]ith few exceptions, the American white woman has had a better opportunity to live a free and fulfilling life…than any other group in the United States, with the exception of her white husband. Thus, any attempt to analogize black

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720 Ibid., 6.
oppression with the plight of the American white woman has the validity of comparing the neck of a hanging man with the hands of an amateur mountain climber with rope burns.” Here La Rue makes an important distinction: she does not deny that white men have made white women their subordinates. Nor does she seem to discredit the notion that white women have a legitimate cause for grievance. What La Rue does, however, is distinguish between the way white men treat their subjugated partners with how they treat, what Afropessimists may describe as, the socially dead. One might say that its abominable to even discuss the mere “rope burns” experienced by white women in a context where you have Black men (and women) being lynched. If it is reprehensible to even mention the presence of “rope burned hands” in the context of lynching, how much more would it be detestable to try to compare the two; or use similar grammar developed to describe the experience of lynching to describe the experience of rope burns? La Rue articulated this much when she stated “It is not that women ought not to be liberated from the shackles of their present unfulfillment, but the depth, the extent, the intensity, the importance—indeed, the suffering and depravity of the real oppression blacks have experienced—can only be minimized in an alliance with women who heretofore have suffered little more than boredom, genteel repression, and dishpan hands.” It seems then, that both Afropessimists and some Black feminists share the view that Blackness functions uniquely within the matrix of oppression experienced through intersecting identities that cannot be duplicated or applied along other axes.


722 Ibid.
Based on what has been presented above, race is the fundamental form of oppression for Black women, because it is their race that placed them at the bottom of the social order, rather than at second-in-command of the social order. Or, as Audre Lorde stated, “Black women and men have shared racist oppression we have developed joint defenses and joint vulnerabilities to each other that are not duplicated in the white community.” Similarly, Oyeronke Oyewumi stated, “European women did not occupy the same position in the colonial order as African women…Though it is necessary to discuss the impact of colonization on specific categories of people, ultimately its effect on women cannot be separated from its impact on men…” This “commonness” of struggle and positionality in the social world, for both Lorde and Oyewumi, transcended gender, but not race. Race, or better yet, Blackness, is functioning in a fundamental way here as it intersects with Black women’s gender identity.

Scholars of Black sexuality have made similar claims as those described above by Black feminists. Page and Richardson argued that the sexually racist and gendered acts of oppression experienced by Black trans people are a part of the shared experience of oppression that all Black people are subject to. They argued that race/ism is the central factor in transphobia experienced by Black people. There concept of the fundamental aspect of Blackness to their experience is characterized by their phrase “Black embodiment.” They explained, “[i]n speaking of the trans

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experience of ‘Black embodiment,’ we mean that sex and gender (with class) co-form each other and converge through race. Black trans subjectivity typically expresses a racialized embodied frame.” Stated differently, sex and gender (and class) in the experience of Black trans people are variables dependent on ‘Black embodiment.’ Similar to what was explained above, the essential modifier for the Black trans subject is Blackness; sex and gender are filtered through the larger Black matrix of experience. For Page and Richardson, the matrix itself is Black; sex, gender, and class then, operate on a secondary level within this larger matrix. Applying this line of thinking, they described “homo/transphobia” as barriers erected in a racial state. That is, “Black gender and sexuality is encircled by the gravitational field of a tacit White demand for racial discipline that bends and distorts Black behavior in line with the Western intolerance of gender variance.” What must be apparent at this point is that neither Black feminists nor Black LGBTQ scholars deny the importance of gender, race, or class. They do, however, recognize Blackness as operating in a unique way on the intersecting identities. For both, Blackness plays a fundamental role that is not operative on other axes of identity.

Also challenging what she saw as the misuse of intersectionality and standpoint theory, Collins has charged that these misapplications are the result of it being undertheorized. She stated that the reality of multiply axes in intersectionality (ex. race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, age) does not suggest that they are all

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726 Ibid., 63.
727 Ibid., 67.
equally important in all groups.\textsuperscript{728} Consistent with the claims expressed above, Collins asserted that “[a]lthough race, class, and gender may share equal billing under the paradigm of intersectionality as a heuristic device, most African-American women would identify race as a fundamental, if not most important, feature shaping the experiences of Black women as a group. Race operates as such an overriding feature of African American experience in the United States that it not only overshadows economic class relations for Blacks but obscures the significance of economic class within the United States in general.”\textsuperscript{729} Like the Afropessimists, Black scholars of sexuality, and other Black feminists mentioned above, Collins saw a fundamental difference between Blackness and all other categories of identity. Where she differs is the reasoning she offers for the distinction.

Collins explained that “group standpoints” within the framework of intersectionality are legitimate to the degree that the identities represented are comprised of shared group histories of oppression. Thus, it is legitimate to view Black people as having a shared group history of oppression because of segregated living. This is because race operates through distancing strategies; people of different races are separated from one another. By contrast, gender functions in social organization with an inclusionary strategy; in these contexts women and men share common social units and live in close proximity to one another. Thus, gender hierarchy operates within a category of belonging.\textsuperscript{730} Consequently, according to

\begin{quote}
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\textsuperscript{729} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{730} Ibid., 211.
\end{quote}
Collins, this means in reality, women form a closer social group with men of their same race than they do with other women of different races. Collins argued this further when she stated that “standpoint theory seems less applicable to gender relations in the United States. Because women are separated from one another by race and class, they face different challenges…”731

Ultimately, what has been set forth is the argument that Blackness functions as a distinctive and foundational factor for the identity and experience of racialized subjects. While Afropessimists “get there” through the concept of social death, and Black feminists and Black LGBTQ scholars and/or identifying people covered above “get there” through what may be called the Black matrix of intersecting oppressions, all agree that Blackness is the fundamental aspect of their experience of oppression. Furthermore, since they posit that Blackness cannot be analogized with any other form of identity, Black people share a certain experience that cannot be replicated with or by others. This is important as one looks to solving the issue presented most explicitly by Delany above: should Black people organize their resistance around their Blackness or some other identity? Stated differently, should Black people allow themselves to be divided based on concerns and/or disagreements deriving from, what the authors above might see as, less fundamental forms of oppression? It is difficult to answer this question, but what is known is that historically, the power structures have utilized various schemes to disrupt the racial unity of Black people.

Many intellectuals, including historians, have pointed out that under the

731Ibid.
veneer of seemingly innocent and legitimate aspirations, white people have consistently sought to cause divisions among people of African descent by encouraging them to emphasize other parts of their identity rather than their Blackness. For example, Nkrumah contended that the imperialists often used propaganda to exploit the differences of political ideology, culture, race, and religion among the oppressed. Historian of Africa, Toyin Falola was in agreement when he stated that under colonialism, the policy of divide-and-rule caused ethnic divisions to be accentuated. In this context, colonizers subverted the development of African nationalism by encouraging an emphasis on ethnicity to flourish. As a result, ethnic distinctions among Africans became more defined and rivalries intensified as ethnic consciousness sharpened.\textsuperscript{732} This dividing up of Africans, or balkanization of Africa, according to Mazrui and Tidy, is the cause for the continued subjection of Africans in various parts of the continent.\textsuperscript{733} They explained that “in general, colonial rulers attempted to govern by dividing the African peoples and encouraging expressions of regionalist and ethnic feeling and practice.”\textsuperscript{734} The implication here is that those in power desired nothing more than for oppressed Africans to take pride in the things that distinguished them from their counterparts who had different identities. If they could keep them focused on their heterogeneity, they could consistently reproduce a divided, weak, and controllable population. Thus, these authors have advanced the claim that the proliferation of identities was a way to shoehorn in lasting divisions


\textsuperscript{733}Mazrui and Tidy, \textit{Nationalism and New States in Africa}, 66.

\textsuperscript{734}Ibid., 85.
Other thinkers have proposed that a similar process of divide-and-conquer has been applied in the United States through the liberal agenda of multiculturalism and the fight for identity recognition in the post-civil rights era. Similar to Collins’ claim that intersectionality had been used to promote individualistic models that emphasized difference and the freedom from “mandatory group memberships,” Sexton has also argued that the multicultural movement encouraged a focus on the individual’s “right to self-identify” and maintain commitments to more than one group. Moreover, he contended that the insistence by this group on the proliferation of identities also had as its motive the decentering of discussions of Black-white racial conflict to allow these other identities to gain more recognition. That is, according to Sexton, multiracialism framed Blackness as ruining the development of a fuller discussion of race and racism that would go beyond the black-white binary.

Under this rubric, race-centered Black people became the “real” problem. Thus, those who adopted this new logic of multiculturalism faced numerous intersections of identities for which they each individually owed allegiance to.

This effectively led to, what Sexton’s claim may be summarized as, the balkanization of the Black community where various group loyalties began to conflict. Articulating the process of this supposed fracturing, Sexton claimed that “as

\[\text{Sexton, Amalgamation Schemes, 53, 76. According to Collins, because intersectionality has been undertheorized, it has been able to fit nicely with traditional liberalism. She explained that “Whether we are talking about the explicit individualism of bourgeois liberalism or the explicit individualism permeating postmodern renditions of difference, individualistic models define freedom as the absence of constraints including those of mandatory group membership. Freedom occurs when individuals have rights of mobility into and out of groups—the right to join clubs and other voluntary associations or to construct their subjectivity as multiple and changing.” For more on this, see, Collins, Some Group Matters, 209.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., 17.}\]
an extension of the right to self-identify, that multiracial people can and should be allowed to maintain ‘loyalties’ to more than one ethnic group… The references to ‘loyalties’ and claim to maintain more than one at a time suggest that these ‘ethnic groups’ experience objective conflicts of interest based in a ‘hierarchical social order’ and not simply a diversity of customs, rituals, religious beliefs, social outlooks, political orientations, and so forth. If this is the case… are there not times when multiple loyalties are simply impossible to sustain…?"737 This, once again, reflects the above claim that oppressors often deploy otherwise legitimate things of value to bait oppressed people into being agents of their own division and political weakness.

One might be tempted to understand the expanding conceptual cleavage between the experiences of Black men and Black women reflected in the writings of Black feminists and womanists as an understandable, but, perhaps, unfortunate consequence of this “balkanization paradigm.” In the legitimate attempt to establish the validity of their own voices, some Black feminists and womanists, in accord with the logic above, have been left with the need to make hard distinctions between themselves and Black men in the effort to overcome the way their experiences have often been silenced by Black men. As a result, instead of simply highlighting the qualitative difference between the suffering experienced by Black women and girls and that experienced by Black men and boys, there is a common attempt to posit a quantitative distinction. That is to say that the assertion that Black women’s (and girls’) experience of suffering are worse than that experienced by Black men (and

737 Ibid., 76.
boys) is not infrequent throughout Black feminist and womanist writings. Consistent with similar statements made by Davis, hooks argued that “[a]lthough it in no way diminishes the suffering and oppressions of enslaved black men, it is obvious that the two forces, sexism and racism, intensified and magnified the sufferings and oppressions of black women.” In like manner, Jacquelyn Grant declared, “[w]ithout succumbing to the long and fruitless debate of ‘who is more oppressed than whom,’ I want to make some pointed suggestions to Black male theologians. It would not be very difficult to argue that since Black women are the poorest of the poor, the most oppressed of the oppressed, their experience provides a most fruitful context for doing Black theology.” Some may see a conflict, however, in the fact that she first claimed that she will refrain from declaring one worse than the other, yet, she could be read as doing just that.

However, scholars such as Tommy Curry have challenged this assertion. One of his major claims is that for all the emphasis on the intersecting axes of oppression that should include race, gender, sexuality, and class posited by Black feminists and adherents to intersectionality, Black males are de-gendered and their experiences are erased by categorizing them under the general experience of Black

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738 For examples of Black feminists and/or womanists arguing that Black women have had it worse than Black men, see, hooks, Ain’t I a Woman, 19; Collins, Black Feminist Thought, 98; M. Shawn Copeland, “Body, Representation, and Black Religious Discourse” in Cannon, Townes, and Sims, eds., Womanist Theological Ethics, 102; Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “The ‘Loves’ and ‘Troubles’ of African-American Women’s Bodies: The Womanist Challenge to Cultural Humiliation and Community Ambivalence” in Cannon, Townes, and Sims, eds., Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader, 95.

739 hooks, Ain’t I a Woman, 22. See also, Davis, Women, Race, and Class, 6, 23.

740 Jacquelyn Grant, “Black Women and the Church” in Akasha Hall, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women’s Studies (New York: The Feminist Press, 2015), 42.
For him, gender theorists have treated the experiences of Black males as something that “need not be accounted for beyond the phenomenon of racism that affects all Black people equally.”

Perhaps, more controversial is his claim that in some senses, Black males have suffered more than Black women and although this can be supported through social science research, it is often silenced in the academy. Some data and research that could be perceived as supporting Curry’s argument include the fact that mass incarceration, police brutality, and felon-disenfranchisement are disproportionately a part of the Black male experience. Likewise, previous studies demonstrated that Black boys were suspended from school twice as much as Black girls. Among twelfth graders, Black girls were scoring higher than Black boys in reading proficiency. Black women were two-thirds of Black applicants to medical school and had a longer life expectancy than Black men. Further, Black men were twice as likely to contract HIV in their lifetimes and in 2009 were found as having the highest death rate from

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742 Ibid., 231.

743 According to a study conducted between 2013 to 2018, researchers found that at the intersection of race, gender, and ethnicity, Black men were at the greatest risk of being killed by the police. Nationwide, Black men dwarf all other groups killed by police, regardless of race or gender. While Black women are at the highest risk of women killed by police of their gender, Black men were found to be twenty-six times more likely than Black women to be killed by the police. For more on police killings having disproportionately Black male victims, see, Shytierra Gatson, April Fernandes, and Rashaan DeShay, “A Macrolevel Study of Police Killings at the Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender,” in Crime and Delinquency, vol. 67 (2020), no. 8, 1085, 1086, 1087; Noel Cazenave, Killing African Americans: Police and Vigilante Violence As a Racial Control Mechanism (New York: Routledge, 2018), 225. Alexander’s research on mass incarceration highlighted that it was mostly Black men who were swept away in this system of racial control. Moreover, she stated that at one point, one in seven Black men had lost their right to vote because of felon-disenfranchisement. For more on the disproportionate effect of mass-incarceration on Black men, see, Alexander, The New Jim Crow, 179-180, 193.
Additionally, Curry challenged the tendency in Black feminists discourse to present the experience of rape during the antebellum period as another distinctive characteristic exclusive to Black women and girls. For them, this was one of the justifications for the legitimacy of giving attention to their unique subjectivity. As an example, hooks argued that the “sexism of colonial white male patriarchs spared black male slaves the humiliation of homosexual rape and other forms of sexual assault.”

Curry corrects this thesis, however, by showing that research has revealed that Black men were in fact raped during antebellum slavery. While it is likely that Black women experienced rape more frequently, what both Black men and women shared was that neither had any autonomy over their sexuality. For both, their enslavers had complete control over their bodies to use them as they pleased; sexually and otherwise. Facts like these led him to state that in some cases Black males have been “more disadvantaged than their female counterparts.”

Curry goes further, however, when he argued that the unique Black male experience expressed in the previous paragraphs is disciplined into silence in the academy. He claimed that “[w]hile white male and female authors are thought to serve as theoretical guides for various racial projects, regardless of their personal and historical racism, and they can even become sociologically interesting when they

745 hooks, Ain’t I a Woman, 24. For another example, see, Davis, Women, Race and Class, 7, 23.
746 Curry, The Man-Not, 152-164.
747 Ibid., 232.
realize and own their white privilege, Black males, who remain oppressed and largely absent from the academy as students and professors, are considered pariahs when they are centered as victims.”

He continued:

under our current disciplinary regime Black men cannot be recognized as the most disadvantaged, not because facts demonstrate otherwise, but because theory denies that such recognition is possible because their sex is male…Since no counter-evidence or explorations are allowed to challenge the rampant dogmas about Black masculinity, disciplines from philosophy to gender studies are allowed to maintain ahistorical mythologies and self-referential theories about Black males without accounting for the disadvantage Black male existence has in the world materially or verifying the alleged privilege Black males enjoy within America’s social organizations—its economy, prison industry, institutions of higher education, and so forth…In our current political-disciplinary milieu, patriarchy is thought to direct its violence primarily toward women through misogyny, despite the historical and sociological findings that show Western patriarchy to be a structural system that directs its most lethal violence against racialized (outgroup) males while preserving the lives of females through paternalism.

In other words, Curry perceived hegemony in the academy where gender studies and Black feminism allows for an a priori rejection of any arguments that challenge the thesis that Black women and girls experience the brunt of suffering under white supremacy, in spite of the data. The thrust of his argument seems to be that the claims of Black feminists rest on theories that are protected in an impenetrable academic cocoon that cordons off data on the actual lives of Black people. For him, theories that magnify the subjective opinions of Black women and girls and does not account for social scientific findings on material reality are more ideological than a representation of reality. Nevertheless, whether the claims of Black feminists hold, or the data upends it, as Curry suggested, is not the concern of this project.

For the present author, the very act of trying to dispute and/or discover who

748 Ibid., 230.
749 Ibid., 230—1.
is “more oppressed” simply falls into the trap set by oppressors. Conflicts like these that seek to prove who “suffers the most” often end in the fracture of the Black movement. Perceiving the “race-only” logic among those in the Black struggle, some Black women developed split loyalties between the women’s movement and the Black liberation movement. For example, Pauli Murray argued that “[b]ecause black women have an equal stake in women’s liberation and black liberation, they are key figures at the juncture of these two movements. White women feminists are their natural allies in both causes.” Murray’s perspective may be read as moving close to what Sexton described as the liberal multiculturalism that equalized all identities intersecting in the single person (i.e. “Black” and “woman”), and aligning herself with white feminists and their movement.

Additionally, Florynce Kennedy’s (d. 2000 C.E.) decision to bring two white feminists into a Black Power Conference in 1967 held in Newark, New Jersey could, perhaps, be seen as something that had the potential to fracture Black unity. During the conference while she was giving a talk, Kennedy was interrupted because of a commotion in the room. Queen Mother Moore, a woman of significant standing in Black Nationalist circles, declared that Kennedy’s white guests needed to leave because this was a Blacks only gathering. In response, Kennedy declared she would not ask them to leave. Someone even threatened to kill Kennedy for bringing in the white women. She told them, however, that they could do what they had to do. Her commitment to align with and/or train white feminists led her to defend white women

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750 Murray, The Liberation of Black Women, 196.

over and against the wishes of numerous Black people and a prominent female Black nationalist. What may be more troubling is a reflection on this moment given by one of the white women who declared that she appreciated Kennedy for bringing her to the conference and stated that “[h]earing Black activists plot strategies and formulate resolutions ‘transformed’ her growing feminist politics.” Thus, one could potentially say that the only gain derived from a decision that caused unnecessary conflict and potential division among Black people was to white feminism. Moreover, Kennedy continued to invite white feminists to subsequent Black Power meetings even after this incident.

Highlighting the potential cost of a split commitment is not a novel claim. Even Lorde stated that “it is easy for black women to be used by the power structure against black men…” She continued by asserting “[t]herefore, for black women, it is necessary at all times to separate the needs of the oppressor from our own legitimate conflicts within our own communities.” Using stronger language, La Rue argued that “[i]t is entirely possible that women’s liberation has developed a sudden attachment to the black liberation as a play to share the attention that it has taken blacks 400 years to generate.” It seems then, that, perhaps, Lorde and La Rue are cognizant of the strategic way that oppressors can take something positive like the fight for Black women’s equality and use it to create a wedge between Black women and Black men to weaken their ability to pose a united front against them. It is very

752 Ibid., 117.
753 Ibid.
754 Lorde, Age, Race, Class, and Sex, 287.
755 La Rue, The Black Movement and Women’s Liberation, 166.
difficult, however, to point to these concerns because Black women have justifiable suspicion toward any project that even closely resembles past methods that were used to silence them. Therefore, the perspective represented by the current writer is not to say that Black women should not ensure that their specific concerns are met. The argument here is simply that as immune to this as any Black person may feel, the history of white domination validates a call to proceed with caution and vigilance.

This is because although Black Nationalism has its numerous issues, according to Falola, it was a combination of Nationalism and Pan-Africanism that helped Africans destroy colonialism on their continent.\textsuperscript{756} Similarly, Benedict Anderson has stated that “since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms.”\textsuperscript{757} While a more fully developed solution for the problem of unity will be offered below, what can be stated here is that history supports the claim that if Black people are to apply revolutionary praxis to their conditions, nationalist/Pan-African unity must be critiqued, but also protected. Thus, Delany’s emphasis on the priority of Black unity above other concerns seems to have some legitimacy.

\textbf{Returning to (Activist/Intellectual) Voices from the African Diaspora}

Bringing this study back from its in depth digression, the author turns to the importance C.L.R. James (d. 1989) placed on unity. Embedded in his assessments of historical events, James recognized the danger of split loyalties. He declared that in the context of the Haitian Revolution, Mulattoes had wavered from the beginning

\textsuperscript{756}Tawo, \textit{Nationalism and African Intellectuals}, 98.

because of their intermediate position in the society. In other words, revolutionary unity is strained when a group of people desire to express commitment to more than one social positionality. He pointed to a similar flaw in the politics of Toussaint L’Ouverture. His loyalty to the French, according to James, resulted in his untimely death. He compromised with white people, giving them government posts, demanding that they should be protected from revenge from formerly enslaved Haitians, and that they should receive their property back. In fact, he killed an important Haitian figure from the revolution for killing whites unnecessarily. James went on to tell his readers that “while his army starved in the campaign against the British, he [Toussaint] gave food to the destitute white women of the district. After the civil war he paid the same careful attention to the Mulatto women and children.” These decisions by Toussaint created strife and divisions among Black Haitians.

Moving his analysis from Haiti to the United States, James made a similar case about the cost Black people pay by aligning with those in power. He noted that although Blacks were used by Northerners against the rebellion of the South, once this was complete, whites deserted them and Black people had to endure terrible repression by southern white people. Similar to the section above, James’ analysis here shows how other movements can utilize Black labor for their own purposes and

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758 James, *The Black Jacobins*, 207.
759 Ibid., 157, 213, 284, 287.
760 Ibid., 254.
abandon Black people when it is only Black people’s interests that are effected.

However, James did not simply point out the dangers of Black political alliances with others, he also expressed the value of Black unity for revolutionary change. Speaking again of Haiti, James asserted that Haitians learned by experience that isolated efforts to exterminate their oppressors were futile. Thus, they began to unite in the early months of 1791 in preparation for revolution. What is most interesting here, in light of the purposes of this dissertation, is that James presented Voodoo as the medium of their organizational unity.\(^{762}\) This might imply that religion need not cause disunity in revolutionary praxis; in fact, it could be used to create unity. Nevertheless, it is also true that Toussaint encouraged the practice of Catholicism but strictly forbid the practice of Voodoo.\(^{763}\) James’ contribution to the current theory construction is the notion that Africana people must be cautious as they align with groups whose main concern is not Black liberation but have interests elsewhere.

Hamer also addressed the issue of Black unity as well. She criticized, prominent Black men and those she described as “chicken-eating ministers” who voted against poor Black people. She frequently called into question the loyalty and commitment of Black preachers to the Black community.\(^{764}\) So committed to Black unity was Hamer, that she even used the epithet “Uncle Tom” to call into question the

\(^{762}\)James, *The Black Jacobins*, 86.

\(^{763}\)Ibid., 246, 309.

allegiance of Black policemen to Black people.\textsuperscript{765} For her, it was important for Black people to view themselves as one. In a speech she gave in 1964, Hamer stated that “there used to be a time when you would hit a Negro—a white man would hit a Negro—the others would go and hide. But there’s a new day now, when you hit a Negro, you likely to see a thousand there. Because God care. God care and we care.”\textsuperscript{766} Here Hamer connected Black unity and oneness with her religious beliefs. In other words, for Hamer, God supported the unity and oneness of Black people. This is a significant contribution to an Africana Critical Theory of Religion and unity.

Fanon discussed colonizers’ aim to divide their subjects and the role religion played to interfere with the much needed unity of the oppressed. He described situations where the colonizers actively searched for any conflict within the population. This conflict, for Fanon, was then, essentially counter-revolutionary. He described it as such because these conflicts would be exploited for the purpose of intensifying the consciousness of the unique identity of various groups among the colonized from one another; this would then turn into feuds.\textsuperscript{767} These feuds served the purpose of fragmenting the colonized; even more, their “sole objective” was to make “any cohesion impossible.”\textsuperscript{768}

Fanon believed that one of the effective weapons to ensure divisions was religion. He wrote that the colonizers reinforced religious confraternities.\textsuperscript{769} This

\textsuperscript{765}Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{766}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{767}Fanon, \textit{Toward the African Revolution}, 59.
\textsuperscript{768}Fanon, \textit{A Dying Colonialism}, 118.
\textsuperscript{769}Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, 51.
suggests that the colonizers could operationalize religious identities in such a way to convince adherents of any given religion that critical assessments of their emphasis on a particular religious identity by other colonized people actually derived from hostility toward that religious identity rather than vigilance toward the schemes of the colonizers. He stated that “[w]ithin the same nation, religion divides the people and sets spiritual communities, fostered and encouraged by colonialism and its apparatus, at odds with each other.”770 More specifically, he mentioned the clash between Christianity and Islam. This hostility, according to Fanon, had raised colonialism “back on its feet” and was used to break the will of Africans to unify with one another. This was an important tool of manipulation the colonizers had at their disposal because the birth of African unity previously had colonialism “trembling on its foundations.”771 Thus, religious divisions allowed the colonial power to secure its control in the face of the threat African unity posed, according to Fanon.

In response to the divisions he saw on the African continent, Fanon declared that Africa had to fight as one in order to truly obtain its freedom from colonialism. He gave the example of the European nations who leagued together to fight against the Nazis. Since Africans are facing their own “Nazis,” in the form of the colonial powers, they had to unite in like manner.772 He also mentioned the 1955 Bandung Conference of representatives from Africa and Asia that met and committed to helping one another get rid of European colonialism. It seems that Fanon saw this

770Ibid., 107.
771Ibid., 106—7.
772Fanon, Toward the African Revolution, 171.
as another positive model because he argued that Africa could not advance as independent regions but had to move forward against colonialism as a whole continent. Explaining the type of unity he had in mind, Fanon asserted:

In deciding to create a corps of volunteers in all the territories the African peoples mean clearly to manifest their solidarity with one another, thus expressing the realization that national liberation is linked to the liberation of the continent. The peoples engaged in struggle, who today are convinced that their African brothers share their combat and are ready to intervene directly at the first call of the directing bodies, contemplate the future in a more serene and optimistic light. In the popular meetings organized in Ghana, in Ethiopia, in Nigeria, hundreds of men have pledged themselves to come to the aid of the Algerians or South African brothers whenever these manifest such a wish.

Thus, Fanon believed that the most effective route of anti-colonialism in Africa was for it to be viewed as a Pan-African project rather than simply a national one. This would involve the support from other African nation states as any particular area fought for its liberation. However, if colonizers were able to utilize grievances and other distinctive features to cause divisions so effectively, how would the unity Fanon described be accomplished?

Fanon presented an approach to unity that suggested it would develop based on the revolutionary struggle itself. He declared that African unity would only be achieved through pressure and Africans would develop a “friendship of combat.” This perspective was also articulated in the way he described many of the social antagonisms of Algerian culture being resolved through revolutionary struggle itself. As an example, Fanon discussed the transformation of the Algerian fathers’ relationship toward their sons. Whereas, formally, the son submitted completely to

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773 Ibid., 146, 192.
774 Ibid., 156—7.
775 Ibid., 196. See also, Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 110.
the father’s will, in the course of the revolution, the son’s attitude toward his father was stripped of all things harmful for the revolution and the father eventually had to bury his old values and join his son. Similarly, the revolution changed the dynamic between the relationship of men and women. Algerian women began declaring that they would refuse to marry any man who was not actively involved in the revolution and wives boldly began to call their husbands a coward if he was not involved.

The transformation of gender relations in Algeria must be emphasized even more. For example, the response of fathers toward their daughters who had unveiled themselves in the process of the revolutionary struggle began to change. Fanon stated that when the father of the unveiled woman found out about his daughter’s new self-presentation,

The father would then decide to demand explanations. He would hardly have begun to speak when he would stop. From the young girl’s look of firmness the father would have understood that her commitment was of long standing. The old fear of dishonor was swept away by a new fear fresh and cold—that of death in battle or of torture of the girl. Behind the girl, the whole family—even the Algerian father, the authority for all things, the founder of every value—followed in her footsteps, becomes committed to the new Algeria.

According to Fanon, Algerian women were able to transform gender relations in their society through the revolution, not as a prerequisite for unified revolutionary praxis.

He argued that

The freedom of the Algerian people from then on became identified with woman’s liberation, with her entry into history. This woman who, in the avenues of Algiers or the Constantine, would carry the grenades or the submachine-gun chargers, this woman who tomorrow would be outraged, violated, tortured, could not put herself back into her former state of mind and relive her behavior of the past; this woman who was writing the heroic pages of Algerian history

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776 Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 101, 103.
777 Ibid., 111, 112.
778 Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 60.
was, in so doing, bursting the bounds of the narrow world in which she had lived without responsibility, and was at the same time participating in the destruction of colonialism and the birth of a new woman.\textsuperscript{779}

Therefore, based off of Fanon’s analysis, Algerian women were able to overturn long held gender expectations through the process of revolutionary struggle. The Algerian women did not allow the colonizers to disrupt the revolution by exploiting their rightful and legitimate frustrations with how they were treated in their society.

Furthermore, the women also did not allow their men to see them any less than equal partners in the revolutionary struggle, according to Fanon. This was not immediate, however. They exhibited what might be called revolutionary patience. Not the type of passive patience of a powerless victim waiting for someone else to show mercy on them. But, more like the patience of a lion waiting for the opportune time to pounce on its prey. While it is possible that Fanon’s analysis of the transformed condition of gender relations in Algeria is only partially true, there is no reason to doubt that there were some positive changes that took place through the process of the revolutionary struggle. Thus, the concept of revolutionary (as opposed to passive) patience is an important component of the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion and unity. This holds promise because a unity based on an all-or-nothing standard that requires a collective agreement on all matters is a recipe for divisions and is counter-revolutionary.

In the above section, the author has traced through various ideas and concepts presented by Africana intellectual-activists. These ideas must be condensed to a set of standards that might be used to evaluate the solutions Malcolm offered.

\textsuperscript{779}Ibid., 107.
Because the method used in this dissertation is dialectical, the standards will reflect an attempt to synthesize the principles expressed by Malcolm and the aforementioned thinkers. These include:

1. Interreligious Africana revolutionary unity must be forged with revolutionary awareness of the ways (religious) identities are operationalized by oppressors to sow divisions.
2. A revolutionary religion is one where the Divine approves (or at least allows) for interreligious African unity.
3. The basis of an interreligious Africana revolutionary unity must be as broad as possible.
4. Interreligious Africana revolutionary unity must be forged by prioritizing a commonly held identity that helps each individual transcend intra-group differences.
5. Intra-group conflict MUST not be ignored, but MUST be approached with revolutionary caution and care.
6. Interreligious Africana revolutionary unity must allow freedom of (religious) beliefs, and a focus on the revolutionary’s actions instead.
7. Interreligious Africana revolutionary unity cannot be withheld until all intra-group conflicts are resolved; revolutionary patience must be employed.
8. Interreligious Africana revolutionary unity would be protected/strengthened if individuals have a singularity of focus, rather than split loyalties.
9. In extreme circumstances of intra-group conflict, the concept of strategic temporary allegiance should be thoroughly considered.
These concepts are not meant to be viewed as a conclusive standard for all future studies; rather, these should be seen as a base-line starting point for analysis for this current project. In the endeavor to dialectically construct a critical theory of religion that resolves the conflict between religion and Africana unity, the author has engaged with several thinkers and concepts from the Africana intellectual tradition. Now that he has constructed these values, the writer will now evaluate the solutions offered by Malcolm.

Malcolm’s Solutions to the Unity/Disunity Dialectical Conflict: Striving for Bandung

The solution for the conflict between religion and Pan-African revolutionary unity offered by Malcolm can be encapsulated in the word “Bandung.” This refers to the Afro-Asian Conference held in Indonesia where various groups from nations in Africa and Asia discussed their conditions of oppression and how they could be eliminated. All recognized that each group represented a larger body of oppressed people who were under European imperialism, and that solidarity between the groups would result in the mutual benefit of obtaining their individual liberation. As a result of this shared commitment, the Bandung Conference has been viewed by some as a defining moment in world history and the process of decolonization. Malcolm was aware of this event and consistently used it as a pedagogic motif for listeners while a member of the NOI and up till the end of his life.

For Malcolm, Bandung was a model for oppressed (Africana) peoples striving to eradicate white dominance over their lives and lands by uniting with one

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another. He believed that unity brought strength and it would allow Africana people to accomplish anything. Consequently, his consistent goal was to unite all factions of Africana people into one group. He explained, “[i]f I slap you, it might sting because these digits are separated. But all I have to do to put you back in your place is bring those digits together.” This is why Malcolm would relentlessly attempt to “bring the digits” of Black people together.

As early as 1959 Malcolm was using Bandung as a teaching devise in one of his speeches to promote this unity. He told his listeners that Black people in America “should study the methods used by our darker brothers in Africa and Asia to get their freedom.” He went on to say “It has been since the Bandung Conference that all dark people of the earth have been striding toward freedom.” Moreover, he declared that the leaders in Harlem, New York should “hold a Bandung Conference in Harlem… We must unite before we can effectively face our enemy…” Thus, he was instructing African Americans to implement the successful strategy used by African and Asian people to get their freedom. Throughout the rest of his public life this practice of invoking Bandung would continue.

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782 Ibid.


785 Ibid., 175.
For example, in 1962 Malcolm told an audience about Bandung and how the participants were able to unify despite their religious differences.\textsuperscript{786} The following year he stated that “At Bandung all the nations came together, the dark nations from Africa and Asia. Some of them were Buddhists, some of them were Muslims, some of them were Christians, some were Confucianists, some were atheists. Despite their religious differences, they came together.”\textsuperscript{787} Again, almost verbatim, less than a week before his assassination in the month of February of 1965, Malcolm asserted, “[a]t the Bandung Conference…[w]e had differences. Some were Buddhists, some were Hindus, some were Christians, some were Muslims, some didn’t have any religion at all. Some were socialists, some were capitalists, some were communists, and some didn’t have any economy at all.”\textsuperscript{788} It seems that the emphasis that Malcolm constantly wanted to convey was that these were a religiously diverse set of people who found a way to work together. However, one is left with the challenge of figuring out how such a vast and diverse group of people were able to collaborate. More specifically, how is it possible to get people of different religions and different postures toward religion to partner together for a revolutionary struggle? The answers he was able to lift from the example of the Conference included the basis of unity, and the preemptive elimination of barriers for unity. For Malcolm, in order for an interreligious Pan-African revolutionary unity to materialize and survive the unity must be based on Blackness and the practice of what the author is describing as

\textsuperscript{786}Malcolm X, \textit{Ronald Stokes Memorial Service (April 28, 1962)}.

\textsuperscript{787}Malcolm X, \textit{Message to the Grass Roots (November 10, 1963)}, 5.

partial (or modified) taqiyya.

**Solution for the Basis of Unity: Our Common Blackness**

As Malcolm saw it, those at the Bandung Conference were able to unite through a realization that they had a similar experience of suffering and a similar enemy. He was reported to have stated in 1959 that “the first step at Bandung was to agree that all dark people were suffering a common misery at the hands of a common enemy…WHITE MEN!”

Similarly, in 1962, 1963, 1964, and in 1965, Malcolm stated that at Bandung, dark (or, Black) people understood that they all were being oppressed by a white oppressor. He explained:

They had no nuclear weapons, they had no air fleets, no navy. But they discussed their plight and they found that there was one thing that all of us had in common—oppression, exploitation, suffering. And we had a common oppressor, a common exploiter. If a brother came from Kenya and called his oppressor an Englishman; and another came from the Congo, he called his oppressor a Belgian; another came from Guinea, he called his oppressor French. But when you brought the oppressors together there’s one thing they all had in common, they were all from Europe. And this European was oppressing the people of Africa and Asia. And since we could see that we had oppression in common and exploitation in common, sorrow and sadness and grief in common, our people began to get together...

Malcolm was pointing to what he saw as a successful model for establishing unity.

Indeed, he saw the unity based on the common African (and Asian) experience of

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790 Malcolm X, *Ronald Stokes Memorial Service (April 28, 1962)*; Malcolm X, *Message to the Grass Roots (November 10, 1963)*, 5-6. Malcolm X, *Not Just an American Problem, but a World Problem (February 16, 1965)*, 167—8. In the following citation from his 1964 mention of Bandung, Malcolm stated that at Bandung, this African, Asian, and Arab bloc united and were able to confront the European powers. In this instance, it may be more accurate to say that Malcolm implied that these anti-colonialists understood their enemies to be Europeans by virtue of who he says they directed their attacks toward. For more on this, see, Malcolm X, *Our People Identify with Africa: Interview with Bernice Bass (December 27, 1964)*, 105.

Blackness as the Solution: Malcolm X in the NOI

Similar to the Bandung attendees, Malcolm encouraged African Americans to unite based on their shared experience of oppression from an identical oppressor. Speaking to an audience in 1963, Malcolm stated:

We have a common enemy. We have this in common: We have a common oppressor, a common exploiter, and a common discriminator. But once we all realize that we have a common enemy, then we unite—on the basis of what we have in common. And what we have foremost in common is that enemy—the white man. He’s an enemy to all of us.  

Here, Malcolm declared that the realization that white people were the cause of the oppression of Black people collectively should be viewed as a platform or foundation for unity. For him, regardless of a Black person’s religious, geographic, or social identity (ex. Baptist, Muslim, Mason, Elk, or from Georgia, Mississippi, California or New York), the white man was their enemy. This common enemy and common experience, for Malcolm, should create a bond that is able to cross religious boundaries. He asserted, “[i]f you can’t get together on the basis of religion, you should be able to get together on the basis of catching hell…Even if you haven’t been able to pray together, we have all caught hell together. We have suffering in common.” Yet, Malcolm goes further to defend his supposition.

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It is not simply the shared experience of oppression from the same enemy that Malcolm used to justify his position, but, he called for unity based on Blackness because he contended that it was the fundamental reason why Black people were targeted for brutality. Drawing very close to the notion of a Black matrix of oppression presented in the work of the Black feminists and LGBTQ scholars mentioned above, and even closer to the Afropessimists’ logic of social death, Malcolm pointed to Blackness over against other intersecting social identities as the basis for Black people’s mistreatment. For instance, in 1961 Malcolm asserted that Black people needed to be unified regardless if they were Baptist, Methodist, or a Holy Roller. Whatever they were, they were still catching hell. He continued and stated that the hell they were catching was not because they were Black Catholics, Black Baptists, or anything else; it was because they were Black.\(^{795}\)

In order to catch the thrust of his argument one must not take for granted the rhetorical moves he made in this section of his speech. He first identified various religious identities with no modifier. He subsequently repeated those identities with the modifier “Black.” In both cases, he rejected them as bases of oppression.\(^{796}\) That is, the religious identity is not the basis of their oppression. Nor, is the basis of their oppression the intersecting of their racial and religious identities. Rather, he isolates Blackness as the essential basis of their mistreatment. Put in an equation:

\(^{795}\)Malcolm X, *The Embassy in Los Angeles (April 16, 1961)*. I italicized the word “Black” in this sentence to indicate the shift Malcolm made in this speech. In the previous sentence, I show that Malcolm initially mentioned various religious identities without the modifier “Black.” However, the modifier shows up in this last sentence here and it seems that this rhetorical move was not without meaning. I explain what I mean in the following sentences.

\(^{796}\)I am using bases/basis here to mean foundation or the most fundamental cause. This is important because, as I will state below, I interpret Malcolm as using this rhetoric not to deny the role that religious identity may cause to particularize a certain form of anti-Blackness. Contrarily, I use this term to point to his understanding of Blackness as the fundamental cause of Black oppression.
1. Religious Identity alone = Nothing
2. Racial Identity + Religious Identity = Nothing
3. Blackness alone = Oppression

The current author does not interpret Malcolm as denying that these other identities cause a particular inflection on the various types of anti-Black discrimination. Instead, he suggests that Malcolm wanted to isolate Blackness as the foundation of all Black oppression in order for him to utilize it as the foundational mechanism of creating unity. This is not to say that Malcolm’s assertion is purely utilitarian. He does seem to agree with some Black feminists and Afropessimists that Blackness is the fundamental site of Black oppression. His denial of the role of religious identity, however, seems to be a case of hyperbole where Malcolm is underselling the role of religious identity in order to emphasize the centrality of Blackness in anti-Black oppression and, therefore, as the legitimate basis for Black unity. A quote from his 1963 Message to the Grass Roots speech makes this clear:

> When we come together, we don’t come together as Baptist or Methodists. You don’t catch hell because you’re Baptist, and you don’t catch hell because you’re a Methodist…you don’t catch hell because you’re a Democrat or a Republican, you don’t catch hell because you’re a Mason or an Elk, and you sure don’t catch hell because you’re an American; because if you were an American, you wouldn’t catch hell. You catch hell because you’re a black man. You catch hell, all of us catch hell, for the same reason.\(^797\)

Therefore, the above validates the author’s claim that even while in the NOI, Malcolm saw Blackness as the unifying concept for Black people. However, as stated in the previous chapter, many scholars emphasize the notion that after Malcolm left the NOI, many of his views began to change.

Blackness as the Solution: Malcolm X as Sunni Muslim (1964)

Despite his conversion to “orthodox” Islam in 1964, Malcolm continued to see Blackness as the basis for unifying all people of African descent throughout that whole year. It is true that after this transition Malcolm would be open to even uniting with white people, but he would consistently view unity among people of African descent as of primary importance and something that must precede unity with others.\(^798\) Shortly after Malcolm left the NOI, the language he used to describe his paradigm for his concept of unity based on Blackness was Black Nationalism. In his Ballot or the Bullet speech in April of that year, he stated that his social, political, and economic philosophy was Black Nationalism. For him, this philosophy was one that assumed that Black people should function as a unit to control the politics, economy, and social reality of their communities.\(^799\) He went on to assert that Black people should see each other like brothers and sisters since they are all Black.\(^800\)

He would continue this concept of unity based on Blackness all the way to the final months of 1964. To give an example, in November that year, Malcolm defined Afro-American, a term he used frequently, as people of African blood in the Western hemisphere; including people in places such as the U.S., Haiti, Brazil, and

\(^798\) The teaching of the NOI included a conception of “Black people” that included all non-white people (i.e., Indigenous Americans, Asians, Arabs, etc.) and thus Malcolm would continue, throughout his life, to have an understanding of unity that would comprise all non-white people as well. Following his departure from the NOI, Malcolm also expressed a desire to unify with white people who were genuinely for the Black struggle. Nevertheless, he always saw Black racial unity as most important. For more on this, see, Malcolm X, *The Harlem ’Hate-Gang Scare (May 29, 1964)*, 70; Malcolm X, “Educate our People in the Science of Politics: Ford Auditorium, Detroit (February 14, 1965)” in Malcolm X, *February 1965: The Final Speeches*, 80-81; Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X*, 49-50; Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 68.


\(^800\) Ibid., 40.
Venezuela, or Canada. He went on to contend that if these people of African-blood would ever unite among themselves, they would provide a strong threat toward imperialism. Moreover, he suggested that the rise of Africa has helped to develop more race pride among Afro-Americans. According to him, Western powers saw Africanism as a more imminent threat to their rule than communism, Marxism, or socialism.\(^{801}\) On this occasion, Malcolm continued his discourse on the power of Black race-based unity to challenge the (white) Western enemy.

The approach is present in the month of December as well. On the third day of the month, Malcolm tells an audience at Oxford University that Black people who all live under the threat of violence with no government protection “because we have the wrong color skin” should, therefore, band together and do whatever is necessary to protect themselves. Stated a different way, because Black people experience a common oppression based on their Blackness they should unite on that basis to liberate themselves.\(^{802}\) Similarly, a few weeks later, Malcolm informed an audience that they should be concerned about the conditions of oppression faced by Black people all over the country and not just in their state or region. Once again, he attached this racial solidarity to the common experience and the reality of a common (white) oppressor. He told them that the Democratic (or, “Cracker”) Party that is populated by racists “crackers” was ignoring the plight of Black people and helping


\(^{802}\) Malcolm X, Oxford University (December 3, 1964), 46.
to sustain their oppression. The above examples support the author’s argument that from beginning to end, Malcolm consistently upheld his interpretation of the Bandung framework consisting of unity based on Blackness. Nevertheless, he had two more months of life that have not yet been considered in this section.

**Blackness as the Solution: Malcolm X as a Sunni Muslim (1965)**

In the final months of his life, Malcolm maintained his view of Blackness as the basis for Africana unity. On the seventh of January, Malcolm juxtaposed his general concern for all humanity with his responsibility toward people of African descent based on race. He argued “my religion teaches me to be for the rights of all human beings, but especially the Afro-American human being; because my religion is a natural religion. And the first law of nature is self-preservation.” Malcolm here provided religious justification for his unity on the basis of race with other Black people. That is, because he sees himself as naturally connected to people of African descent in a particular way, then he is committed to them specifically because of that reason. Furthermore, his usage of the idea of “self” when referring to Afro-Americans is striking because he seems to see people of African descent as one unit of humanity. Based on their Blackness, what happened to one happened to all.

A couple weeks later at the end of the month, Malcolm again encouraged his listeners to unite based on their Blackness. It seems important to the writer to include a lengthy quotation so that readers can see the rationalizations Malcolm gives in his own words. He asserted,

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They also know that the only way we’re going to do it is through unity. So they create another trap. Every effort we make to unite among ourselves on the basis of what we are, they label it as what? Racism. If we say that we want to form something that’s based on Black people getting together, the white man calls that racism…But these are traps. He traps us because he knows it’s impossible for us to go forward unless we get together. But what basis are we going to get together on? We’ve got to get together on the same basis they got together. Italians got together because they were Italian, the Jews got together on the basis of being Jews, the Irish got together on the basis of being Irish. Now what basis are you and I going to get together on? We’ve got to have some kind of basis. But as soon as we mention the only basis we’ve got to get together on, they trick us by telling our leaders, you know, that anything that’s all Black is putting segregation in reverse. Isn’t that what they say? So the people who are Black don’t want to get together because they don’t want segregation. See, the man is tricky brothers and sisters.

In this quite lengthy statement by Malcolm, readers see the emphasis Malcolm placed on a basis for unity. He pointed to various other groups of people and highlighted their basis for unity and argued that people of African descent needed a basis as well. A fair reading of the passage, particularly when he mentioned the potential accusations of racism if Black people were to get together on the “only basis that we’ve got,” makes it certain that Malcolm is referring to unity based on Blackness. With these examples and numerous others from his final weeks of life in February, this author substantiates his claim that whether one is referring to his time during the NOI, immediately following his departure from the group, or up to his last few days of life, Malcolm’s communication of Black unity on the basis of Blackness never wavered.  

Solution for Religion as a Barrier to Unity: (Partial) Taqiyya

The other contributing factor Malcolm understood as supporting the unity


developed at Bandung was the participant’s ability to deemphasize their (religious) differences. In 1959, Malcolm was recorded as stating “At Bandung they had to agree that as long as they remained divided a handful of whites would continue to rule them. But once our African Asian [sic] Brothers put their religious and political differences into the background, their unity has since been sufficient force to break the bonds of...WHITE SUPREMACY [sic].”

As he continued, he then argued that Harlem leaders needed to “put aside all petty differences of religion and politics, and hold a Bandung Conference in Harlem.” The lesson that Malcolm sought to convey was that the necessity of unity to defeat the more powerful oppressor led African and Asian leaders to play down their religious and political differences. Likewise, Malcolm desired that this same process would be repeated among African Americans. The author describes the method Malcolm articulated as partial *taqiyya*.

**Defining *Taqiyya***

The concept of *taqiyya*, according to some, can be found in the Qur’an itself. Surah 3:28 reads, “Let not the believers take the disbelievers as protectors apart from the believers. Whosoever does that has no bond with God, unless you guard against them out of prudence. And God warns you of Himself, and unto God is the journey’s end.” Various commentators agree that this *ayah* (i.e. verse) gives the Muslim religious justification for permitting an outward self-presentation to unbelievers that will not reveal his or her commitment to Islam. If not directly

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807 Carson, *The FBI File*, 175.

808 Ibid.

permitting the hiding of one’s faith, as one interpreter has suggested (Caner Dagli),
others have viewed the *ayah* as allowing Muslims to act outwardly friendly (Ibn
Kathir) and/or accept assistance from unbelievers (Yusuf Ali).\textsuperscript{810} Another important
*ayah* for understanding the concept of *taqiyya* reads “Whosoever disbelieves in God
after having believed—save one who is coerced, while his heart is at peace in faith—
but whosoever opens his breast unto disbelief, upon them shall be the Wrath of God,
and theirs shall be a great punishment” (Surah 16:106). Some scholars (Maria Dakake
and Ibn Kathir) have understood this *ayah* to allow for Muslims under duress or
torture to renounce their belief in Islam, while continuing to believe in the faith
inwardly.\textsuperscript{811} However, Yusuf Ali seems to assert that this *ayah* is an exception for a
weak moment, but not a permission (maybe read as: not a license) to hide one’s
faith.\textsuperscript{812}

The practice is often associated with Shi’i Muslims, who represent a
minority expression of what may be viewed as “orthodox” Islam. Conflict over
legitimate claims to descent from the Prophet Muhammad’s family and the right to
lead the Muslim state placed Shi’is into a strained relationship with the Abbasid State
(750-1258 C.E.). Thus, according to Jonathan Berkey, Shi’is found that publicly
identifying their religious commitment to a version of Islam that claimed to connect
adherents to the family of Muhammad would be precarious. Thus, according to him,
it encouraged the practice of dissemblance in regard to one’s Shi’i beliefs in the

(Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003),142; Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Qur’an: Text, Translation and Commentary*


\textsuperscript{812}Ali, *The Qur’an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, 685.
context of persecution; they called this *taqiyya.*

Other scholars contributing to this discourse have provided more insight. For example, R. Strothmann explained that because the Muslim’s profession of faith gains its fundamental legitimacy from his or her intention, then it remains valid even if one is forced to verbalize unbelief or even perform worship along with unbelievers. John Hanson defines *taqiyya* in relationship to politics. He argued that the practice implies “acquiescence to a greater political power while maintaining inner adherence to the faith.” It seems then, that despite some of the Islamophobic interpretations, a significant amount of scholars, including those mentioned above, agree that *taqiyya* refers to the act of concealing one’s actual beliefs during times of distress.

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816 For examples of other scholars who accept this interpretation, see, Etan Kohlberg, “Some Imami-Shi’i Views on Taqiyya” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 95, no. 3 (July-September, 1975), 395; Eduardo Manzano Moreno, “The Iberian Peninsula and North Africa” in Chase Robinson, ed., *The New Cambridge History of Islam, vol. 1: The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 595; Nader El-Bizri, “God: Essence and Attributes” in Tim Winter, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 134; Rippin, *Muslims*, 127—8, 284. Rippin has also highlighted the suspicion that many Muslims have endured, especially in Western countries. The idea that a self-professed “moderate” Muslim is actually practicing *taqiyya* has led to the assumption by some that Muslims are untrustworthy. Some even saw former President Barack Obama as a secret Muslim. This has led to harmful and uninformed presuppositions about Muslims in the West. Rippin explained: “The motif of ‘hiding one’s religion’ resounds strongly and links to a sense that Muslims cannot be trusted. It is doubtful that the general public has any knowledge of the formative Shi’i concept of *taqiyya,* ‘dissimulation,’ that allows for one’s status as a Shi’i to be denied in the face of dangers posed by the Sunni majority to Shi’ites. That word is sometimes invoked, however, especially on some polemical websites when they wish to convey the idea that underneath all Muslim beliefs is a secretly held doctrine which must manifest itself at some point: *jihad.*” For a fuller discussion of this, see, Rippin, *Muslims*, 325—6.
Based on what has just been described, the author would like to utilize the concept of *taqiyya* as a framework to understand Malcolm’s proposed solution to the problem that a religiously diverse group confronted in regard to unifying. The author has not encountered any speeches or writings by Malcolm that suggested he conceived of himself as applying this concept. Therefore, the case is not being made that Malcolm taught Africana peoples to utilize *taqiyya* in the traditional sense. Rather, his claim is that, in an analogous way, the idea of withholding information about one’s religious affiliation under threatening circumstances is something that Malcolm encouraged. That is, since he believed that Black people would never obtain freedom under the rule of white people, revolutionary praxis was vitally important for them to alleviate the state-sponsored terror they endured. However, a successful revolution could not be accomplished unless Africana peoples were united. This could be understood as a situation of extreme distress and thus, warrant concealing one’s religious beliefs in the interest of protecting Pan-African unity. However, there is need for a clarifying point that distinguishes how *taqiyya* will be used throughout the rest of this dissertation. As it will be shown below, Malcolm was not advocating for people to deny their religious views, but rather to refrain from discussing them during times of political mobilization. As with his other solutions that have been articulated throughout this dissertation, Malcolm presented *taqiyya* as the solution for interreligious unity from his time in the NOI, all the way until his last days of life.

*Taqiyya as the Solution: Malcolm X in the NOI*

Throughout his time in the NOI, Malcolm frequently encouraged Black people to avoid divisions by deemphasizing their religious distinctions. So adamant about protecting Black unity, he declared in 1960 that Black people should not highlight their distinct complexions because he believed that stressing these unique individual characteristics inevitably would create divisions. He went on to say that
Black people need to use terms that lend themselves to unity, not disunity.\textsuperscript{817} This strong caution for anything that could lead to division caused him to say in April of 1962 that his listeners should forget that they are Methodist or Baptist, and rather, remember that they are catching hell.\textsuperscript{818} This assertion reveals the complimentary relationship of the two solutions Malcolm argued for that are being presented in this chapter. There must be both a remembering and a forgetting. That is, as Blackness (African-descent and experience of oppression; social death) takes center stage, these other identities must, simultaneously, be pushed to the back (i.e. \textit{taqiyya}).\textsuperscript{819}

Malcolm applied this framework at the Memorial Service of his fellow Muslim, Ronald Stokes, who had been killed by the police. He told the audience that rather than describing it as a Muslim who had been killed, he declared that it was a Black man who had been brutally murdered. Explaining his reason for doing this, Malcolm asserted that the white press sought to emphasize the fact that Stokes was a Muslim in an attempt to alienate him from the masses of Black people.\textsuperscript{820} This is an example of him implementing his own call for Black people to submerge their minor differences for the purpose of forming a Black united front.\textsuperscript{821}

A little over a year later, in 1963, Malcolm provided a bit of nuance to his


\textsuperscript{818}Malcolm X, \textit{Ronald Stokes Memorial Service (April 28, 1962).}

\textsuperscript{819}Falola asserted that Nkrumah had also “warned all Africans to underplay their ethnic differences in dealing with Europeans, as they were all exploited as ‘blacks’ rather than as Yoruba or Fante.” For more on this, see, Falola, \textit{Nationalism and African Intellectuals}, 102.

\textsuperscript{820}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{821}Malcolm X, \textit{Harlem Unity Rally (August 10, 1963).}
perspective. While still instructing Black people to “forget our differences,” Malcolm also provided insight for dealing with intragroup issues. He told his listeners to “don’t let the enemy know that you’ve got a disagreement.” Rather than “airing our differences” the problems Black people have with one another should be dealt with internally, according to Malcolm.\textsuperscript{822} He explained it as such:

Instead of airing our differences in public, we have to realize we’re all the same family. And when you have a family squabble, you don’t get out on the sidewalk. If you do, everybody calls you uncouth, unrefined, uncivilized, savage. If you don’t make it at home, you settle it at home; you get in the closet, argue it out behind closed doors, and then when you come out on the street, you pose a common front, a united front…We need to stop airing our differences in front of the white man, put the white man out of our meetings, and then sit down and talk shop with each other.\textsuperscript{823}

Although this might be viewed as conflicting with Malcolm’s previous declarations of the need to forget or submerge differences, the author interprets this in an alternative way. First, this quote demonstrates that the fundamental purpose of this \textit{taqiyya} proposed by Malcolm is to dissuade division rather than silence dissent. His main concern, it seems, was focused on preserving Pan-African unity. Nevertheless, he was keenly sensitive to the fragility of unity, while also being aware of the potential reality of disagreements; hence his instruction on the proper steps to address them.

Malcolm’s dialectical approach to unity made use of hyperbole. For the purpose of emphasizing the absolute necessity to protect unity from potentially dis-unifying issues, Malcolm frequently told his hearers to forget their difference. His concern seems to have been with publicly revealing intragroup problems while addressing them. In other words, he was not instructing Black people not to address

\textsuperscript{822}Malcolm X, \textit{Message to the Grass Roots (November 10, 1963)}, 4, 6.

\textsuperscript{823}Ibid., 6.
problems within the community. Rather, he was telling them to do it without exposing a “thread in the garment of unity” that white people could see and pull with the result of Black unity unraveling.

This, perhaps, accommodates for some of the dangers highlighted by Black feminists and Black LGBTQ scholars and/or people who identify as such. That is, the type of race-based unity proposed by Malcolm does not seem to be consistent with calls to ignore the concerns of Black women and Black LGBTQ identifying people. In Malcolm’s formulation of unity, these issues should be addressed under the rubric of family. That would seem to entail mutual love, patience, willingness to learn, and willingness to help others grow in various areas. Yet, the present author is consistent; if Black women and/or Black LGBTQ peoples concluded that Black men were irredeemable, then the author would concede Louise Moore’s point that for Black women (and/or LGBTQ Black people), “the answer to our problem must be revolutionary and that means that armed struggle—killing the Black man who oppresses us.” While this perspective is not favorable to the present writer, according to the logic of this dissertation, he must concede its legitimacy if a case could be made that all, or even most, Black men consciously and intentionally violently subjugate Black women and Black LGBTQ identifying people.

Nevertheless, even if this was the case, it seems logical that temporary Black unity is still necessary to destroy the larger enemy. That is, unless Black women believe that white supremacy will end once Black men are defeated, or that

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they are able to defeat white supremacy on their own or with the help of other non-white people, then temporary unity with Black men would remain necessary until white supremacy is destroyed. This is, however, in the most extreme case of Black male depravity; and since the author does not believe this is the general condition of Black men, the need for genuine unity is that much more justified.

**Taqiyya as the Solution: Malcolm X as Sunni Muslim (1964)**

After leaving the NOI, the practice and “teaching” of *taqiyya* became more important for Malcolm. This was because, as noted in the previous chapter, while in the Nation, Muhammad limited Malcolm’s ability to engage with the broader movement. However, his new found freedom made the possibility of actual unified action a reality for Malcolm. Therefore, shortly after his break from the NOI, he gave two versions of one of his most famous speeches, *Ballot or the Bullet*, and argued for and demonstrated *taqiyya*. In the speech, he stated,

> I would like to clarify something concerning myself. I’m still a Muslim, my religion is still Islam. That’s my personal belief...Although I’m still a Muslim, I’m not here tonight to discuss my religion. I’m not here to try and change your religion. I’m not here to argue or discuss anything that we differ about, because it’s time for us to submerge our differences...  

Similarly, a few days later, in another version of the same speech, Malcolm would add to his opening statement that his religion was his personal business; between himself and his God. Moreover, he argued that it was best that way because if he had come out discussing religion there would be too many differences and it would ruin

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their ability to get together. Thus, he declared, their religion should be kept at home; kept in the closet so they could attend to the enemy that was common to them all.  

Since he wanted to be a uniting force for all Black organizations he realized that he had to find a way to avoid jealousy among other leaders; which he had learned would inevitably arise. Speaking rhetorically to his audience, he asked, “How can we avoid jealousy? How can we avoid the suspicion and the divisions that exist in the community?” He continued, “I’ll tell you how.”

Malcolm informed his audience that he had been observing the well-known Gospel preacher, Billy Graham. Through this examination, he concluded that the power of Graham’s gospel message (which Malcolm described as white Nationalism) was that Graham called people to Christ and pointed them to a local church to join. This, Malcolm contended, helped him to avoid inciting jealousy among local pastors; in fact, these local pastors cooperated with Graham. Malcolm went on to say that his gospel, riffing off of what he learned from Graham, was a gospel of Black Nationalism. Moreover, it would not threaten the existence of other organizations. One could remain a member of any organization that was preaching and practicing the gospel of Black Nationalism. Malcolm believed that through this method he would be able to overcome the barriers that hindered unity between religiously heterogeneous communities of Black people. That is, the political mobilization of Black people would not require a commitment to

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828 Ibid., 40-41.
a particular religious view because it was a non-religious organization.

The statements and actions presented above have caused some to believe that Malcolm held a dichotomy between his religion and his politics. That Malcolm’s call to leave religion at home for the purpose of focusing on Black political action somehow was a reflection of a new vision that understood Black liberation in a secular form. Even Sawyer considered the introduction to the first version of this speech as a situation where Malcolm “references his religion as being secondary to considerations of political praxis toward a project of political viability for Black people.” However, this type of reading demonstrates the need for utilizing *taqiyya* as an interpretive framework for understanding this aspect of Malcolm’s discourse. Because without it, others have had a narrow approach to this aspect of Malcolm’s worldview and have missed the fact that he consistently saw religion and politics as one and the same. Even more, it misses the fact that this was actually a deeply religious act on the part of Malcolm; it was his articulation of *taqiyya*.

Malcolm realized that religion, to many, sought converts and spread doctrinal claims. However, as Seyed Miri explained, “he [Malcolm] interprets

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religion as a frame of political action.” In other words, since Malcolm saw religion and politics as one and the same, he could discursively separate the two (\textit{taqiyya}) to pacify the fears of those who were not interested in religious debate, while simultaneously holding the two together within his own personal philosophy. Just as the practice of \textit{taqiyya} referred to the outward dissemblance of belief, while the believer maintained her inward commitment to faith, the argument presented here is that although Malcolm saw no distinction between his religion and politics, he had to verbally claim a separation (i.e. submerging) of his religion from his political work so it would not become a barrier to unity.

\textbf{Taqiyya as the Solution: Malcolm X as Sunni Muslim (1965)}

On the first day of 1965 Malcolm reaffirmed his continued application of \textit{taqiyya} in what would become his last weeks of life. He was discussing his journey toward the creation of the OAAU to a group of young civil rights workers he, no doubt, hoped to recruit. He stated,

\begin{quote}
I don’t get my religion involved in my politics, because they clash. They don’t clash, but when you go into something as a Muslim, you’ve got a whole lot of Negroes who are Christians, who aren’t broad-minded enough, so you get into a religious argument, and it doesn’t pay. So I don’t enter into this struggle as a Muslim…
\end{quote}

Explaining this further, Malcolm argued that those in the Muslim Mosque Inc. (the religious organization he established immediately after leaving the NOI) realized that the problem facing Black people went “above and beyond religion.” They therefore, decided to create an organization that “had nothing to do with religion at all;” so they

\begin{flushright}
\textit{\textsuperscript{832}}Malcolm X, \textit{See for Yourself (January 1, 1965)}, 95.
\end{flushright}
formed the OAAU. This description of the birth of his organization may tempt the reader again to interpret these statements by Malcolm as distinguishing his political action from his religion. However, as it has been explained above, Malcolm was applying the principle of *taqiyya*. Stated differently, to keep from alienating non-Muslim potential participants, Malcolm made an outward separation of his religion from his politics while inwardly they were inseparable.

While over the next few days Malcolm would repeatedly express that he kept his religion and politics separated, it was on February 16 of that year that Malcolm would again articulate his justification for using *taqiyya*. Malcolm stated, that “our people began to get together and determined at the Bandung Conference that it was time for us to forget our differences. We had differences…But with all of the differences that existed, they agreed on one thing, the spirit of Bandung was, from there on in, to de- emphasize the areas of difference and emphasize the areas that we had in common.” With this comment made less than a week before Malcolm’s assassination, it seems that the argument posed in this section has come full circle. The author began the solution section of this chapter with a discussion of Malcolm’s use of Bandung as a paradigm for his concept of unity beginning in 1959. Here one can see that days before his death, Malcolm continued to highlight the importance of

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833 Ibid., 83.


forgetting differences and emphasizing what they had in common. Centering Blackness and practicing *taqiyya* shaped the entire public life of Malcolm X. It must be stated that for Malcolm, neither of these concepts were inconsistent with an exclusivist view of religion or a religion that required spreading its message. He utilized *taqiyya* for political mobilization but always saw Islam as the only true religion and one that should be spread.\textsuperscript{836} Now that the author has provided a detailed exposition of Malcolm’s thought on the subject of unity, he will analyze whether Malcolm’s solutions satisfy the standards that have been constructed in the first half of this chapter.

**Conclusion: Assessing Malcolm’s Contribution to an Africana Critical Theory of Religion**

In light of the various ways that divisions have developed among groups of people, many Africana theorists have highlighted the importance of unity for resistance movements. Historians have firmly established the fact that Europeans weakened those they sought to subject by creating or exploiting already present divisions. Malcolm’s perspective on this reality was discussed in the beginning of this chapter. Along with other theorists, Malcolm criticized the way religion could be used as a vehicle for divisions. Furthermore, this chapter sought to engage with some of the concerns raised by Black feminists, Black LGBTQ people, and Afropessimists.

One thing that was realized from that section was that Black feminists and Black LGBTQ scholars do not seem to have a problem with centering race; the problem they have is what centering race would entail for other concerns? If a race-centered unity is to develop, it must be one where every member of the race is viewed as an equal partner. After engaging with these concerns along with Africana activist-thinkers, the author revisited some of the concepts developed in the section on Malcolm’s critiques.

Reflecting dialectically with Malcolm’s perspective and those of other thinkers caused the author to refine the standards that were initially constructed. For example, the first principle that called for vigilance toward the ways oppressors can sow divisions (1) in the first list was expanded to directly emphasize identities as potential avenues the oppressor could use to sow divisions in the second list. After expounding on various writers’ work, it became clear that a key aspect of divisions was developed through certain ethnic and religious identities. Thus, it seemed appropriate to add more specificity to the standard.

In regard to another change, the discussion on religious relativism and interreligious dialogue caused the author to subsume the concept of the potential hindrance of proselytism from the first list, into the freedom of religious beliefs and the revolutionary awareness of how oppressors use various identities to sow divisions in the second list. Rather than place a ban on religious proselytism, the emphasis seems to be best laid on an awareness of potential dangers it has to political mobilization. With those changes, along with additional standards based on the discourse of other thinkers, the author constructed a foundation by which to gauge
any claim to offer an Africana Critical Theory of Religion related to unity.

Malcolm’s implementation of *taqiyya* seems to address a number of the values that have been determined. His insistence that Africana people put aside their differences in regard to religion (and other aspects of identity) and to “forget” their specific identities in favor for emphasizing what they had in common satisfies the first standard. One should not allow subgroups within the Black community to form and create divisions.

Readers also saw that Malcolm called for the centering of Blackness as the fundamental basis for unity. Satisfying the third standard, a unity based on Blackness would include all people of African descent. Malcolm saw this as a strong link, because he believed that Black people had suffering in common and a common enemy. Moreover, the focus on Blackness would satisfy the forth principle because it would base unity on something that transcends intragroup differences in the Black community. Malcolm told audiences that there Blackness was the fundamental reason why they were targeted. Blackness also functions as a paradigm for a singular focus because Malcolm taught his audiences to submerge other identities and push their Blackness to center stage. This would fulfill the concern mentioned in standard eight about split loyalties.

Although Malcolm consistently told his hearers to submerge their differences, he also gave insight on how to deal with intragroup conflicts. His main directive was to encourage Black people to ensure they do not air their differences with one another, lest they be exploited by white people. In other examples of race-based Black unity, Blackness was sometimes used as a cover for abuse; particularly
toward Black women. The provision Malcolm gave to address problems within the Black community show caution and care, and thus, satisfies the fifth standard. There may be tension, however, between Malcolm’s position and the seventh standard. In Malcolm’s discourse, he seemed to desire for the intragroup concerns to be solved; or at least for an agreement to be made among the parties. Thus, for better or worse, Malcolm may not satisfy standard number seven.

It may also be said that Malcolm does not satisfy the ninth principle as well. While this author dialectically engaged with the concern of extreme intragroup conflict, it is not clear where Malcolm stood on this issue. One thing is for certain, Malcolm believed in a “by any means necessary” ethic for all people. Thus, although the author developed a notion of temporary unity until white supremacy is destroyed, it is possible that Malcolm would hold a similar view.

In regard to the Divine approval of Africana unity, Malcolm declared that his religion was a natural religion. He believed that justified his particular focus on Black people for liberation because the first law of nature was self-preservation. This perspective satisfies the second principle on the ACT standards list. Similarly, Malcolm’s claim that religion was someone’s personal business fulfills the sixth principle of religious freedom. Although he believed that Islam was the one true religion, he did not require Black people to convert to Islam as a prerequisite to work with him.

This assessment demonstrates that there are some clear ways that Malcolm provides satisfactory solutions, but there are other things that are obscure. It would have been great to find a discussion with Malcolm explaining the priority intragroup
differences should take. In other words, should all intragroup differences be solved prior to the revolutionary moment? Nevertheless, even with the unanswered questions, Malcolm still delivered some helpful insights on unity and revolutionary struggle.
CHAPTER 5: BETWEEN HOMOGENEITY (OR HEGEMONY) AND HYBRIDITY (OR HUMAN FREEDOM): THE PROBLEM WITH THE OPPRESSORS’ RELIGION

As explained in chapter one, the study of Black religion from its origin began with a prejudice against the religion of people of African descent. It was also noted that this hostility was not limited to European thinkers but even Black scholars who studied Black religion approached the topic with a negative bias; particularly toward Black Christianity and the Black Church. Historian, Barbara Savage, argued that, from the very beginning of Black Religious Studies, Black scholars presented Black churches as a problem and placed unrealistic expectations on the institution that went beyond its actual capabilities.\(^{837}\) She explained: “The first generation of African American scholars employed all the academic tools at hand to indict black churches, black ministers, and black congregants as a problem and a hindrance in the fight against racial inequality.”\(^{838}\) Moreover, this critique has continued throughout the generations of Black scholars from philosophers to artists.\(^{839}\)


\(^{838}\) Ibid., 20.

\(^{839}\) The author has given numerous examples of Black scholars who have espoused this view in chapter one of this dissertation. However, as an example in Africana Philosophy, Lewis Gordon has presented Christianity as the religion of enslavers. See, Lewis Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 141—2. For examples of this among Black writers, see, Wright, *Native Son*, 778; Caldwell, *Prayer Meeting Or, The First Militant Minister*, 465, 467.
Perhaps the most popular and aggressive attacks directed toward (Black) Christianity in the twentieth century originated with the NOI. Beginning around 1930 in Detroit, Michigan, NOI founder, Fard Muhammad, taught that Christianity was the white man’s religion used to enslave Black people. After Fard Muhammad disappeared from any authoritative record in 1933, Elijah Muhammad began to lead the group. Born in 1897 to a Baptist minister, Muhammad was a Baptist minister himself for a time. However, after being taught by Fard Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad began to proclaim that Christianity was the white man’s religion and inappropriate for Black people. He argued that “Christianity is one of the most perfect black-slave-making religions on our planet. It has completely killed the so-called Negro mentally.” In fact, Muhammad stated that the “greatest hindrance to the truth of our people is the preacher of Christianity.” This strong critique of Christianity would obtain prominence largely from the ministry of Malcolm X.

The onslaught of critiques toward Christianity that would characterize Malcolm’s adult life could be contrasted with the fact that he had a background in Christianity. Along with being an organizer for the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), Malcolm’s father, Earl Little, was an itinerant Baptist preacher. Reflecting back on his childhood, Malcolm stated that he was more attracted to his father’s work for the UNIA more than his teachings about Christianity. He declared

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840 Muhammad, Message to the Blackman in America, 18; Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism, 19, 53.

841 Elijah Muhammad, Our Savior Has Arrived (Phoenix: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 1974), 86; Muhammad, Message to the Blackman in America, 26, 94; Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism, 77.

842 Muhammad, Message to the Blackman in America, 70.

843 Ibid., 18.
that his father’s UNIA meetings were intelligent, but he found his Christian services to be highly emotional and confusing.\textsuperscript{844}

Malcolm claimed that at that young age he was not fully convinced of some of the central claims of Christianity. In his Autobiography he asserted that he did not accept the Christian concept of Jesus as divine and the message about Jesus that he learned from his father.\textsuperscript{845} However, William Hart challenged Malcolm’s description of his childhood. He suggested that this was a case of “autobiographical memory” where in retrospect he projects his current beliefs onto his younger self. Hart did not go as far as saying that Malcolm did believe in the Christian doctrine of Jesus, but that he was likely ignorant at that age.\textsuperscript{846} However, while it cannot be known whether Malcolm truly had an active rejection of Christian teachings in his early childhood, it is clear that as he got older he went to church on numerous occasions, was baptized, and he admitted to being a Christian during his pre-incarceration days.\textsuperscript{847}

After being arrested and sent to prison, Malcolm’s whole demeanor toward Christianity changed. When he received no answer to continual prayers for justice, Malcolm gave up on Christianity. In fact, he considered himself an atheist. At this

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{844}Malcolm X and Haley, \textit{The Autobiography of Malcolm X}, 1, 5, 6; Payne, \textit{The Dead Are Arising}, 61-62. Although Carew mentions that Malcolm’s brother Wilfred insisted that their father was not a Baptist preacher but was only allowed to address the congregations of sympathetic Black preachers, I am not convinced of this. For more on Wilfred’s statement, see, Carew, \textit{Ghosts in Our Blood}, x.

\item \textsuperscript{845}Malcolm X and Haley, \textit{The Autobiography of Malcolm X}, 5.

\item \textsuperscript{846}Hart, \textit{Black Religion}, 27, 28.

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point, Malcolm became very hostile toward religion in general.\textsuperscript{848} Once again, Hart takes issue with Malcolm’s description of himself as an atheist. For Hart, Malcolm was more of a practical atheist than one who rejected theism on some rational basis. That is, it was more of a “fist-shaking” posture toward the divine; a god cursing form of atheism.\textsuperscript{849} Regardless of which description more accurately portrays him, what is evident is that the rest of Malcolm’s life he militated against the religion of Christianity as the religion of Black people’s oppressors.

In previous chapters the author chose to “pull back” conceptually to apply Malcolm’s critique to religion more broadly even though Malcolm was often directing his attention to the oppressors’ religion of his context which happened to be Christianity.\textsuperscript{850} This decision was not done simply out of convenience for the use of this dissertation. For example, it was demonstrated that Malcolm also critiqued the form of Islam practiced by the NOI and some Sunni Muslims explicitly and implicitly. Nevertheless, that approach for this chapter is untenable. The category of critiques focused on in this chapter is directed toward Christianity itself rather than simply an aspect of the religion. For that reason, the way the author will interact with the concerns raised against Christianity should not be viewed as a personal attack on the religion, nor an apologetic for the faith. Rather, just as when he addressed other topics, the claims accentuated here will be confronted dialectically; evaluating them on various bases. Just like in previous chapters, the author will begin by presenting


\textsuperscript{849} Hart, \textit{Black Religion}, 41.

\textsuperscript{850} See Chapter 3.
Malcolm’s critiques, then he will interact with thinkers from the Africana world to construct a standard that must be met by any solutions offered. Subsequently, he will articulate Malcolm’s solutions and end with some concluding evaluations.

**Malcolm’s Critique of Christianity: The (Oppressors’) White Man’s Religion**

It may not be an overstatement to assert that Malcolm X articulated, at least in the twentieth century, perhaps the most culturally relevant, African-centered, cogent and creatively delivered critiques of Christianity. In fact, much of the critiques of Christianity that would come after his death are variations of Malcolm’s rhetoric. No one would likely dispute the idea that, during his lifetime, Malcolm was the most well-known critic of Christianity in the Black community.

Although it originated from someone else, one of the critiques Malcolm is most well-known for popularizing is his claim that Christianity is the white man’s religion. Examples of Malcolm proclaiming that, or that it’s the slave master’s religion, can be found in his discourse in 1957, 1960, and in 1962. In regard to the latter date, Malcolm stated approvingly that there was a new type of Black person on the rise who rejected the white man’s Christian religion.851

One of the primary proofs he would use to demonstrate this claim is that the religion, according to him, required adherents to worship a blonde haired and blue-eyed God (a God in the image of their oppressors). Moreover, Black people had

been maneuvered into worshipping a white Jesus. During a speech in 1961, Malcolm contended that every other people group that worshipped Jesus depicted him with features they possessed. He maintained that it was only Black people who did not continue this practice and rather presented Jesus as white. This seems to reflect what might be described as a subjective theological epistemology. That is, the Divine has offered humans the freedom to present the Divine-Self in their image. There is no objectively true image of the Divine that is true for all people. Rather, according to this view, the image of the particular people is the correct image of the Divine for those people; not for others. Elaborating on this further, he described this concept in nationalistic terms. In April of 1964, he declared:

I studied this man Billy Graham…who preaches white nationalism; that’s what he preaches…I say that what he preaches. The whole church structure in this country is white nationalism. You go inside a white church, that’s what they’re preaching; white nationalism. They got Jesus white, Mary white, God white, everybody white, that’s white nationalism.

From the consistent display of religious images depicted as white, Malcolm saw this as part of the larger structure of white dominance in the United States. For him, white people validated their superiority in the social structure by declaring the image of all things holy exclusively as white. For this reason, Christianity was the white man’s religion. However, this was not the only basis for his claim.

Working in correlation with the whitening of everything holy, was the Christian imperative to attempt to destroy all non-white cultures. For him, in order to create the “Negro,” white people had to destroy the African-ness of Black people.

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854 Malcolm X, The Ballot or the Bullet (April 12, 1964).
He argued that white people brought them here and systematically stripped the pure Black Africans of their language, their religion, and their art (i.e. their culture). This created the “innocent, happy-go-lucky, grinning, dancing child of nature;” the Negro. Moreover, Malcolm argued that Christianity was given to the Negros to prevent them from reverting back to their original state.\textsuperscript{855} As evidence of this cultural erasure, he pointed to the last names of Black people as an indication that their original names had been destroyed and replaced by their enslavers’ names.\textsuperscript{856}

Malcolm believed that this replacement of African culture with Christianity (white nationalism) had serious political implications. First, as was stated in previous chapters, Malcolm made no distinction between religion and politics. Therefore, having a white man’s religion would have a negative effect on Black political activity. This concept can be gathered from statements he made in January of 1965. Speaking to an audience about Black history, he asserted that enslaved mothers would pray out loud in their native tongue so their children could hear them and learn their language. Furthermore, he told his audience that these mothers were not praying to Jesus; even though that’s who Black people prayed to in 1965. White people have no problem with Black people calling on Jesus because they did not fear Jesus. But, the person who the enslaved mothers were calling on was somebody else.\textsuperscript{857} Similarly, a

\textsuperscript{855}Malcolm X, \textit{The Negro}, 8-9.

\textsuperscript{856}Malcolm X and Haley, \textit{The Autobiography of Malcolm X}, 203; Essien-Udom, \textit{Black Nationalism}, 178—9. Historian, Orlando Patterson seems to agree with Malcolm here in the since that he argued that in his broad research on slavery among various people and different time periods, he found that “the slave was usually forced to reject his own gods and ancestral spirits and to worship those of his master.” See, Paterson, \textit{Slavery and Social Death}, 66. Furthermore, referring to a different context, Paget Henry discussed the way Europeans tried to destroy any acknowledgement of African culture or an African philosophy; philosophy was viewed as exclusively a product of Europe. For more on this, see, Henry, \textit{Caliban’s Reason}, 69.


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few days before his assassination, he argued:

Those of you who are Christians probably believe in the same God, because I think you believe in the God who created the universe, the only difference being you call him God and I—we call him Allah. The Jews call him Jehovah. If you could understand Hebrew, you’d probably call him Jehovah too. If you could understand Arabic, you’d probably call him Allah. But since the white man, your friend, took your language away from you during slavery, the only language you know is his language. You know, your friend’s language. So you call for the same God he calls for. When he’s putting a rope around your neck, you call for God and he calls for God. And you wonder why the one you call on never answers you.\(^858\)

In both examples above, calling on the right God by the right name effects Black people’s political liberation. Moreover, in both cases it is the destruction of Black people's previous religion and its replacement with Christianity that has hindered their religio-political resistance. In other words, accepting the white man’s religion and calling on the white man’s God hinders Black resistance.

Another political implication Malcolm attached to accepting Christianity was that it placed Black people into mental bondage. In the mid-1950s, he was recorded as saying that “white devils preaching a white Christian religion” numbed the minds of Black people and placed them in a condition of mental death.\(^859\)

Similarly, recounting one of his early sermons, Malcolm explained that he taught listeners that the “white man’s Christian religion [was] used to brainwash us black people!”\(^860\) This is detrimental because as long as Black people pray to the white

\(^{858}\) Malcolm X, *Educate our People in the Science of Politics* (February 14, 1965), 83.

\(^{859}\) Carson, *The FBI File*, 122.

man’s God they will be brainwashed and remain beggars to white people.\textsuperscript{861} He did not change his perspective on this in his last year of life. In fact, a little over a week before his assassination, Malcolm again stated that the “Christian religion has been used to brainwash the Black man.”\textsuperscript{862}

The effectiveness of Christianity for the purpose of white dominance is connected to the fact that, according to Malcolm, it was tailor-made for the use of white oppressors. He argued that white people twisted Christianity so that Black people would focus on the afterlife while they keep their “foot on our backs.”\textsuperscript{863} It is also reported that in Chicago in 1956, Malcolm “ridiculed the teachings of the Bible, especially life after death. He asserted that statements in the Bible were inserted by the white man to hold the black man in slavery.”\textsuperscript{864} This highlights once again Malcolm’s claim that white people shaped Christianity to help them oppress others; particularly it’s teaching about the afterlife.\textsuperscript{865} Things were so bad, however, that


\textsuperscript{864}Carson, The FBI File, 131.

\textsuperscript{865}What is interesting about this claim is that while attributing teachings about life after death to nefarious white people who used it to oppress Black people, it is noteworthy that ancient Egyptians were the first people to express the idea of life after death. This is an example how there are some concepts that have rhetorical strength, but are inconsistent with the larger narrative. That is, while the claim is that white people, through their evil schemes developed the idea of life after death, the truth is that ancient Africans were the first to make this claim. Craig Keener and Glenn Usry recognized this when they stated that “Elijah in fact attributes any belief in an afterlife purely to slavery teaching, ignoring the afterlife doctrines of both orthodox Islam and virtually all traditional African religions.” For more on the teachings of life after death among ancient Egyptians, see, Emily Teeter, Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 4, 58; Theophile Obenga, “Egypt: Ancient History of African Philosophy” in Wiredu, ed., A Companion to African Philosophy, 43; Craig Keener and Glenn Usry, Defending Black Faith: Answers to Tough Questions About African-American Christianity (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 60.
even “Negro preachers” [and Malcolm emphasized the fact that he does not call them “so-called Negro...”], who were paid to teach exactly what white people wanted, taught the silly belief that it was possible for punishment after death. Providing more detail and using his sense of humor, Malcolm declared that Black people had some dumb preachers who had the community’s mind so messed up that he had them singing “you can have all this world, just give me Jesus.” Malcolm went on to say that, consequently, white people took all this world and gave Black people Jesus and that’s all you got.

Malcolm saw this strategy as a template that white people used all around the world to oppress people. He explained that when white people came to the Americas, they sent a priest in first to pave the way for soldiers. Moreover, in Africa, they sent in missionaries and the missionaries were followed by the soldiers. Christianity was used to get Black people to accept their inferior position. He went on to say that white people used a slave ship named Jesus to bring Africans here, and they used Jesus to keep them here as well. This usefulness of Christianity for white oppressors should be enough to convince Black people that Christianity is for white

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866 Malcolm X, “Malcolm X on the Original Asiatic Man (1962)” in Malcolm X: The Most Complete Collection of Malcolm X Speeches, Debates, and Interviews ever Assembled [Downloaded Online Digital Collection], Retrieved from: Malcolmxfiles.blogspot.com/2015/02/the-complete-malcolm-x-40-hours-of.html; Carson, The FBI File, 106—7. In Malcolm’s discourse, he would often refer to Black people as “so-called Negroes” because, as highlighted above, he believed that a Negro was the creation of white people; a subservient being. However, in order to reject that identity, Malcolm used the phrase “so-called Negro.” In this case, however, Malcolm brought to his listeners’ attention that he was intentionally refraining from qualifying his use of the word “Negro” with his usually “so-called” statement. This pointed to the fact that he was using the word “Negro” in a pejorative way. For more on this, see, Malcolm X, The Embassy in Los Angeles (April 16, 1961).


868 Malcolm X, Austin Clarke Interview (October 13, 1963).

people and not for them.

In addition, however, not only does Christianity work for the project of white supremacy, but it has been ineffective for Black people. On various occasions Malcolm declared that Christianity had failed to solve the problem Black people faced. It is reported that in 1960 Malcolm told an audience that if something is not doing you any good, then you should get rid of it; then he threw a Bible on the floor and stated “that’s where it belongs.” Moreover, he is said to have argued that “anything you take that affects you so much that it makes you absolutely helpless, can easily be classified as poison, and we find that the so-called Negroes here in America today are in a miserable or pitiful condition, namely because of the type of conception they’ve gotten of religion from getting the wrong understanding of the Bible…when Mr. MUHAMMAD [sic] says that the Bible is a poison book, he doesn’t condemn the book as such but he condemns the condition that the reading of it has placed the Negroes here in America in.” These two statements along with the throwing of the Bible on the floor highlights a distinction it seems that Malcolm sought to make. That is, between the Bible itself, and the effect the Bible has had on Black people. As he said, he is not condemning the Bible, but because of the effects of the Bible it should be thrown out. Nevertheless, this seems to be a distinction without any true meaning. Because, if it is just the faulty interpretation of the Bible, then why should it be thrown away? Why not tell people to keep their Bibles and simply offer them a

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871 Carson, The FBI File, 197.
872 Ibid., 186.
different interpretation? Thus, Malcolm pointed both to the Bible and Christianity itself as the cause for most of the issues Black people faced in the U.S.A. In fact, he went on to say that the religious concept of Christianity that was given to Black people has made it almost impossible for them to solve their problems.\(^{873}\)

More specifically, Malcolm argued that Christianity had failed to solve both the personal morality and the political problems faced by Black people. He went as far as stating that Christianity actually made Black people more ungodly.\(^{874}\) On May 12, 1963, Malcolm told listeners that they “were Christians, Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Negroes, and this type of religious concept that they had in the society in which they traveled, circles in which they traveled, led them into a life of crime; and the inability of that religion to reform them of these criminal tendencies is what made them wind up in prison.”\(^{875}\) Similarly, in regard to political liberation, Malcolm asserted that “This white man’s Christian religion teaches blacks that their Savior died for them two thousand years ago; but, for all their churchgoing and praying, blacks have not been saved, and they have yet to know ‘any freedom, justice or equality.’”\(^{876}\) What this demonstrates is that Malcolm saw Christianity as perfectly effective for white supremacy but impotent for assisting Black advancement.

Ultimately, however, the problem Malcolm saw with Christianity was that it was a false religion. Going against nearly a consensus of the dating by historians


\(^{874}\) Malcolm X, *Austin Clarke Interview (October 1963).*

\(^{875}\) Carson, *The FBI File*, 235.

\(^{876}\) Ibid., 127.
and biblical scholars, Malcolm asserted that Christianity got its name hundreds of years after Jesus was alive. He also claimed that since Christianity is only two-thousand years old it cannot be God’s religion because the world is much older than that. Malcolm was also recorded as stating that “the Christian Bible had been written by the ‘Christian slavemaster’ to keep the so-called Negroes in slavery.” While this claim is demonstrably false, it carried much weight in a context where biblical scholarship was not readily accessible to his largely Black urban poor listeners. Nevertheless, there are standards that can be drawn from what has been articulated above for the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion related specifically to Christianity:

1. A revolutionary religion cannot derive from one’s oppressor

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877 Malcolm X, “Black Man’s History (December 12, 1962)” in Malcolm X: The Most Complete Collection of Malcolm X Speeches, Debates, and Interviews ever Assembled [Downloaded Online Digital Collection]. Retrieved from: Malcolmxfiles.blogspot.com/2015/02/the-complete-malcolm-x-40-hours-of.html. I am basing this claim on the fact that Acts 11:26 records when the disciples were first referred to as Christians. One of the earliest historians of Christianity, Eusebius (d. 340 C.E.), confirmed that Luke was the author of the book of Acts. Paul Wegner argued that all of the New Testament writings were completed between 48 A.D. and 100 A.D. Most scholars date the book of Acts between 70 A.D. and 90 A.D. However, there are other scholars who date the book between 61 A.D. and 64 A.D. There are, however, some who date the book between 115 A.D. and 130 A.D. but this is a date that few serious scholars would accept. Moreover, what is known as the Muratorian Fragment, dated to the end of the second century, mentions the book of Acts. Furthermore, Irenaeus (d. 202) also discussed the book as well. What this means is that even if we take the most liberal dating (130 A.D.) this still means that Malcolm’s claim that Christianity got its name hundreds of years after the time of Jesus is nonsense. For more on scholarship on the dating of the book of Acts, see, Eusebius, Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History: Complete and Unabridged, trans. C.F. Cruse (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 69; Craig Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 314—5; Mal Couch, ed., A Bible Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 14; Wegner, The Journey from Texts to Translations, 135, 139.

878 Malcolm X, Black Man’s History (December 12, 1962).

879 Carson, The FBI File, 153.

880 Scholars of the Bible have access to manuscripts of the biblical text that predate European colonialism by centuries. Many scholars see a consistency in the text of the Bible today and the text from centuries old manuscripts. Furthermore, in contemporary society, there have been numerous university and seminary trained Black scholars who have learned the biblical languages and are able to check the stability of the biblical texts themselves. While this critique by Malcolm has rhetorical strength, it is outdated in a context of Black scholars trained in the biblical languages and biblical scholarship. For more on the biblical manuscripts, see, Wegner, The Journey from Texts to Translations.
2. A revolutionary religion must be nationalistic; it cannot destroy the culture of revolutionaries.

3. A revolutionary religion must not encourage the acceptance of suffering.

It has been demonstrated that Malcolm believed that Christianity should be rejected because it was a religion shaped for and by white people. Not only does it assist white domination it also encourages Black subjugation. Secondly, readers have noticed that Malcolm saw religion in nationalistic terms. That is, Malcolm believed it was illegitimate for one people to accept the religion of a different people. For him, a religious people should represent their deity in their own image. Moreover, he believed having the right God had political implications. Part of the reason Black people could not stand up to their oppressors was because they were calling on “his” God rather than their own God. Finally, Malcolm viewed Christianity as brainwashing Black people into accepting the domination of white people over them. Just as in previous chapters, the author will now turn to other Africana voices to help construct an Africana Critical Theory of Religion in regard to the religion of one’s oppressor (Christianity).

**Africana Voices on Accepting Oppressor’s (Religion) Culture**

**From the Continent**

In this section, the author begins with Desmond Tutu and his engagement with the idea of the religion of the oppressor. Although he was committed to Christianity, his commitment was only to a form of Christianity that was against injustice. In 1982 he argued, “If anyone were to show me that apartheid is biblical or
Christian…I would burn my Bible and cease to be a Christian. I want to show that the Christian Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord is subversive of all injustice and evil, oppression and that God is on the side of the oppressed and the downtrodden, that he is the liberator God of the Exodus, who leads people out of every kind of bondage, spiritual, political and economic.”

One thing that this statement demonstrates is that whether the oppressors’ religion is itself oppressive or is simply being used to further oppression is an important distinction. Tutu maintained that if he was to discover that Christianity was an “oppressive religion” as opposed to being the “religion of (choice by) the oppressor” he would discard the religion. This is because the former says something essential about the religion while the latter reflects something accidental. Put in an equation, it might be stated as such:

A. Oppressive Christianity = Christianity

B. Christianity + oppression = fraudulent Christianity

For Tutu, if formula (A) is correct, he is willing to reject Christianity. However, for him, formula (B) is more accurate because he believed that the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ opposed oppression. One might be able to make the case that even if formula (A) was true, as long as Africana revolutionaries held that (B) was true, then the religion poses no threat. Put differently, even if Christianity did actually support the inferior status of Africana peoples, what is important in the revolutionary moment is whether Africana revolutionaries believe that or not; if they continue to believe that the religion is revolutionary despite your knowledge of the contrary, it serves no purpose to strive to convince them that (A) is correct. In fact, their continued belief in

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(B) is likely to serve the revolution more; because, what happens if the person is convinced that (A) is correct but simply remains in the religion? It seems that the most fruitful path is to point to other Christians that embody formula (B) and encourage adherents to be more like them.

Highlighting this further, Tutu pointed to a phenomenon where adherents utilize the same nomenclature to refer to their religion as their oppressors, but they have opposing views on issues of oppression. Tutu explained: “You can be sure that the bulk of white Christians [in South Africa] and the bulk of black Christians are on opposite sides on quite crucial matters and these tensions are putting our unity to strenuous testing…Most white Christians think that our [liberation movements]…are terrorists. Most black Christians believe them to be truly freedom fighters. Most whites see black political prisoners as justly condemned criminals, whereas the vast majority of blacks regard them as heroes and as their leaders.” Moreover, he pointed to his Christian faith as the motive for fighting against oppression. These accentuate the distinction made above; that there are some who hold to the same religion but they have opposite views on issues of justice. What this at least shows is that adopting the Christian faith does not guarantee that one will support oppression; it may actually encourage someone to fight against injustice. Thus, what one can gather from Tutu’s arguments is that if revolutionaries are going to adhere to the same religion as those who are oppressing them, their understanding of their faith must detract from their oppressor’s in regard to issues of justice.

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882 Tutu, We Drink Water to Fill Our Stomachs (1979), 38.
883 Ibid., 31.
Similarly, Sankara had a complex view of Christianity [and Islam]. Like some in the Marxist tradition, Sankara admitted that “in every thing [sic] and every phenomenon there is a progressive and regressive aspect.”884 This view is consistent with the dialectical perspective mentioned in chapter two of this dissertation. Moreover, he shared the view of Tutu articulated above when he asserted that the rich and the poor don’t share the same morals. The Bible and the Koran can’t serve in the same way those who exploit the people and those who are exploited. There will have to be two editions of the Bible and two editions of the Koran.885 Sankara suggested that one cannot equate the perspectives on religion that derive from the exploiters and the exploited. Their very positionality in society precludes agreed upon moral standards and perspectives of religion. What he should be understood as communicating, then, is that Christianity serves a different purpose in the hands of the oppressed than in the hands of the oppressor. The distinction is so vast that Sankara used the language of two distinct “editions” of the religious texts. The current author reads this term “editions” metaphorically to refer to distinct readings of the same texts. Said differently, in a since, there is a different Bible for exploiters and those being exploited; even though the words on the page are the same.

Moreover, although Sankara revealed his admiration toward Christianity, like Malcolm, he pointed out its ineffectiveness for modern revolutionary struggle. Responding to a question about books he would bring with him if he was on an


island, Sankara mentioned *State and Revolution* by Vladimir Lenin, the Bible and the Qur’an. Moreover, he agreed that Lenin, Jesus, and Muhammad went well together. However, although he maintained that Muhammad [and Lenin] was undeniably a revolutionary, he qualified his affirmation that Jesus was a revolutionary too by declaring that his [Jesus’] revolution was unfinished.886 Explaining this further, he argued Jesus “ends up being abstract, while Muhammad was able to be more materialist. We received the word of Christ as a message capable of saving us from the real misery we lived in, as a philosophy of qualitative transformation of the world. But we were disappointed by the use to which it was put.”887 Therefore, he continued, “[w]hen we had to look for something else, we found the class struggle.”888 What one learns is that, for Sankara, while Muhammad was able to turn “society upside down” Jesus did not.889 Even more, Sankara indicated that both the message of Jesus and that of Muhammad help contemporary revolutionaries obtain knowledge of the history of revolutionary thought, their perspectives are outdated; it is the class struggle represented by Lenin that is relevant for contemporary revolutions.890

Sankara offered some important insights for thinking about an Africana critical theory of religion related to the religion of one’s oppressor; Christianity in particular. First, he demonstrated that even if an oppressed person shared the same religious text [and by consequence, nominally the same religion] as their oppressors,


887 Ibid.

888 Ibid., 281.

889 Ibid., 280—1.

890 Ibid., 280.
they will not have the same perspective on that religion. In fact, one can discursively speak of each group having a distinct “edition” of the religious text [or, as will be argued below, a distinct religion]. Nevertheless, approaching Christianity [and Islam] dialectically, Sankara, presented the faith as important for historical context, but as being outdated and ineffective for bringing about a complete revolution.

Biko addressed the concern with accepting the oppressor’s religion as well. While rejecting both, Biko recognized a distinction between the historic Christian faith and the religion used by European colonizers. For example, Biko did not accept the teaching of the Divine and human nature of Jesus, the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, and the Apostle Paul’s call for Christians to submit to the governing authorities. 891 This led him to say that if he was required to accept these doctrines he would have to “reject the Church almost completely.” 892

On the other hand, Biko characterized the expression of Christianity in his context as a “colonialist-tainted version.” This type of Christianity was a tool of oppression and cultural imperialism. 893 For him, a religion that was used to colonize Black South Africans would perpetuate their mistreatment in the future. He explained, “[I]f Christianity in its introduction was corrupted by the inclusion of aspects which made it the ideal religion for the colonization of people, nowadays in its interpretation it is the ideal religion for the maintenance of the subjugation of the same people.” 894 Here Biko admited that the version of Christianity used to colonize

891 Biko, Our Strategy for Liberation, 211.
892 Ibid., 212.
893 Steve Biko, “The Church as seen by a Young Layman” in Biko, I Write what I like, 56.
894 Ibid., 57.
them was ideal for this purpose because of the “inclusion of [certain] aspects.” It seems then, that Biko is concerned with the continual use of that version of Christianity. In other words, if people do not modify the oppressors’ religion, it will continue to be an oppressive religion.

What is more, Biko recognized that Christianity was used to destroy the indigenous cultures of Black South Africans. Their culture was viewed as savage by those who imposed a version of Christianity that was alien to Black South African culture. This imposed perspective of the Christian faith did not allow the type of cultural adaptation by Black South Africans that had been afforded to Europeans.

Biko asserted:

Whereas Christianity had gone through rigorous cultural adaptation from ancient Judea through Rome, through London, through Brussels and Lisbon, somehow when it landed in Cape, it was made to look fairly rigid. Christianity was made the central point of a culture which brought with it new styles of clothing, new customs, new forms of etiquette, new medical approaches, and perhaps new armaments. The people amongst whom Christianity was spread had to cast away their indigenous clothing, their customs, their beliefs which were all described as being pagan and barbaric.

In other words, Christianity was able to become the white man’s religion; but it became exclusively the white man’s religion. Unlike Europeans, it was viewed as illegitimate for Africans to modify the cultural expression of Christianity to fit their indigenous ethnicities.

Biko does, however, add a very important qualifier to his critique of the introduction of Christianity to South African contexts. His problem was not necessarily that a new religion was being introduced to South Africans; nor that it had

895 Ibid., 55, 56.
896 Ibid., 56.
affected the indigenous cultures, per se. Rather, his concern was with it being forced on to Africans. He stated, “cultures affect each other, you know like fashions and you cannot escape rubbing against someone else’s culture. But you must have the right to reject or not anything that is given to you…the primary important thing is that you must have the right to reject or accept any new trend.”\footnote{Biko, \textit{The Righteousness of our Strength}, 130.} This statement demonstrates that Biko understood the inevitability of cultures mutually affecting one another. He did not desire cultural homogeneity; nor its hegemonic enforcement. He simply believed that people encountering new religions and/or cultures should have the freedom to choose to accept or reject them.

As has been articulated, Biko presented some very important contributions for the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion related to the question of the oppressor’s religion. As others covered above have argued or implied, the religion of the oppressor must be distinct or modified if it is to be accepted by the oppressed. Biko also made the case that diverse cultural influences should be expected. However, the people should be free to adopt and adapt the new culture (religion) to their own context.

Cabral enters into the relevant discourse through his thorough discussion of how culture (both African and the European oppressors’) is related to the revolutionary struggle. One of his fundamental assumptions was that “no culture is a perfect, finished whole.”\footnote{Cabral, \textit{National Liberation and Culture}, 50.} Moreover, all cultures have elements that promote
progress and those that cause “stagnation or regression.”\textsuperscript{899} This perspective positions Cabral as a dialectition; able to concede the positives and negatives of other cultures and his own.

One of the central problems of the oppressors’ culture is that it is used as a tool for domination. Repeating what has been stated by previous African thinkers above, Cabral noted that one way the oppressor’s culture functions as a weapon is by repressing the culture of the oppressed. However, the colonizer also aimed to alienate certain portions of the population by having them accept their culture. This, Cabral argued, would create divisions among the people. One way that the division manifests itself is through the assimilated colonized person beginning to look down on his or her fellow colonized people because the cultural values they still hold are viewed as inferior.\textsuperscript{900} In this way, accepting the oppressor’s culture can alienate a section of the oppressed from the larger community of the colonized. Further, it can instill arrogance and condescension toward the cultural values of one’s people.

While he realized that the colonized can have a tendency to look down on their own culture, Cabral was still willing to admit that there were some things about his own culture that hindered the revolutionary struggle. For him, “the negative values of culture are generally an obstacle to the development of the struggle…”\textsuperscript{901} He continued by stating “the armed liberation struggle requires…the progressive liquidation of the remnants of tribal mentality, and the rejection of social and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{899}Ibid., 50-51.\\
\textsuperscript{900}Ibid., 45.\\
\textsuperscript{901}Ibid., 52.
\end{flushright}
religious rules and taboos which inhibit development of the struggle (gerontocracies, neopotism, social inferiority of women, rites and practices which are incompatible with the rational and national character of the struggle, etc.).”

It bears to mention that Cabral does not see culture as an insignificant element even related to armed struggle. Moreover, he highlighted the fact that there were parts of his indigenous culture that should be discarded. He gave numerous examples, but a representative description he presented was as follows:

To give a concrete example: I am African, and it could happen, as it still does with other Africans, that I convince myself that in order for certain things to occur in my life that it be necessary to satisfy the will of a ‘spirit.’ And the spirit said that what I asked for in our conversation could only be realized if I take a little girl who just turned three years old as alms to kill, to make a sacrifice—and then, all that I want could be realized. That still exists in Africa, and if we look closely, people who believe in such things might still exist in our land. I remember a comrade named Alfucene who we sent for the struggle in Gabu. One day he found me to tell me that the ‘spirit’ in Gabu didn’t want us to fight there unless his son was sacrificed. I interpreted this in the following manner: he was native to Gabu and looking for a way to be in charge, because he wanted to be the chief in Gabu; and so, he wanted to show that the ‘spirit’ was interest in his son, thus, that he should be the boss. I told him: ‘Comrade, if that’s how we’re going to struggle in Gabu, let’s go look for that ‘spirit’ until we find it and kill it, because it’s a ‘spirit’ from the tugas [i.e., the Portuguese]—it was the tuga who put it there, it’s not from our land…Thus, I have the obligation to defend my land against all those people who have that aspect of culture stuck in their heads.”

There are at least two things from this quote that should be emphasized for the purposes of this dissertation: First, Cabral recognized that not only could colonizers use their religion to manipulate and serve their purposes with regard to the colonized, but some colonized Africans could use indigenous religions to manipulate other colonized Africans. This is an important concept because essentialist understandings

\[^{902}\text{Ibid.}, 54.\]

\[^{903}\text{Cabral, Cultural Resistance, 116. For other examples of aspects of his culture that Cabral described as a hindrance, see, Ibid., 119; Cabral, Political Resistance, 77, 78.}\]
of culture (and religion) that presume that the foreigner’s culture is evil, and the indigenous culture is pure and good fail to grasp the reality that people will use whatever tools they have to carry out their motives. It is not the culture’s place of origin that makes it oppressive; it’s the motives of those who adhere to it that make it such. Secondly, Cabral’s idea of the “defense of the land” included protection from schemes that manifested in the guise of the religion of the colonized.

However, Cabral was aware that maintaining the local African cultures did have some value. He argued that the seed of opposition to oppression that eventually developed into a liberation movement derived from the people’s culture. Moreover, it is the preservation of the people’s culture and identity that equips them for prolonged resistance against oppression. Culture was so central to resistance for Cabral that he asserted that “with a strong indigenous cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation.” Putting it in even stronger terms, he noted that the “greater the differences between the culture of the dominated people and the culture of their oppressor, the more possible such a victory [of the liberation movement] becomes. History proves that it is much less difficult to dominate and to continue dominating a people whose culture is similar or analogous to that of the conqueror.” All of these statements present the correlation Cabral makes between preserving indigenous culture and the success of the liberation struggle.

Contrarily, there are even useful elements of the oppressors’ culture that


\[\text{\footnotesize{905}}\] Ibid., 39-40.

\[\text{\footnotesize{906}}\] Ibid., 48.
the colonized should also use. To make this point, Cabral focused on the use of Portuguese; the language of the colonizers in his context. He contended that Portuguese, like any other language is merely a tool to communicate. If using Portuguese helped the liberation struggle, that in itself was justification for using it. He added that there “are many things that we can’t say in our language, but there are people who want us to put the Portuguese language to the side because we’re Africans and don’t want the foreigner’s language. Those people want their mind to advance; they don’t want to make their people advance.” In fact, he chided that no one is more loyal to their land just because they choose to speak Creole rather than Portuguese; there were some traders who spoke their native language fluently. The principles stated here are central for those who lean towards a nationalist’s perspective to contend with. Although he was speaking about language, a similar case could be made in regard to religion. Nationalists and Afrocentricists have a tendency to be concerned with whether the religion oppressed people practice derived from their own culture or from outsiders. However, Cabral’s statements above suggest that the most important thing about the religion accepted by the oppressed is whether it assists their struggle for liberation. One is not better if they adhere to a traditional African religion or to Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism.

Ultimately, what Cabral declared is that a new culture must be dialectically created. He believed that there was a need to destroy all of the

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908 Ibid., 136.
909 Ibid., 134.
colonizers’ institutions and create a new culture.\(^{910}\) This is done by recognizing the positives and negatives of one’s culture. Similarly, one must accept good things from the foreigner’s culture and reject the bad things.\(^{911}\) This is the essence of the dialectical approach. Cabral rejected an absolutist perspective on both his own culture and the culture of his oppressors. He displayed an extremely important perspective for an Africana Critical Theory of religion with regard to accepting the oppressor’s religion. Cabral called Africana revolutionaries to avoid an outright rejection of the oppressor’s religion based simply on it originating from them. Rather, one is free to reject the harmful parts and preserve the useful elements.

**From the Diaspora**

Originally from modern-day Ghana but kidnapped into slavery and brought to the Caribbean, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano (died after 1791 CE), is an important figure with first-hand experience of slavery and Christianity’s apparent connection to it during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. He believed that there “is nothing in the sacred writings of the Bible that justifies slavery.”\(^{912}\) Moreover, to suggest that it does, according to Cugoano, is “the grossest perversion of reason, as well as an inconsistent and diabolical use of the sacred writings.”\(^{913}\) For him, it is obvious in the Bible that slavery is condemned and is “most opposite to every precept and injunction of the Divine Law, and contrary to that command which enjoins that all men should love

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\(^{910}\) Cabral, Connecting the Struggles, 83; Cabral, Cultural Resistance, 117.

\(^{911}\) Cabral, National Liberation and Culture, 52; Cabral, Cultural Resistance, 137.


\(^{913}\) Ibid.
their neighbors as themselves, and that they should do unto others, as they would that men should do to them."  

For this reason, whatever the white man’s religion is, it cannot be (authentic) Christianity if it is consistent with slavery, according to Cugoano. His denunciation deserves to be quoted at length:

But as I said before, it is surely to the great shame and scandal of Christianity among all the Heathen nations, that those robbers, plunders, destroyers and enslavers of men should call themselves Christians, and exercise their power under any Christian government and authority. I would have my African countrymen to know and understand, that the destroyers and enslavers of men can be no Christians; for Christianity is the system of benignity and love, and all its votaries are devoted to honesty, justice, humanity, meekness, peace and good-will to all men. But whatever title or claim some may assume to call themselves by it, without possessing any of its virtues, can only manifest them to be the more abominable liars, and the greatest enemies unto it, and as belonging to the synagogue of Satan, and not the adherers to Christ. For the enslavers and oppressors of men, among those that have obtained the name of Christians, they are still acting as its greatest enemies, and contrary to all its genuine principles.  

Not only did he consider enslavers who called themselves Christians as liars, but he also stated that they were actually enemies of Christianity. Speaking to fellow Africans, Cugoano assured them that although enslavers may use the name, they are not genuine Christians because their actions are in complete contradiction to the principles of Christianity. This seems to articulate a distinction between the profession of Christianity, and the evidence of a life committed to Christianity. To be a Christian, then, means to have an obligation to oppose slavery rather than support it. Consequently, Christianity is not the white man’s religion; they are actually enemies to Christianity.

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914 Ibid., 146—7.
915 Ibid., 162.
916 Ibid., 146.
The wicked use of Christianity Cugoano perceived in the practice of Europeans caused him to assert that they were particularly evil and would be judged by God. He proclaimed that,

None but men of the most brutish and depraved nature, led on by the invidious influence of infernal wickedness, could have made their settlements in the different parts of the world discovered by them, and have treated the various Indian nations, in the manner that the barbarous inhuman Europeans have done; and their establishing and carrying on that most dishonest, unjust and diabolical traffic of buying and selling, and of enslaving men, is such a monstrous, audacious and unparalleled wickedness, that the very idea of it is shocking, and the whole nature of it is horrible and infernal.

Cugoano believed that Europeans’ oppressive activities around the world warranted the punishment of God. He contended that if Europeans did not repent calamity would befall them. He noted that “we may be assured that God will certainly avenge himself of such heinous transgressors of his law.” What becomes apparent, then, is that when considering the oppressor’s religion (Christianity in particular) for an Africana Critical Theory of Religion, one must distinguish between oppressors’ who profess Christianity, and those whose lives are consistent with principles such as “justice, humanity, meekness, peace and good-will to all men.” Moreover, for an Africana Critical Theory of Religion, one must be open to the reality that those who claim to adhere to a certain religion might actually be enemies of that religion.

Similarly, the abolitionist, Frederick Douglass (d. 1895), argued that one could not suggest that the white man’s religion could be considered authentic Christianity. He viewed slavery as a sin and that its existence in the United States

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917 Ibid., 160—1.
918 Ibid., 168—9.
919 See block quote on previous page.
branded the country’s “Christianity as a lie.” Speaking of the professed Christianity of the U.S., Douglass maintained:

It is a religion for oppressors, tyrants, man-stealers, and thugs. It is not that ‘pure and undefiled religion’ which is from above, and which is ‘first pure, then peaceable, easy to be entreated full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.’ But a religion which favors the rich against the poor; which exalts the proud above the humble; which divides mankind into two classes, tyrants and slaves; which says to the man in chains, stay there; and to the oppressor, oppress on; it is a religion which may be professed and enjoyed by all the robbers and enslavers of mankind; it makes God a respecter of persons, denies his fatherhood of the race, and tramples in the dust the great truth of the brotherhood of man.

Douglass highlighted various ways that the religion he observed, and some described as Christianity, was a religion of oppressors. That is, this religion supported the aim of oppression.

This form of religion, however, was diametrically opposed to how he understood the historic Christian faith taught by Jesus. Being one of the greatest orators in American history, it is impossible to capture the full scope of what Douglass articulated on this matter without quoting it at length. He stated:

I love the religion of our blessed Saviour, I love that religion that comes from above, in the 'wisdom of God, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.' I love that religion that sends its votaries to bind up the wounds of him that has fallen among thieves. I love that religion that makes it the duty of its disciples to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction. I love that religion that is based upon the glorious principle, of love to God and love to man; which makes its followers do unto others as they themselves would be done by. If you demand liberty to yourself, it says, grant it to your neighbours [sic]. If you claim a right to think for yourselves, it says, allow your neighbours [sic] the same right. If you claim to act for yourselves, it says, allow your neighbours [sic] the same right. It is because I love this religion that I hate the


921 Frederick Douglass, What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?, 80.
slave-holding, the woman-whipping, the mind-darkening, the soul-destroying religion that exists in the southern states of America. It is because I regard the one as good, and pure, and holy, that I cannot but regard the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. Loving the one I must hate the other, holding to the one I must reject the other, and I, therefore, proclaim myself an infidel to the slaveholding religion of America.  

Here Douglass presented a distinction between two forms of religion that is fundamental rather than trivia. The difference he saw between the “religion of our blessed Saviour” [sic] (i.e. Christianity), and the religion of America is so vast, Douglass argued that to accept one is to by necessity to reject the other. If one of these religions is good, the other by its very nature must be bad. Douglass’ position, then, agreed with that of Cuguano’s in that they both viewed that slavery and Christianity were incompatible. Moreover, they both believed that whatever the name that might be given to the religion of slaveholders, it is a different religion than genuine Christianity. Therefore, Douglass also offers one constructing an Africana Critical Theory of Religion related to Christianity the notion that although they used the same nomenclature, the Christianity that Douglass adhered to was a totally different religion than the one that enslavers who professed to be Christian held on to.  

Fanon also contributed to the subject of accepting the oppressor’s culture (religion). It has already been stated that Fanon viewed religion as a hindrance to revolutionary struggle and also that he referred to the Church in the colonies as the “white man’s Church” (similar to Malcolm’s notion of the “white man’s religion”).  

While this may cause one to assume that Fanon has nothing to offer on the particular

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923 See the Introduction to this dissertation.
problem addressed in this chapter, one can still gain general precepts from the writings of Fanon that speak to the general concern at hand. For example, Fanon was aware of the fact that colonizers aimed to destroy the culture of the native people and get them to accept their foreign values. However, he declared that it was the process of revolution itself that was able to transform the culture of the colonized. The needs of the revolution force the colonized to discard of things that hinder the revolution.

However, similar to Cabral, Fanon presented a dialectical approach to the formation of the new culture for colonized revolutionaries. He warned that the colonized could be driven to “appraise all the colonizer’s contributions in a pejorative and absolute way.” Here Fanon cautioned his readers about, what the theorists in the Marxist tradition of critical theory of religion described as, absolute negation. Just as critical theorists of the Marxist tradition did not completely reject everything that came from modernity due simply to its origin, Fanon contended that the colonized should not reject something based simply on it originating from the colonizer. Fanon taught that the colonized must be able to “separate the wheat from the chaff.”

Fanon articulated the dialectical process of cultural transformation that happened during revolutionary struggle in regard to the Algerians use of the radio and the French language that were both introduced to them through colonialism. He

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924 Fanon, A Dying Colonialism, 38-39.
925 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 2, 178; Fanon, A Dying Colonialism, 69, 143, 179, 181.
926 Ibid., 121.
927 Ibid., 122.
explained that the radio functioned, for the Algerians, as an enemy object, a symbol of the French colonial presence, and part of the occupier’s attempt to destroy the native culture. However, the need to obtain accurate news from neighboring Arab nations caused the Algerians to make use of the European item. Fanon stated that the “acquisition of a radio set in Algeria, in 1955, represent the sole means of obtaining news of the Revolution from non-French sources.” Similarly, the value of the oppressors’ language shifted during the revolution. He explained that “The broadcasting in French of the programs of Fighting Algeria was to liberate the enemy language from its historic meanings…The French language lost its accursed character, revealing itself to be capable also of transmitting, for the benefit of the nation, the messages of truth that the latter awaited. Paradoxical as it may appear, it is the Algerian Revolution, it is the struggle of the Algerian people, that is facilitating the spreading of the French language in the nation.”

Fanon’s contribution to the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion in relation to the oppressor’s religion is that a new culture (religion) must be developed. That is, just like other thinkers have articulated, there must be a dialectical approach to the oppressor’s culture and not an outright rejection of it. Moreover, he provided examples that demonstrate that the revolutionary struggle creates new priorities that should cause the revolutionaries to adjust their expectation and standards. This is similar to TPRI presented in the introduction of this dissertation.

928 Ibid., 72-73, 84.
929 Ibid., 82.
930 Ibid., 89-90.
That is, there are some concerns that emerge in light of the revolutionary struggle that heightens the priority of certain things, and lessens the priority of other things.

Addressing the issue of Christianity directly, Ani argued that Christianity is a religion for Europeans and is inherently imperialistic. She maintained that despite the claims of Black Theology, Christianity has only assisted European imperialism and is ill-equipped to be used as a form of resistance against European supremacy.\(^{931}\) Imperialism is an essential aspect of the religion and this is reflected in its universal offer of membership which began with the Apostle Paul’s focus on Gentiles.\(^{932}\) For her, “[p]roselytization is inherently imperialistic.”\(^{933}\) She explained that the ideology of seeking converts put adherents in opposition with those who rejected the faith. Moreover, the objective was worldwide and was easily coopted by the Roman Empire for world imperialistic purposes.\(^{934}\) Ani declared that the “European institutionalization of Christianity was something akin to a technological advance. It added the element of proselytization that more suited the objective of imperialistic expansion within which those objectives could be hidden or camouflaged.”\(^{935}\)

Ani continued by arguing that the inherent colonial and oppressive aspects of Christianity are manifested in its history. She thought that it was implausible to believe that the “2000-year imperialistic quest of Western Europe, then Euro-America, was successfully maintained in spite of a religion that spoke for more

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\(^{931}\) Ani, *Yurugu*, 144, 145.

\(^{932}\) Ibid., 125.

\(^{933}\) Ibid., 167.

\(^{934}\) Ibid., 130.

\(^{935}\) Ibid., 169.
humanistic goals.”^936 Thus, the oppressive tendencies reflected in the history of Christianity are not mere negative inflections of the faith, but its essential character. Although the author will return to this matter below, it is interesting to note that Ani equated Christianity with European expressions of the religion.

This, however, is connected to her understanding of the nature of religion itself. She asserted that all “religions are by necessity culturally nationalistic in that they profess in some way the specialness if not the moral superiority of those who are ‘born into’ them and, in fact (most importantly), involve an explanation of the sacred origins of the group.”^937 Because of this, Ani believed that “Christianity’ is a configuration of values, attitudes and behaviors that are inseparable from the history of Europe.”^938 In fact, “Christianity…helped to redefine European nationalism as universal imperialism.”^939 She explained this in detail:

Traditionally, one is born into a religion just as one is born into a culture. One’s religion is considered a birthright. Culture is indeed the natural context for religious belief. Christian ideology radically altered this concept and by so doing fashioned a religious statement that was potentially elitist…at the same time universal-imperialistic. One is not born a Christian, one must be baptized by the proper authorities…This idea is related to the imperialistic nature of Christianity. It is justifiable (and, in fact an act of piety) for missionaries to proselytize the Christian religion, because, in their view, those whom they seek to convert have no religion, properly so-called.”^940

Here, Ani sets forth a charge: religion by its nature is culturally nationalistic and that proselytizing destroys the culture of nations that a religion was not indigenous to.

After laying out a few theoretical frameworks, the author will address these claims.

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^936 Ibid., 137—8. See also, Ibid., 130.
^937 Ibid., 121.
^938 Ibid., 192.
^939 Ibid., 170.
^940 Ani, Yurugu, 149.
Nationalistic Religion, Homogeneity (or Hegemony): Hybridity and the Reality of the Black Atlantic

Ani’s view articulated above can be broadly conceived as Afrocentric. Afrocentricity is an intellectual paradigm that privileges Africana agency within the context of the history of Africana people. It places Africana people’s interests, values, and perspectives at the center of analysis of Africana phenomena.\(^\text{941}\) This theory has as one of its presuppositions that the most effective way of studying and understanding people is from their own perspective.\(^\text{942}\) Often the history and culture of Africana people has been evaluated based on the values and perspectives of Europeans who have sought to belittle their contributions. By contrast, the Afrocentric scholar dispenses of every thought, action, behavior, and value that cannot be found in African culture or history.\(^\text{943}\) That includes religion.

Similar to Ani’s view above, Molefi Asante stated that adopting Christianity (or Islam) is in contradiction to Afrocentricity.\(^\text{944}\) This is because, according to him, all people “create their religions out of their histories.”\(^\text{945}\) Moreover, all “religions rise out of the deification of someone’s nationalism.”\(^\text{946}\) There is, therefore, a connection with one’s people and the religion that he or she


\(^{945}\) Ibid.

\(^{946}\) Ibid., 6.
should hold. This is similar to what Judith Weisenfeld labelled religo-racial to describe “a set of early twentieth-century black religious movements whose members believed that understanding black people’s true racial history and identity revealed their correct and divinely ordained religious orientation.” With the above in mind, there are three relevant assumptions that must be brought to the fore:

1. Religion derives from humans
2. Religion is someone’s nationalism deified
3. Religion is determined by race.

Each of these are presuppositions that require arguments for their defense. For example, similar to other religions, Christianity includes the belief that it is a religion that was revealed by God. Although there have been alternative theories for the origin of Christianity (such as the claim that it was copied from ancient Egyptian religion, or other early societies, based on superficial similarities), however, claims such as these that hope to substantiate the religion’s purely humanistic foundation are not as potent when the historical record is considered. This is not to say that the truth claims of

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948 Scholars such as John G. Jackson, John Henrik Clarke, Yosef Ben-Jochannan, and Jacob H. Carruthers have all argued that Christianity is merely a copy of ancient Egyptian religion. However, authors such as Flavius Josephus (d. 100 CE) who was a 1st century historian confirmed the historical existence of a “wonder worker” and teacher named Jesus who was crucified during the time of Pilate and was said to have “appeared to them alive again on the third day.” Furthermore, one of the earliest Church historians, Eusebius (d. 340 CE) discussed the life and message of Jesus. Moreover, his discussion of the New Testament Canon identified books still recognized as Scripture today by many Christians. Moreover, these are extra-biblical sources that confirm the life and teachings of Jesus. The New Testament itself which scholars have dated to have been completed by 100 C.E. are extremely early testimony to the life and message of Jesus. Whether Jesus actually performed miracles or resurrected cannot be proven beyond dispute. What is clear, however, is that there was a person named Jesus who lived and he was a teacher who people believed could perform miracles. Furthermore, his message about his death and resurrection was not something that was created from later traditions, but these beliefs were present among his earliest followers. These facts make it highly unlikely that the Christian narrative was borrowed from ancient Egyptian religion. Also, Vince Bantu, scholar of African Church history and Egyptian Languages, challenged the assertion of Christianity being a copied religion. He stated that many of the alleged “copies” between the Christian message and ancient
Christianity are valid. Rather, the author aims to problematize the presupposition that the basis of Christianity has been so thoroughly discredited that scholars are allowed to simply reject its Divine origin without defending that assertion. Asserting a humanistic origin of Christianity should not be viewed as evidence for its own validity; neither should the mere claim of a religion’s truthfulness either.

Nevertheless, if one was to accept the idea that religion is created by humans (and therefore, is not divine) then the idea that a religion is the deification of someone’s nationalism weakens the Afrocentrist’s claim even more because there is no “pure” nationalism. Stated differently, since nations and cultures are mixed with various ethnicities, to demand cultural (and religious) homogeneity is requiring a purity in cultural preservation that has never existed in any single culture itself.

Scholars have described this phenomenon as hybridity: the notion of cultural syncretism and the inter-penetration of elements of various cultures.\textsuperscript{949}

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Egyptian religion are “unsubstantiated fabrications.” He went on to argue that there are more similarities between ancient Indian Sumer, Assyria, Babylonia, and Mesopotamian civilizations with ancient Egyptian religion than there are between Christianity and ancient Egyptian beliefs. Bantu also stated that the ancient Egyptians themselves borrowed from the Hyksos, Greek, and Roman religions. Additionally, Craig Keener and Glenn Usry declared that “the biblical writers did not simply uncritically adopt the views prevailing in Egypt or in Babylon; often the biblical writers even went against the grain of their own Israelite culture, when it was shaped too much by religions conflicting with what God had taught them.” These arguments make the claim that Christianity is merely a copy of ancient Egyptian religion difficult to substantiate. For more information about the claims by some Black scholars on the origin of Christianity in ancient Egyptian religion, see, John G. Jackson, \textit{Christianity Before Christ} (Texas: American Atheist Press, 1985), 21; John Henrik Clarke, “Our Black Seminarians: An Introduction” in Yosef Ben-Jochannan, \textit{Our Black Seminarians and Black Clergy without a Black Theology} (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), n.d.; Yosef Ben-Jochannan, \textit{African Origins of the Major Western Religions} (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), xi, xiv; Jacob Carruthers, “Foreword” in Maulana Karenga, \textit{Selections from the Husia: Sacred Wisdom of Ancient Egypt} (Los Angeles: The University of Sankore Press, 1984), xi; Maulana Karenga, \textit{Selections from the Husia: Sacred Wisdom of Ancient Egypt} (Los Angeles: The University of Sankore Press, 1984), 3.


\textsuperscript{949}Floya Anthias, “New Hybridities, Old Concepts” in Klaus Stierstorfer and Janet Wilson,
Others have discussed the same reality in the context of the Black Atlantic. Paul Gilroy posited the notion of a Black Atlantic that transcends the structure of the nation and the limits of ethnicity. Gilroy seems to provide theory that takes seriously the critiques of essentialism and pluralism. He does this by arguing that there is a two-way traffic between African cultural forms and the African diaspora. Thus, there is a mixture with various different cultures along with African cultures. This concept excludes arguments for essentialism.

J. Lorand Matory provided more support for the reality of hybrid cultures when he argued that there has been an ongoing Afro-Atlantic dialogue in which African people produce and reproduce culture. He described his model as having the ability to situate Black Atlantic cultures beyond the boundaries of nations or regions, but rather operating within a larger transoceanic context that they cannot be extracted from. Much of Matory’s field work that shaped his understanding of the Black Atlantic focused on the religion of Candomble in Brazil. He did not deny the fact that when observing its practices, ritual logic, and the ethnic identities of the religion, it is unmistakably African. What he did reject, however, was the idea that these elements are African “survivals.” He also rejected the notion that the religion is merely a Brazilian religion or that Brazil has not been affected by the Black

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952 Ibid., 284—5.
953 Ibid., 267.
Atlantic. There are many similarities between Candomble and its West African precedents. It joins Oyo with European, Native American, and African patterns into Brazilians’ own invented form. Matory strove to push his readers to apply his theory to a broader reality and perhaps, as a universal concept.

Most relevant to this current project, Matory pointed to the impracticality of demanding adherence to an untainted ethnic religious tradition. He stated that “religious purism is also quite foreign to the West African religions that I have studied, including the Gulf of Guinea and West-Central African religions that are normally considered the ‘origins’ of Candomble.” What Matory suggested is that all cultures are a mixture of cross-cutting influences; even those cultures that are sources of a diaspora. So the African-ness of Candomble derived from an Afro-Atlantic dialogue that has shaped all the cultures on the Atlantic perimeter. He contended:

The ongoing 19th to 21st century dialogue among the massive urban black populations of the Atlantic perimeter has, to my mind, done as much to constitute the Africanity and the creativity of these populations as has any ancestral African or plantation culture. The social contexts of not only Candomble but also Dahomean/Beninese Vodun, Cuban Ocha, West African and Cuban Ifa divination, Rastafarianism, North American Jazz, and black Protestantisms all over the Anglophone Americas (to name just a few famous instances of Afro-Atlantic ‘folk’ culture) have always had important supralocal, interethnic and cross-class dimensions. In all these traditions, African American practitioners borrowed from, studied and communicated with Africa.

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955 Matory, Black Atlantic Religion, 16-17.
956 Matory argued that “The focus of this project on the past two hundred years is intended to demonstrate not that we can no longer treat geographical isolation as a condition of cultural reproduction in Africa but that we never could, in Africa or anyplace else.” Ibid., 2.
957 Matory, A Retrospective Discussion, 69.
958 Matory, Black Atlantic Religion, 15-16.
This description expands the idea of two cultures mutually forming one another to multiple interconnected communities that shape one another. Giving a specific example, Matory explained that from the 19th century and beyond, the memories of the Bahians were informed by what Brazilians saw on the West African coast in the 19th and 20th century. What they saw as a purely African culture, however, was one that had been transformed by European influences. Matory says that the slave trade along with British colonization changed Lagos into a metropolis. Moreover, diasporic returnees' were able to significantly transform the local culture. In fact, from the 18th century onward, some free Africans had returned to Africa from Brazil. After the largest of the insurrections in 1835, officials in Bahia began to expel those they thought played a role in the rebellion. As a result, between 1820 and 1899 around 8,000 Afro-Brazilians returned to West Africa. In this way, Matory argued, some of the West African forms observed by travelers during this time of transformation were in reality “the ‘remodeling’ and ‘reflexification’ of Brazilian ritual and aesthetic logics.”

Thus, if one adopts the humanist’s assumption that religion is “man-made,” the above discredits any commitment to a nationalistic religion that is based on the assumption that one is adhering to an unadulterated belief system passed down from his or her ancestors. All cultures have been affected by a variety of ethnic influences. This would mean that all religions have been influenced by others outside of an ethnic...

959 Ibid., 50.
960 Ibid., 52-53.
961 Ibid., 28.
boundary. Thus, Ani’s claim does not hold.

Another aspect of Ani’s thought that must be interrogated was her belief that one’s religion is determined by their race. However, similar to above, what conclusions might arise if one was to accept the premise drawn from Ani’s thought? If the historical significance that Christianity has held among Europeans legitimizes calling it a European religion although it originated from Palestinian Jews, what if history presented a different race of people with an even stronger claim on the religion? With these questions in mind, the author would like to make the case for the possibility of presenting Christianity as being the Black (African) man’s religion; similar to Glen Usry and Craig Keener’s assertion.

**Christianity: The Black Man’s Religion?**

This section will demonstrate that people of African descent have influenced Christianity so much from its inception to the present day that not only is the appellation “white man’s religion” ahistorical, but it also might be said that it is more appropriate to call Christianity a Black man’s religion. The religion has been in

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962 Although I am sensitive to the gendered language this word represents, I am choosing to utilize it for its ability to make a discursive connection with the language used earlier in this chapter. Thus, although I use the word “man,” I am thinking about all Black people.

963 While the author is not directly relying on the work of Usry and Keener that goes by this name, he must acknowledge that they have provided a similar argument in the past. Because they were responding to a similar contextual issue that I am, many of the same issues will be addressed. One of the major differences between my engagement with this topic and that of Usry and Keener’s is intent. While Usry and Keener seem to be making an apologetic case for the validity of Christianity being practiced by people of African descent, my approach to the topic is to demonstrate the significance of Africans in the very formulation of Christianity and the distinct expression of Christianity that they have developed. My goal is to highlight the agency of Africans in shaping this religion for the purpose of disrupting the logic of associating Christianity with white people. While our purposes may overlap in some ways, my task is philosophical rather than evangelistic. Nevertheless, although the author does not directly engage with Usry and Keener’s text in the following section, what follows might be said to be “in the spirit” of Usry and Keener’s work. For more on this, see Glenn Usry and Craig Keener, *Black Man’s Religion: Can Christianity Be Afrocentric?* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996).
Africa from its very beginning and flourished in North Africa for six centuries.\footnote{Laura Grillo, Adriaan van Klinken, and Hassan J. Ndzovu, \textit{Religions in Contemporary Africa: An Introduction} (New York: Routledge, 2019), 36; Sindima, \textit{Classical Theories in African Religion}, 388.} In fact, Christianity has been so well established on the continent since it began that it caused MBi\textit{t}i to declare that “Christianity in Africa is so old that it can rightly be described as an indigenous, traditional and African religion.”\footnote{John MBi\textit{t}i, \textit{African Religions and Philosophy 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition} (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1969), 223.} Moreover, this history is not unknown; in fact, Malcolm himself was aware of the significance of Christianity in ancient Africa while also characterizing it as a white man’s religion.\footnote{Malcolm X and Haley, \textit{The Autobiography of Malcolm X}, 178.} However, African Christians were not just mere participants in the religion, they were central to the development of early Christianity.

It cannot be overstated that central teachings and the main doctrines that would shape Christianity for the next two thousand years were developed by African Christians. Christian scholarship was born in Africa (Alexandria, Egypt). The very rules and methods for interpreting the Bible were developed by African exegetes.\footnote{Thomas Oden, \textit{How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity} (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 44-46.} Furthermore, instead of being teachings derived from white slave masters, the core doctrines of the Christian faith, according to scholar of Early African Christianity, Thomas Oden, and prominent African philosopher, D.A. Masolo, such as Christology and the Trinity, ironically, were fundamentally formed by African Christians.\footnote{D.A. Masolo, “African Philosophers in the Greco-Roman Era” in Kwasi Wiredu, ed., \textit{A Companion to African Philosophy} (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 56, 62; Oden, \textit{How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind}, 46-47.} Similarly, the battle over the importance of right doctrine and the critique of
“heretics” did not begin with Europe, but, the fact is, the “major battles with heresy were fought out in Africa.”\(^{969}\) Thus, it was African thinkers such as Origen (d. 253 CE), Tertullian (d. 240 CE), and St. Augustine (d. 430 CE) who were some of the earliest architects of Christian theology.\(^{970}\)

While the importance of the aforementioned thinkers has been well established among scholars, the issue is that Eurocentric scholarship has erased these early African Christians of their Blackness.\(^{971}\) According to Salim Faraji, there has been an attempt to strip ancient Africans in this region of their African-ness. Because it has been viewed as the quintessential advanced society of the ancient world, Egyptologists and other scholars have sought to remove Egypt out of Africa. Moreover, Faraji argued that traditional Egyptology continues to be ill-equipped to address the question of the “black-African” character of ancient Egypt.\(^{972}\) Providing more detail, he explained:

> it is...curious that a predominant trajectory within contemporary Egyptology continues to uphold ancient Egypt as separate and distinct from the rest of Africa. The rationale for such geographical illogicality and historical absurdity can be found in the rise of European modernist and enlightenment justifications for racial superiority in defense of the global enslavement and colonization of the ‘Oriental,’ ‘African’ and non-European peoples—which by extension included the construction of ancient Egypt as ‘European,’ Mediterranean,’ ‘Near Eastern’ and by final recourse ‘Oriental’ if that meant the complete nullification of the concocted trope of the African as uncivilized, primitive, barbaric and

\(^{969}\)Ibid., 47.


\(^{971}\)Uncharitable readings of claims about the “Blackness” of people in the ancient world, especially in North Africa, rush to highlight the fact that the modern construct of race did not exist in the ancient world. However, as Salim Faraji has stated, when modern Africana thinkers speak of the “Blackness” of ancient Egypt, we are not asserting some notion of an essentialized Black identity; rather, we are declaring that according to modern understandings of race in the United States, the ancient Egyptians would have been considered Black. This perspective will be defended more thoroughly below. See, Salim Faraji, *The Roots of Nubian Christianity Uncovered: The Triumph of the Last Pharaoh* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2012), 8-9.

\(^{972}\)Ibid., 6, 10-11.

Therefore, this mischaracterization of ancient Egypt has also distorted how people think about the identity of early Christianity. Nevertheless, as Albert Raboteau has stated, “Ancient Christianity is not, as many think, a European religion.”\footnote{Albert Raboteau, “Afterword” in Father Paisus Altschul, ed., \textit{An Unbroken Circle: Linking Ancient African Christianity to the African-American Experience} (Missouri: Brotherhood of St. Moses the Black, 1997), 162.} Rather, it was largely formulated by African Christians. Moreover, various forms of scientific, cultural, and historical scholarship have placed the “Blackness” (i.e. indigenous African origins) of ancient Egypt on an academically credible and firm foundation.\footnote{For an example of the scholarship that supports the “Blackness,” southern origin (i.e. Nubia/ ‘Ethiopia’), and cultural congruence of ancient Egypt with the rest of Africa (the fundamental ‘African-ness’ of their culture), see, Du Bois, \textit{The World and Africa}, 64-65; William Leo Hansberry, \textit{African History Notebook Volume II: Africa and Africans as Seen by Classical Writers}, Joseph Harris, ed. (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2019), 45; Diop, \textit{The African Origins of Civilization}, 2, 5, 140, 150, 235; Molefi Asante, \textit{The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony} (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2-3, 20; Richard Lobban, “Afrocentric Perspectives on Race Relations in Dynastic Egypt” in Fluehr-Lobban and Rhodes, ed., \textit{Race and Identity in the Nile Valley}, 41, 44 [note 2]; Toby Wilkinson, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt} (New York: Random House Trade Paperback, 2010), xxviii, 8, 10-11; Faraji, \textit{The Roots of Nubian Christianity}, 7, 10-11, 23, 29. In addition, the diverse depictions of skin color found in ancient Egypt has caused some to challenge their “Blackness.” However, one scholar has argued that conclusions based solely on depicted skin color in ancient Egypt is untenable. The diverse skin colors in these depictions had various meanings other than being the actual representation of the people’s skin complexions. For more on this, see, Catherine Cheal, “The Meaning of Skin Color in Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt” in Fluehr-Lobban and Rhodes, ed., \textit{Race and Identity in the Nile Valley}, 47-65.} Similarly, although some have sought to relegate “Black” North Africans and their indigenous culture to the margins of late antiquity (during the time of early
Christianity), however, studies have supported the claim that not only were the North Africans who shaped early Christianity “Black,” but even after their encounters with Greek and Latin culture and their conversion to Christianity, their cultures and religion (i.e. Christianity), while hybrid, continued to be fundamentally African.976

The above assertion has faced resistance both by racists and Africana historians. Faraji has challenged a predisposition he has noticed among scholars of late antiquity who present the Nile Valley cultures as mere appendages of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine civilizations.977 This characterization of the region would lend support to those who adamantly desire to maintain the historically unfounded claim that Christianity is the white man’s religion. Since the informed are unable to support the case that it was white people who formed the religion, the second best argument is to contend that Europeanized people shaped early Christianity. However, this makes Faraji’s intervention so important. His explanation warrants a lengthy quotation:

Similar to Eurocentric scholars of late antiquity, but for very different reasons some Africana historians act as if Africans in the Nile Valley stopped making history from the eighth century BCE until the medieval period. They have simply forfeited late antique African history to the specialists of ancient Greece and Rome because of their erroneous perceptions that late antique Africa is unoriginal, tainted, impure and diluted—forgetting that this period of ancient African history is very similar to the recent predicament of Africa and the African Diaspora and therefore requires the theoretical foci that have emerged from the diasporic encounters of Africa and the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds. For Eurocentric scholars the problem lies in the utter dismissal of


977 Faraji, The Roots of Nubian Christianity, 100.
indigenous African presence during the periods of Greek, Roman and Byzantine occupation. In the realm of early Christian studies this means that Egyptian, North African, Ethiopian and Nubian Christianity is not actually a part of African civilizations—and by extension influential historical figures such as Origen and Athanasius and Tertullian and Augustine are represented not as African theologians and philosophers, but as Latin-speaking and Greek-speaking Western intellectuals. Yet, the fact that they spoke Greek and Latin does not annul their Africanity anymore than the fact that Leopold Senghor spoke French or Kwame Nkrumah spoke English would suggest that they were no longer Senegalese or Ghanaian.

What Faraji hints toward is the need for paradigms developed to reflect on modern Africana peoples, such as hybridity and the Black Atlantic, when late antique Africa is under consideration. These theoretical formulations would help articulate the ability of early African Christians to accept Christianity while maintaining their African-ness. As a result, one would be able to have a more complete understanding of the history of the Black man’s encounter with Christianity.

Christianity entered Africa and reached the Black man through Egypt shortly after the crucifixion of Jesus. According to one of the earliest historians of Christianity and a very old tradition, Christianity came to Africa through St. Mark the Evangelist around 42 C.E. As a result of his preaching he founded the See of Alexandria, Egypt. One of his first converts was a cobbler named Anianus, who was eventually ordained as bishop. According to Faraji, many of these first churches were Egyptian temples and the religious leaders were former temple priests. For him,
because Christian traditions were “Egyptianized,” early Egyptian Christianity was an expression of ancient Egyptian religion."\textsuperscript{979} Perhaps connected to this reality, because of a rumor that Christians sought to overthrow the pagan deities, Mark was martyred in 68 C.E. by being dragged through the streets with a rope around his neck.\textsuperscript{980} This supports Faraji’s assertion that “Egyptian Christianity, although sometimes in alignment with Roman cultural and political imperatives, especially in their post-Constantinian, Carthaginian and Alexandrian forms, developed as a religion of the oppressed in resistance to Roman cultural imperialism.”\textsuperscript{981}

Christianity made its way into Nubia progressively beginning in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. While some scholars have placed the date of Christianity’s arrival in the sixth century, archaeological research has confirmed that an embryonic form of Christianity was present alongside classical pharaonic religion in the middle of the fifth century.\textsuperscript{982} Specifically, an inscription dated approximately to 450-500 C.E. of “the last epigraphically represented ‘pharaoh’ in the Nile Valley,” the Nubian King Silko, represents an appeal to, and validation of, Christianity by the Nubian court.\textsuperscript{983} Faraji declared that this inscription represented the first time in Nubian history where the sacred tradition of kingship was aligned with a deity other


\textsuperscript{980}Meinardus, \textit{Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity}, 29.

\textsuperscript{981}Faraji, \textit{The Roots of Nubian Christianity}, 75.

\textsuperscript{982}Isichei, \textit{A History of Christianity in Africa}, 15; Faraji, \textit{The Roots of Nubian Christianity}, 32, 68,

\textsuperscript{983}Ibid., 32, 107.
than Nubian and Egyptian divinities. Moreover, he argued that the significance of King Silko to Nubia is comparable to that of Constantine to the Christianization of Rome.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 70, 106.}

Nevertheless, just like with Constantine, Christianity existed prior to King Silko’s formal support for the religion. Similar to Egypt, the Nubian temples were transformed into the first churches.\footnote{\textit{Ashby, Calling Out to Isis}, 266; \textit{Faraji, The Roots of Nubian Christianity}, 43.} This facilitated the type of cultural hybridity that made room for multiple religious identities in Nubia during this time. For the purposes of this current project, the indigenous African expression of Christianity must be emphasized. As Faraji has noted, “the earliest form of Christianity that entered Nubia was not Byzantine Christianity as devised in Constantinople and the creeds of fourth century ecumenical councils, but an indigenous Coptic Christianity shaped by the religious culture of ancient Egypt.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 45.} This perspective moves away from the prioritization of the Byzantine missionary, Julian, who converted Nobatia in Makouria in the mid-sixth century.\footnote{\textit{Isichei, A History of Christianity in Africa}, 30-31; \textit{Faraji, The Roots of Nubian Christianity}, 67-68.} Rather, what should be highlighted is that Nubia converted to Christianity without any prior experience of Roman (“white man’s) rule.\footnote{\textit{Isichei, A History of Christianity in Africa}, 31; \textit{Faraji, The Roots of Nubian Christianity}, 75.}

Christianity also arrived early in Ethiopia. Some traditions suggest that Ethiopia was another one of the countries that some of the early apostles visited

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\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 70, 106.}
\footnote{\textit{Ashby, Calling Out to Isis}, 266; \textit{Faraji, The Roots of Nubian Christianity}, 43.}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 45.}
\footnote{\textit{Isichei, A History of Christianity in Africa}, 30-31; \textit{Faraji, The Roots of Nubian Christianity}, 67-68.}
\footnote{\textit{Isichei, A History of Christianity in Africa}, 31; \textit{Faraji, The Roots of Nubian Christianity}, 75.}
during the time the New Testament records. In fact, the New Testament narrates the
story of an Ethiopian court official who is baptized by the apostle Phillip.\textsuperscript{989} At the
very least by 340 C.E. there were communities of Christians in Ethiopia. This can be
deduced from the fact that a Syrian man named Frumentius who became the secretary
and treasurer of the king of Ethiopia was consecrated bishop of Ethiopia around 342
C.E. by the Archbishop Athanasius. Furthermore, this action established the tradition
of archbishops of Ethiopia being chosen by the Egyptian church (later these
Archbishops would have to be Egyptian by birth). Moreover, reflecting its
distinctiveness, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church did not accept the decisions of the
Council of Chalcedon in regard to the doctrine of the nature of Christ.\textsuperscript{990}

Another unique aspect of Christianity in Ethiopia is the tradition of
Solomonic ancestry of the kings of Ethiopia recorded in the fourteenth century text
entitled \textit{Kebra Negast}. The king is viewed as being divinely elected and declared king
of Israel, the son of David and Solomon. The act of coronation confirmed the king’s
divinely appointed rule. Similar to many traditional African communities that
combined the office of the king and religious leadership, some of the kings of
Ethiopia were also ordained as priests as well.\textsuperscript{991}

Christianity reached the Kingdom of Kongo, in 1483 when the Portuguese
explorer, Diogo Cao, arrived with his crew and met with the local rulers. Some

\textsuperscript{989}John Binns asserts that the high official mentioned in this passage of the New
Testament was actually from Meroe, just north of Ethiopia. For more on this see John Binns, \textit{The
\textsuperscript{990}Ibid., 40-43, 49.
\textsuperscript{991}Isichei, \textit{A History of Christianity in Africa}, 49. Also check out Binns, \textit{The Orthodox
Church of Ethiopia}, 53-56.
Kongolese went back to Portugal with Diogo and when they returned in 1485 they had been exposed to Christianity. The Manikongo, Nzinga a Nkuwu, sent more Kongolese to stay in Portugal to learn about the new religion. He was converted and was baptized in 1491 and obtained the name Joao I. Eventually, his eldest son was baptized and received the name Afonso. Afonso became king and ruled from 1506-1543. He spread Christianity in his kingdom by requesting additional clergymen from Portugal to be sent to the Kongo. However, it should not be assumed that the Kongolese accepted a copy of the faith. Rather, scholars have pointed out that they developed a Kongolese version of Christianity that they themselves controlled.

One of the most important details to specify for this current study, however, is that Kongo converted to Christianity freely. As Jeroen Dewulf has noted, “the King of Kongo converted to Christianity before Columbus started his first voyage to America.” Furthermore, this was, according to Cecile Fromont, a “willful conversion of the Kongo monarch.” The sovereignty of the Kingdom of Kongo and its free acceptance of Christianity has been emphasized by numerous scholars because of the ideological temptation to present their conversion as a product of European imposition. Dewulf explained that the postcolonial perspective of the

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994 Dewulf, Afro-Atlantic Catholics, 86.


996 Yolanda Covington-Ward, “Exceptional Healing: Gender, Materiality, Embodiment,
conversion of Africans on the continent does not capture the reality in the Kongo; they did not convert under pressure from the Portuguese. Africans were in power during this time; they converted freely.997 This fact has major implications on how the origins of African American Christianity can now be discussed.

It is often suggested that Christianity was forced onto African Americans to support the system of slavery. However, this common narrative ignores the fact that initially, enslavers were either indifferent or hostile to the conversion of enslaved Africans to Christianity. Some felt that conversion would cause the enslaved people to become ungovernable and that baptism would require them to have to free the new convert.998 This narrative, however, does not simply distort the initial perception of Christianity among enslavers, but it also hides the fact that enslaved people saw themselves as accepting a different religion than their enslavers, and that some enslaved Africans were already Christian before being captured in Africa.

It should be stated clearly that, contrary to the belief that enslaved Africans were fooled by the oppressive form of Christianity offered to them, enslaved Africans did not see themselves as accepting the white man’s religion, but a different religion all together. Historian of slavery, Orlando Patterson informed his readers that there is


“absolutely no evidence from the long and dismal annals of slavery to suggest that any group of slaves ever internalized the conception of degradation held by their masters.”\textsuperscript{999} Moreover, he stated that enslaved people quickly recognized the ideological strategy of their enslavers’ eventual use of Christianity to rationalize the slave system.\textsuperscript{1000} Similarly, scholars of Black religion have also noted that enslaved Black Christians rejected white interpretations of Christianity and offered their own readings.\textsuperscript{1001}

In fact, the distinction between African American Christianity and white Christianity was viewed as so drastic that some enslaved Africans declared that they were two different religions. For example, Olaudah Equiano (d. 1797) referred to those who participated in the slave trade as Christians in name only.\textsuperscript{1002} Likewise, Sojourner Truth (d. 1883) stated “what is that religion that sanctions, even by its silence, all that is embraced in the ‘Peculiar Institution?’ If there can be any thing more diametrically opposed to the religion of Jesus, than the working of this soul-killing system—which is as truly sanctioned by the religion of America as are her ministers and churches—we wish to be shown where it can be found.”\textsuperscript{1003} One also might notice that David Walker, who was born free, stated that he knew better than to believe the religion taught by Europeans. He characterized it as “fabricated by

\textsuperscript{999}Patterson, \textit{Slavery and Social Death}, 97.
\textsuperscript{1000}Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{1001}Glaude, \textit{African American Religion}, 40; Cone, \textit{Black Theology and Black Power}, 93.
\textsuperscript{1002}Equiano, \textit{The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano}, 79.
themselves and the devils to oppress us.”

If one includes Douglass’ distinction between the Christianity of slaveholding America and the Christianity of Christ, with the previous examples, what they would find is substantial support for Raboteau’s assertion that “slaves distinguished the hypocritical religion of their masters from true Christianity and rejected the slaveholder’s gospel…” The firsthand testimony of the (formerly) enslaved, along with the support of other scholars who articulate an understanding of a distinctive African (American) Christianity, places the author on a firm foundation when he states that African Americans who converted to Christianity did not accept the white man’s religion but a totally different religion; might one say a “Black man’s religion?”

Additionally, recent studies have revealed that some enslaved Africans converted to Christianity prior to their ill fate. Scholars have highlighted that the largest amount of Africans captured and enslaved in the Americas originated in or around the Kingdom of Kongo. In fact, research has demonstrated that in places like Cuba and other parts of Latin America there were enslaved Africans who has

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already embraced Christianity from the Kongo Kingdom. Furthermore, in 1739 in Charleston, South Carolina, enslaved Africans from the Kongo Kingdom led an uprising that has been termed the Stono Rebelllion. The very date of the rebellion, September 8-9, 1739, was connected to the rebels’ Catholic background in Kongo. The Catholic Calendar developed in Kongo saw September 8 as the day of Nativity of the Virgin Mary. These facts led historian, Jason Young, to argue that the “Stono rebels mobilized their exposure to Christianity as a means to restore their freedom.”

This recent scholarship has challenged some of the initial assumptions about the “introduction” of Christianity to enslaved Africans and has made the rhetoric that has been based on dated studies illegitimate. As Cecile Fromont and Michael Iyanaga has stated, scholarship has moved beyond claims that consider Christianity as “inherently exogenous” or “imposed elements that enslaved or disenfranchised populations of African origins or descent either resignedly accepted or else eventually transformed into syncretic objects of stealthy resistance and identity formation.” Rather, studies have demonstrated that a discussion of African American Christianity should begin in the Kingdom of Kongo rather than from European Christianity. Dewulf stated this explicitly when he asserted that his work “challenges the narrative of the origin of Black evangelical churches deriving from a

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1008 Ibid., 89-90, 101.
1010 Young, Rituals of Resistance, 69.
1011 Fromont and Iyanaga, Introduction: Kongo Christianity, 1.
mixture of White Protestantism and indigenous African elements. Rather, it shows that Afro-Atlantic Catholics had a profound impact on the way African American Baptist and Methodist Churches would eventually organize.\textsuperscript{1012} He supported this declaration by highlighting the fact that many of the main centers of African American identity formation [New York, South Carolina, Louisiana] were substantially influenced by Africans who originated from regions that were exposed to Christianity.\textsuperscript{1013}

Previous observations of certain practices by enslaved Africans assumed that the use of traditional African worship forms were attempts to syncretize Christianity and African traditional religions. However, according to Dewulf, they failed to understand that these were actually Afro-Atlantic Catholic expressions.\textsuperscript{1014} Fromont and Iyanaga also noticed a similar phenomenon in the previous research. They argued: “Many aspects of African religious practices that would have been molded in Kongo and Angola, such as the use by different ritual associations of saint statues or crosses, could easily be misinterpreted in the Americas as new, Creole syncretisms. Essentialist conceptions of Christian thoughts, forms, and rituals as strictly European and of African religious practices as necessarily non-Christian fueled these once predominant perceptions.”\textsuperscript{1015} In other words, the idea that Christianity was alien to African people before being exposed to it by European

\textsuperscript{1012} Dewulf, Afro-Atlantic Catholics, 10. See also, Fromont and Iyanaga, \textit{Introduction: Kongo Christianity}, 1.

\textsuperscript{1013} Dewulf, Afro-Atlantic Catholics, 4.

\textsuperscript{1014} Ibid., 104—5.

\textsuperscript{1015} Fromont and Iyanaga, \textit{Introduction: Kongo Christianity}, 10.
enslavers has been a pervasive, yet incorrect, view in the Africana tradition.

The brief theoretical and historical reflection on Africana people’s encounter with Christianity requires a reformulation of discourse on this topic. Rather than being new to the religion, Africans were a part of the Christian religion from its very beginning and some of the principle developers of its doctrines. In places like Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia, and Kongo, African people freely accepted the Christian faith without European imposition. There is, in fact, almost a millennium and a half of African Christian history prior to the transatlantic slave trade.

Furthermore, what has become increasingly clear is that even during slavery African people demonstrated agency by dialectically engaging with the faith. That is, enslaved Africans did not mindlessly accept the religion of their oppressors, but they created a different religion with the scant materials they found acceptable. This new paradigm places scholars of Africana religion in an uncomfortable position. Many well respected thinkers in the Africana tradition have constructed a narrative about Christianity and the Africana experience that was built on limited, and sometimes misinformed, scholarship. Nevertheless, what the author has shown is that the claim that Africana people accepted the white man’s religion no longer has any credence. In fact, it might be said that if the European engagement with the religion made it appropriate to classify it as the white man’s religion, given the history presented above, it seems more accurate to view it as a Black man’s religion.

Returning to (Activist/Intellectual) Voices from the African Diaspora

Resuming with his engagement with voices from the African diaspora, the author will return, briefly, to the work of Ani. She argued that Christianity was not
meant for, and would never be appropriate for self-determining non-European peoples. Although Ani was not the only person to hold this view, the previous section has demonstrated that people of African descent have made Christianity their own from its inception. However, African philosopher, Souleymane Diagne has highlighted the limitation of essentialist perspectives on culture. He described it as an “ethnological paradigm wherein what is ‘authentically’ African is simply assumed to be what remains once you have removed all the deposits that history has left on the continent.” He continued by stating: “in this essentialist paradigm constructed by this ethnological logic, one ends up thinking that identity exists in spite of history, instead of in and by history.” In other words, African identity is not based on some imagined core “African-ness” that existed prior to all other influences. Rather, Africans in history have adapted to various circumstances and have adopted different beliefs and practices and have made them their own; that is, made them African. The idea that a religion is only suitable for those from which it arose ignores the reality of how cultures borrow and influence one another.

A final weakness in Ani’s representation of Christianity is that she was guilty of equivocation. That is, she began by defining her use of the term Christianity in one way, but in the process of building her argument her definition changed. For example, on the one hand, she argued: “I will take liberty of using the term Christianity to refer specifically to its European manifestation…For, having changed


the emphases and offering different interpretations, Europeans can indeed be credited with the creation of a formulation that uniquely responded to the needs of their cultural selves. In this sense, which emphasizes the ideological uses of religion, European Christianity was a ‘new’ phenomenon.” On the other hand, she stated that “Christianity’ is a configuration of values, attitudes and behaviors that are inseparable from the history of Europe.” In the former statement, Ani makes a distinction between what might be called “Christianity proper” and “European Christianity.” That is, she explicitly recognized that Christianity could stand alone from European culture. Nevertheless, when Europeans took the religion, they created a “new’ phenomenon.” By contrast, however, the latter statement makes Christianity fundamentally attached to the history of Europe. This subtle shift in the uses of the term allows her to collapse all of the critiques she makes about European Christianity onto “Christianity proper.” One might argue, by analogy, Ani opened the door addressing European Christianity, then closed the door with all the critiques inside the house and stated that they all apply to Christianity as a whole. This is a subtle move that is effective, but fallacious.

It seems that the importance of Ani’s work for this current project is simply to highlight some of the problems with certain forms of cultural nationalism. One of the lessons is that all cultures are hybrid cultures and that demanding a pure religious

1018 Ani, Yurugu, 111.
1019 Ibid., 192.
1020 When I say “Christianity proper” I am referring to the fundamental teachings of Christianity. That is, the elements of Christianity that would remain regardless of what culture it existed in. Another way to think of it is that “Christianity proper” refers to the way Jesus and his early apostles defined the faith.
system without any influence from an oppressor is naïve at best. It was also argued that Africans did not first learn of Christianity from Europeans. Rather, many had practiced the religion for centuries. Finally, the author concluded that it is more legitimate to refer to Christianity as the Black man’s religion than to call it the white man’s religion.

The final thinker that will be engaged for this section is Angela Davis (b. 1944). Davis recognized that enslavers emphasized passages in the Bible that would cause enslaved people to be submissive. However, she admitted that there was no lack of evidence that a revolutionary version of Christianity developed among the enslaved. She pointed to figures such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Gabriel Prosser, and Nat Turner as emblematic examples of enslaved Christians with a militant posture. Further, she argued that “the fact that the Christian spirituals created and sung by the masses of slaves were also powerful songs of freedom demonstrate the extent to which Christianity could be rescued from the ideological context forged by the slave holders and imbued with a revolutionary content of liberation.” This notion of the ability to “rescue” certain elements with revolutionary potential from Christianity mirrors what some in the Marxist tradition of Critical Theory of religion, explicated in chapter two, advocated. Davis could recognize the determinate negation carried out by enslaved people toward the Christianity they were introduced to. Her understanding of the Black experience with religion led her to critique Marx’s understanding of religion. She argued that Marx

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1022 Ibid.
“assumes a necessary and exclusively ideological relationship between religious consciousness and material conditions…” Nevertheless, she added, such “an all-embracing conception of religion cannot account for its extra-religious dimensions.”

Thus, she concluded, despite what Marx said, religion (Christianity) was practiced by enslaved African insurrectionary leaders. In this way, Davis reinforced the need for a dialectical perspective with regard to the religion of the oppressor for the construction of an Africana Critical Theory of Religion. That is, Christianity can be used to oppress by the oppressor, and it can be used for liberation by the oppressed.

The above theorists have provided guidelines and standards, along with those presented from Malcolm, by which one can assess Malcolm’s solutions. They include:

1. A revolutionary religion for Africana peoples cannot be a copy from one’s oppressor, but must be distinct even if it has the same name.
2. A revolutionary religion for Africana peoples should not completely destroy the culture of revolutionaries, but it also should not naively be expected that it is a pure religion uninfluenced by an oppressor.
3. An Africana revolutionary religion must not encourage the acceptance of suffering.

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4. An Africana revolutionary should not absolutely reject their oppressor’s religion, but should determinately negate it.

5. An Africana revolutionary should be free to willing adopt any religion (that is consistent with the other standards mentioned here).

6. An Africana revolutionary should not view Europeans as authoritative examples of what Christianity is or is not.

7. It is more appropriate for Africana revolutionaries to consider Christianity a Black man’s religion than a white man’s religion.

Taking these standards, the author will now proceed with articulating the solutions offered by Malcolm X. As with previous chapters, the solutions below will be assessed based on the standards that have been established. This will help determine the strengths and weaknesses of Malcolm’s Critical Theory of Religion.

**Malcolm’s Solutions to the Religion of Oppressor/Religion of the Oppressed Conflict**

It was explained in the beginning of this chapter that Malcolm believed that African Americans should not accept Christianity because it was a religion for white people; their oppressors. Moreover, because this religion was tailor-made for white people, it had negative political implications for Black people. Therefore, Malcolm believed that Black people should accept the religion that was practiced by their forefathers and that was natural to Black people. Comparable to previous chapters, Malcolm offered these solutions the entirety of his public ministry. The following sections will detail and assess these assertions.
Solution for Oppressor/Oppressed Religion: The Religion of our Forefathers

Forefather’s Religion as the Solution: Malcolm X in NOI

Rather than accept the white man’s religion, Malcolm instructed Black people to return to the religion of their forefathers. During a lecture in Atlanta in 1960, Malcolm declared to his listeners that Black people are realizing that Christianity has failed them, and they are returning back to Islam; the religion of their forefathers. Moreover, the following year, in a speech at Harvard, he stated that Islam had always been the prevailing religion in Africa. He went on to say that white people had “brought our people here in chains from our African Muslims culture.”

Similarly, in 1962 Malcolm argued that prior to slavery there were Muslim civilizations in Africa; in places like Ghana, Mali, and Timbuktu. Furthermore, at the end of 1963, he, again, told his interviewer that Islam was the religion of “our forefathers.” These examples show Malcolm as pointing to Islam as an alternative to Christianity. However, the reason it is a plausible alternative is because he claimed that it was the religion that was practiced by the ancestors of African Americans prior to their enslavement. It is important to note that Malcolm continued to hold this perspective even after leaving the NOI.

Forefather’s Religion as Solution: Malcolm X as Sunni Muslim (1964 and 1965)


Throughout 1964 and 1965, Malcolm is advocated for Black people to return to the things of their forefathers in Africa; including Islam. As early as his announcement of his break with the NOI, Malcolm advised Black people to return to Africa. In April he told an audience that Black people were “Africans who are in America.” In other words, Malcolm saw Black people’s American-ness as incidental; it was their African-ness that was fundamental to who they were. For this reason, Malcolm stated in his diary that Black people “must identify with (‘migrate to’) Africa culturally, philosophically, psychologically and the ‘life’ or new spirit will give us the inspiration to do the things necessary (ourselves) to better our political & economic & social ‘life’ there in America.”

This statement is connected to what Malcolm said about Christianity presented above. Just as having the white man’s religion produced negative political implications, when Black people holistically return to their forefathers it had positive political implications. It will liberate Black people from the bonds of white supremacy and will “unbrainwash an entire people.”

These benefits are why it was so important to Malcolm that Black people become reacquainted with their cultural (and religious) past.

This call for a return to Africa cannot be divorced from his understanding of what was lost from Africa. One quote from Malcolm that encapsulates the scope of the lost went as such: “First they stole us from Africa, and then they tried to steal

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1029 Malcolm X, *OAAU Founding Rally (June 28, 1964)*, 81.
Thus, Malcolm even protested the fact that African people had their names stripped from them. He consistently held this type of Black Nationalist view of culture all the way to the last few days of his life.

However, for the particular purposes of this dissertation, Malcolm mentioned in April of 1964 that the forefathers of African Americans practiced Islam before they were kidnapped and brought to America by the white man. He went on to assert that “Here in America today when you find many of us who are accepting Islam as our religion we are only going back to the religion of our forefathers.” Even more, in 1965, Malcolm declared that, historically, Islam was the only thing powerful enough to stand and fight the “white man’s Christianity” and to keep “white Christianity at bay.” Here, while Malcolm does not explicitly direct Black people to return to the religion of their forefathers, nevertheless, he continued to identify Christianity with the white man and Islam as the only solution to white supremacy. Moreover, in the context of his consistent message throughout 1964 and 1965, it is implied that Black people should return to the religion of their forefathers. That is, by identifying Islam as the religion of Black people’s ancestors, Malcolm is telling them to return to Islam. This is more evident in light of the fact that the whole year Malcolm consistently emphasized the need for Black people to return to Africa in every way (i.e., philosophically, culturally, etc.).

1030 Carew, *Ghosts in our Blood*, 47.
1033 Ibid.
Solution for Oppressor/Oppressed
Religion: Our Natural Religion

Our Natural Religion as the Solution: Malcolm X in the NOI

Malcolm not only called Black people to turn to Islam because it was the religion of their forefathers, but because he also believed that Islam was the natural religion of Black people. While in the NOI, Malcolm told his listeners that there is no separation between religion and one’s color. Religion was so tied to race that Malcolm argued that when a Black person declared they are a Christian, what they are actually saying is that they want to be white. This, he argued was the condition of the House Negro/Uncle Tom; this type of Black person is not interested in a religion of his own. By contrast, Islam is the natural religion of Black people. In fact, according to Malcolm, all Black people were born Muslim. This claim was one of the first things Malcolm learned about the NOI. When his brother wrote him in prison in 1948, he told Malcolm that he had discovered the “natural religion for the black man.” The apparent logic, then, was that Black people needed to “drop the white man’s religion” and accept their natural religion: Islam.

Our Natural Religion as the Solution: Malcolm X as Sunni Muslim (1964 and 1965)

Malcolm consistently held the perspective that Islam was the natural religion for Black people after he became a Sunni Muslim even though he would find different ways to articulate it. In June of 1964, Malcolm is recorded as stating that

1035 Malcolm X, Black Man’s History (December 12, 1962).


Islam was the “only true faith for the Negroes.”\textsuperscript{1038} However, as time went on, this sentiment would be expressed by Malcolm in more subtle ways. For example, two days before his assassination, Malcolm spoke of the trouble he encountered with trying to find white people who desired to be Muslim. Contrarily, he noted that there should be centers for Islamic teaching primarily in Black communities because it was mostly Black people who were displaying any interests in Islam. Explaining his logic in detail, he stated:

Up to now it has been only the Black American who has shown interest even in Sunni Islam. If a student of agriculture has sense enough to concentrate his farming efforts on the most fertile area of his farm, I should think the Muslim would realize that the most fertile area for Islam in the West is the Black American. This in no way implies discrimination or racialism, but rather shows that we are intelligent enough to plant the good seed of Islam where it will grow best; later on we can ‘doctor up’ or fertilize the less-fertile areas, but only after our crop is already planted in the heart and mind of these Black Americans who already show great signs of receptiveness. Was it not Bilal, the Black Ethiopian, who was the first to receive the seed of Islam from the prophet himself in Arabia 1,400 years ago?\textsuperscript{1039}

The broader context of Malcolm’s life sheds some light on this statement. As discussed in previously in this dissertation, Malcolm understood that Sunni Muslims (especially from the “Islamic world”) were keeping a close eye on him and the genuineness of his transition from his former beliefs. Therefore, here, when Malcolm contrasted the receptivity of Black people toward Islam with the lack of interest he perceived among white people to the religion, he ensured his hearers that this had nothing to do with “discrimination or racialism.” However, his analogy presented

\textsuperscript{1038}Carson, The FBI File, 314.

\textsuperscript{1039}Malcolm X, “We are Fighting for Respect and Recognition as Human Beings for all Black Americans: Answers to Questions by ‘Al-Muslimoon’ (February 13-20, 1965)” in Malcolm X, February 1965: The Final Speeches, 253. See also, Malcolm X, “There is a Conspiracy to Kill Me: Interview with ‘New York Post’ (February 18, 1965)” in Malcolm X, February 1965: The Final Speeches, 182; Malcolm X, We are Fighting for Respect and Recognition as Human Beings for all Black Americans, 251.
Black people as (naturally?) fertile ground for Islam. Yet, it seems hard to believe this explanation from Malcolm at face value.

If one considers the zeal he put into spreading the NOI even in the midst of rejection, it is doubtful that Malcolm concluded white people were unreceptive based on fervent attempts he had made. Although it is clear that at this point in his life, Malcolm understood Islam to even be available for white people, he still seemed to have the belief that there was something (natural?) about Black people that made it more likely for them to accept the faith. This is even clearer when he defended his focus on Black people by stating that Islam was a natural religion. These statements support the contention that even up to the last weeks of his life, Malcolm indicated a perspective that suggested that there was some natural affinity toward Islam among Black people. Since both his critiques and solutions have been presented, the author can now assess what Malcolm offers to an Africana Critical Theory of Religion based on the standards constructed above.

**Conclusion: Assessing Malcolm’s Contribution to an Africana Critical Theory of Religion**

One of the important contributions of Malcolm’s thought is the emphasis he placed on culture and its importance to the resistance struggle. This may not be more evident than in his insistence that Black people had been manipulated into accepting the religion of their oppressors. He wanted Black people to see the folly in worshipping the same deity that seemed to support enslavers and the oppression of one’s own people. This was important to Malcolm because he believed that an oppressor’s religion could only make the oppressed accept their condition. However,

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Malcolm seems to have underestimated the intelligence and creativity of both enslaved Africans and that of his contemporaries.

In regard to the first standard for an Africana Critical Theory of religion that was developed above, and that restricts Africana revolutionaries from accepting a copy of their oppressor’s religion, Malcolm’s perspective failed in at least two ways. First, Malcolm charged Black people with being brainwashed into accepting the religion of their oppressors. Even with other issues aside, one must first recognize that this perspective is condescending. In some ways, it accepts the racist ideas that Black people are unintelligent and could be easily duped. For this current author, he sees the perception that enslaved Africans were unable to perceive the duplicity in the way their enslavers packaged their religion as offensive. The narrative of gullible Africans converting to their enslavers religion was meant to do a certain type of work; that is, to shame African Americans out of Christianity. However, that form of discourse also required that certain racist assumptions about the intelligence of African people be accepted. Nevertheless, a case has been made above that enslaved Africans (and African Americans today) did not accept their oppressor’s religion; even though it may go by the same name. From the time of slavery until the present day, there are fundamental differences between what might be called Black Christianity and white Christianity.

Further, another area that Malcolm’s perspective does not adequately account for is the fact that some have suggested that Islam in Africa was a copy of an oppressor’s religion. As mentioned above, Muslims are also associated with enslaving people of African descent and it is believed by some that Islam spread
among Black people in this way. However, apparently Malcolm understood that even if a religion was used to harm a people, it does not mean that religion should be inherently associated with oppression. This points to a double standard he held because he did not afford Christianity this luxury.

The aforementioned could also be applied to how Malcolm faired with the second standard on cultural purity and preservation. While he instructed Black people to return to Africa culturally, it has been demonstrated that this included rejecting the white man’s religious influence (Christianity), accepting Islam, and returning to their African Muslim cultures. This call for a pure African religious culture misses the fact that African cultures themselves are hybrid cultures that subsume influences from various peoples. Moreover, his perspective ignores the way that “African Muslim culture” was influenced by Arab other non-African cultures. For example, the Mali Kingdom, which Malcolm celebrated as an African Muslim civilization, was heavily influenced by non-African cultures. Its King, Mansa Musa (d. 1337 C.E.) brought in builders and teachers that deeply influenced the architecture, education, and other aspects of Mali culture. Therefore, although Malcolm advocated for a return to a “pure” African culture, what one finds is that even the African Muslim cultures he elevated were hybrid cultures. Thus, Malcolm’s solution falls short of the standard because it naively calls for a return to a purely African Muslim background (that itself was not purely African).

With regard to the third standard that restricts Africana revolutionaries

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from accepting a religion that causes one to tolerate suffering, Malcolm adds a positive contribution. He argued that accepting one’s African heritage would empower them to obtain political progress. It has already been demonstrated in chapter one that Islam has played an important role in Africana political resistance and noncompliance with oppression.

Yet, just as Malcolm saw with the NOI, there were some traditions among African Muslims that have been perceived as accommodating to systems of white supremacy. For example, Amadu Bamba (d. 1927 C.E.), founder of the Muridiyya Sufi order (1905 C.E.) in West Africa was a mild ascetic and is said to have lost all interests in worldly matters after witnessing two respected Muslims killed for political reasons. This experience may have also influenced his committed opposition to involvement with rulers and the jihad of the sword. Additionally, although the Murids had the reputation of being anti-French, to a limited extent, Bamba cooperated with the French. This does not mean he was ever completely friendly in his attitude towards the French, but he concluded that the desire to overthrow the French was unrealistic and thus took a different approach.

This did not quell tensions he had with the colonial government. Local African chiefs who represented the French colonial administration began to complain to the French about the Murids because of their growth as a movement; this caused the group to attract more attention from the French administration. Acts like these moved Bamba to meet with the governor in an attempt to advance the situation. He communicated to the official that he was devoted to seeking God and had no interest

1042 Babou, Fighting the Greater Jihad, 55-56, 58-59, 60, 79.
In his work on the Murids, David Robinson claimed that the French:

permitted marabouts and brotherhoods to develop considerable autonomy in the religious, economic, and social spheres while surrendering the political and administrative domain to the French. Of all these ‘paths to accommodation’ between Muslim societies and French colonial authorities, the one followed by Amadu Bamba Mbacke and the Murid movement is ostensibly the longest, the hardest, the most complete, and the most enduring.

It is not the author’s contention that either Bamba or the Murids passively accepted oppression. In fact, some scholars have challenged that thesis directly. Rather, he is making the case that there is a need for nuance when assessing the way people engage with oppressive circumstances.

The type of nuance necessary is connected to the need and the ability of oppressed people to determinately negate their oppressor’s religion as stated in the fourth standard. If Malcolm could determinately negate the “practical nonviolence” of the NOI, and the resistance to Black-specific political action by some Sunni Muslims (discussed in Chapter 3), then one wonders why he could not allow for the same thing with Christianity.

Malcolm’s approach to Christianity lacked nuance and, in conflict with standard six, he viewed white people as the sole authoritative representatives of Christianity. Malcolm associated Christianity with European expansionism; particularly when it attempted to spread into Muslim ruled territories. Thus, Malcolm

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viewed Christianity in a homogeneous way and did not allow for the type of adaptation and determinate negation that would approve of African people willingly adopting the religion as required in standard five. The author must be clear here; he has not observed any evidence to support the idea that Malcolm rejected the right for people to choose their religion freely. Thus, when he asserts that Malcolm did not allow for African people to freely accept Christianity, he is stating that Malcolm was opposed to it ideologically. He believed that Christianity was not the natural religion for Black people and that it would hinder their political action. The fact that he was aware of, and celebrated, his father’s Christian and Garveyite activities, and the revolutionary Christianity of Nat Turner, makes his perspective that much more complicated.\textsuperscript{1046} This type of cognitive dissonance is a common thread in Black radical discourse. One can simultaneously recount the numerous revolutionary activities by Africana Christians, while also declaring that Christianity undermines Black radicalism.

Finally, in regard to the seventh standard that suggests that Christianity would be more appropriately viewed as the Black man’s religion, Malcolm’s position fell short here as well. His assertion that Black people should return to the religion of their ancestors ignored the fact that, while there were African Muslims prior to slavery, there were also African traditional religious practitioners, Black Jews, and also Black Christians on the continent of Africa.\textsuperscript{1047} In fact, the latter three religious

\textsuperscript{1046} Malcolm X and Haley, \textit{The Autobiography of Malcolm X}, 179.

traditions have a much longer history with people of African descent. Thus, if one chose to follow his advice they would still be left with determining which ancestors’ religious example African Americans should return to.

What the above conclusions show is that compared to the concerns addressed in previous chapters, Malcolm fell much shorter on the current subject. Although his challenges toward Christianity are useful, they sometimes go beyond their legitimate application. What the reader can still gather from Malcolm’s discourse is the need for consistency and nuance. One of the valuable things readers can learn even from imperfect Africana Critical Theorists of religion is the potential pitfalls of theory construction. That itself is a worthy contribution.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION: BETWEEN THEORY
CONSTRUCTION AND THEORY APPLICATION

This dissertation set out to resolve the apparent tension between religion and revolution. The author proposed that Malcolm X could be used to settle that supposed conflict by employing his thought as a locus of analysis and critical reflection within the paradigm of Africana Critical Theory (of Religion). That is, Malcolm’s critiques and solutions for the problems he perceived in religion could be used to deconstruct anti-revolutionary forms of religion and to (re)construct a revolutionary model of religion.

The author highlighted the limitations of revolutionary theory for this form of analysis. He pointed to the secular bias that has developed in European revolutionary theory and that was subsequently adopted among Africana theorists of revolution. A negative predisposition toward religion shaped how these thinkers engaged (or ignored) religion in the history of Africana revolutionary resistance. What one found is that theory and history were at odds with one another. That is, although the discourse presented religion as “getting in the way” of revolution, history positioned religion as “leading the way” of revolution in Africana contexts. Despite this disconnect, the author believed that putting Malcolm’s thought on religion in dialogue with other Africana intellectual-activists would clarify further what a religion consistent with revolution would look like.

Because the author defined the word revolution as necessarily including the
use of violence, the potential conflict between religion and revolutionary violence was a key component to this dissertation. In Malcolm’s perspective, a religion that required nonviolence should be a priori rejected. He saw the right to use violence in self-defense as innate to humanity. That is, the prerogative to defend oneself is so self-evident that to require a justification for it would only reflect an attempt to deceive. Thus, Malcolm saw calls for nonviolence by white people as strategic deception, and Black calls for nonviolence as evidence of having been duped.

This was important because Malcolm was not persuaded that those in power would ever give freedom, justice, or equality to those they were not forced to give it to. Malcolm observed that there was no historical evidence to justify a belief that oppressors would stop merely because they were asked. He perceived anti-Black violence as being ubiquitous in American history. Thus, he felt that the only way the horrible circumstances Black people found themselves in was to use violence. He believed that a heightened awareness of the possibility of death for white people was more persuasive than appealing to their good will. Therefore, it was a non-negotiable that violence had to be an available tool for Black people to end their suffering and slaughter.

However, Malcolm had to face the demand for nonviolence wrapped in religious language. There are numerous ways that religions can influence followers to be nonviolent. One example would be moral expectations for nonviolence. That is, a religious leader may demand his or her followers to endure violence with patience. That patience may look like passivity or a willingness (or desire) to be martyred. In addition, a religion could have a concept of love that might be interpreted as
demanding one to refrain from harming another person under any circumstances.

Another way religions could encourage nonviolence is to prioritize Divine intervention. If it is believed that a deity will enact retribution to one’s oppressors, then the religion could cause some to reject the use of violence as a means to stop oppression. Therefore, this type of religion would be beneficial to people who desire to take advantage of others and ensure that they will not resist. This is why Malcolm adamantly rejected the religious teaching of nonviolence. He saw it as inconceivable that a deity would require followers to adhere to a religion that would so perfectly work in the favor of their oppressors.

For this reason, the idea that those in power would not relent from oppressing the weak except by violence, and the notion that religion had the potential of restricting people from using violence, conflicted with one another and required a resolution. In response to this tension, Malcolm advocated for a type of religion that allowed for revolutionary violence. Moreover, he saw Islam as the ideal religion for revolutionaries. The concept of jihad in Islam provided Muslims with an option to utilize violence under certain conditions, according to Malcolm. Although he ultimately pointed to a particular religion, his perspective is still useful because it can serve as a model for whatever religion one may be affiliated with.

Another requirement Malcolm saw for a successful revolution was unity. Oppressed people had to mobilize their collective strength to face an opponent with superior arms. However, the very notion of unity required sacrifice and the willingness to yield to the will of others. No individual would be able to completely shape the aims, goals, and ideas of the revolutionary struggle. Thus, unity is
predicated on the ability to compromise.

Yet, religion is often viewed as dogmatic and uncompromising. Some religions imagine that the Divine has revealed the Divine-self to human beings and thus, there are truth claims that have unquestionable authority. Some of the claims that are made by religions apply to interactions by adherents with other human beings. These may restrict who one can cooperate with and how.

Similarly, the principle of unity might be used to undermine legitimate critiques within an oppressed group of people. Whenever there is abuse within a social unit of people, individuals are often asked to put the needs of the group above their individual concerns. When they do not conform, they are viewed as destructive to the unit rather than the unit itself being viewed as harmful. However, two things can be simultaneously true. On the one hand, an individual’s survival and/or ability to alleviate oppression may be dependent on the group. On the other hand, the group’s survival and/or ability to function to fight oppression may be dependent on the individuals. This becomes even more complex when there is an oppressed group that includes people from various religions.

In this light, the expectation of unity among a diverse range of people who believe various and contradictory things is in conflict with individual autonomy. This tension is resolved by Malcolm through an emphasis on racial solidarity and a de-emphasis on distinctions. This concept of de-emphasizing distinctions for the purpose of creating unity, particularly in the African American context, traces back to the experiences of newly captured Africans as they waited to embark onto slave ships and the experience of the transatlantic journey itself. According to Michael Gomez,
historian of Africa and the African Diaspora, there were bonds developed in these contexts that transcended ethnic distinctions. These experiences were, for him, the origins of African American race consciousness. That is, the common experience of suffering and the recognition of Blackness as the shared trait of those that suffered together, caused these Africans to understand the importance of seeing themselves as united based on their African-ness rather than emphasizing their ethnic distinctions.\textsuperscript{1048}

An argument could then be made that the greater one’s experience and/or awareness of the perilousness of the Black condition, the more willing one becomes to set aside differences and unite based on Blackness. The reverse of this may be a bit more controversial because it would suggest that the greater one’s social privilege, the more invested one becomes in articulating distinctions among Black people. It is not clear whether these positions are accurate, yet, it would likely be fruitful to analyze the circumstances of African Americans during times when race consciousness was at its peak, and whether different political and socio-economic conditions could be mapped onto explorations of various intra-group identities and the organization around such.

Similarly, one might argue for the importance of investigating whether a correlation could be made between the desire to center race, and intra-communal violence or mistreatment. What is obvious in some of the literature that was examined in chapter four is that both Black women and Black LGBTQ identifying people have

signaled the danger in a race-only approach. It does, however, seem like Malcolm sought to accommodate for both the race-only perspective and the intra-communal concerns.

One might describe Malcolm’s solution as distinguishing between “race-only” and “race-first” approaches. Perhaps in its most extreme since, “race-only” approaches might be viewed as ignoring all other concerns that go beyond one’s racial identity. Thus, violence against Black women perpetrated by Black men is ignored; or, the marginalization of Black Lesbians by some Black women is not addressed. Contrarily, a “race-first” approach simply recognizes the centrality of race in the Black experience and addresses all other concerns in light of the foundational issue of race. Malcolm’s perspective seems to fit within the latter paradigm. His belief in the fundamental reality of the race issue caused him to declare that Black people should pose a common front in the sight of the larger structure of white supremacy. However, his increasing recognition of the importance of addressing intra-communal disputes caused him to demand that these other problems also be dealt with; but, nonetheless, addressed behind closed doors. This was the type of compromise Malcolm sought to apply to the reality of the Black experience. Even if one does not agree with the legitimacy or viability of this approach, it might be said that whatever alternative that would be offered has to find a way to balance both sides of this issue. A form of Black politics that simply ignores the way that the white power structure has/will capitalize on Black divisions is just as destructive as a politics that demands silence on intra-group issues.

Therefore, since Black people are religiously diverse, it would be
unrealistic to expect unity to be grounded upon a homogenous ideology. Moreover, each religion adhered to by the revolutionaries must permit interreligious cooperation in a revolutionary struggle. Here, Islam is pointed to by Malcolm as a religion that required its adherents to be concerned about the liberation of non-Muslims as well. Yet, it could be contested whether Islam, Christianity, or any other religious tradition are welcoming sites for collaboration across religious lines. This, perhaps, is why Malcolm’s “advocacy” for *taqiyya* was so important. Rather than each person having to defend the reputation or legitimacy of their particular religious affiliation, their willing participation in revolutionary praxis should be an important unifying point of overlap.

The discussion in chapter five pointed to the importance of culture in regard to the revolutionary struggle. Is struggle based on the preservation of one’s culture, or can one make use of elements from their enemy’s culture that they agree with or find helpful? More specifically, would an oppressor’s deities help the oppressed? One ought to be cognizant, however, that the very formulation of these kinds of questions is saturated with assumptions. One might begin by asking what makes a culture. Are cultures pure social phenomena that have been “uncontaminated” from “outsiders?” Or, are cultures complex sets of customs, views, practices, and ideas that have been shaped by people’s interaction with their environment and other people groups? A discussion of adopting an oppressor’s culture must begin from this point.

A second level of analysis for this issue is whether the oppressor is actually the creator of a particular cultural item. What was found in the research above is that,
in reality, all cultures are an amalgamation of various beliefs, practices, and items from numerous ethnicities. It is not clear that any given people are the exclusive “owners” of a particular cultural form. Yet, this is not to say that there is no significance in maintaining one’s cultural identity. It becomes a problem, however, when there is a since of cultural hegemony that militates against all “outside” influence.

A third level of analysis engages with the question of whether it matters who created a cultural item or whether it works. The weapons used by Nat Turner and the other rebels to rise up against their European oppressors were likely produced by Europeans. Nevertheless, Turner and the other rebels made use of those items for the benefit of Black liberation. This brings the writer to state that it is not the origin of something that legitimizes it, but whether it is useful.

What has been demonstrated in chapter five is that Malcolm’s perspective on the aforementioned queries was very narrow. While his call for a return to African culture should be commended, he had a truncated and legalistic view of what it meant to be African. Malcolm was absolutely right that some African Americans descend from people who originated in Muslim societies on the African continent. Yet, both African Traditional Religions and Christianity were more wide spread and had a much longer history among African peoples on the continent. The most detrimental mistake of his ideology of “returning to the religion of our forefathers” is that it actually weakens his case for adopting Islam. The case for African Traditional Religions would go without saying. However, most ironic is the fact that the history of Christianity among Africans, which expands several centuries longer than Islam,
would provide one with more credence to suggest that Black people should return to
Christianity; as the religion of their fore parents. In fact, once a person steps outside
of theories and rhetoric, history would lend more weight to the assertion that
Christianity is the Black man’s religion more than it has ever been the white man’s.

Having come to the end of this dissertation, there are two final issues that
require further reflection. As the driving inquiry of this whole dissertation, it must be
determined: (1) Does the theory constructed in this project relieve the tension
between religion and revolution? Furthermore, as a dissertation that is fundamentally
a Black Studies project, one must ask: (2) What kind of difference would the religion
constructed in this dissertation make for the conditions of Africana people as of the
date of this writing? These questions will be addressed in turn.

It is the conclusion of this writer that using Malcolm as a locus of analysis
in conversation with other Africana intellectual activists, helped to relieve some of
the perceived tension between religion and revolution. Both violence and unity are
central aspects of the type of revolution that has been considered in this dissertation.
Therefore, if one adopts an understanding of religion that makes room for the use of
revolutionary violence and interreligious unity, then two important conflicts can be
avoided, and one has a better chance for a successful revolution.

However, Malcolm’s perspective on adopting the religion of one’s
oppressor creates more tension and barriers than it resolves. Besides the limitations
already described above, debates about the adoption of Christianity by potential Black
revolutionaries conflicts with the concept of TPRI. While it is doubtful that his
critiques would gain any more legitimacy during times of peace and stability, it is
certain that in the context of impending revolution the relevance of the concerns he raised would diminish even more.

In fact, there is a since in which attacks on (Black) Christianity become antirevolutionary because it has the potential to alienate Africana Christians who are otherwise ready to participate in revolutionary praxis. It could become an additional barrier of unity if Africana Christians are required to meet a higher standard than other Africana revolutionaries to prove their commitment to revolution. Even when Malcolm could pursue collaborations with Black Christians more openly after he left the NOI, his rhetoric on (Black) Christianity placed an unnecessary strain on the possibility for his ideal of unity to materialize.

In regard to the final concern mentioned above, if the theory constructed in this dissertation was to be applied to the lives of Africana people today it would allow for the utilization of all means necessary to end their oppression. If it was put into practice it would permit the use of violent self-defense, retaliation, and revolution. What this means is that, for example, African Americans would have been able to respond in various ways to the racist killings of African Americans between 2012 and 2023. For example, it would have been morally permissible for African Americans, like Ahmaud Arbery, to have killed the white vigilantes who chased him down and murdered him. Similarly, this religion would have sanctioned African Americans watching Eric Garner or George Floyd being choked to death, to attack the police in order to save those men’s lives. Moreover, this religion would have supported the Ferguson rebellion in 2014 in response to the killing of Michael Brown and the option to use deadly force by Breonna Taylor, or any occupant of her residence, in response
to nighttime home invasion that happened to be an execution of a “no-knock warrant” in 2020 in Louisville, Kentucky.

This conception of religion and revolution would also have challenged calls for nonviolence and the weaponizing of forgiveness in response to the killings of African Americans. For example, when Dylan Roof killed members of a Black church in 2015 and was forgiven by some members of their families, this posture would not have been required if the theory articulated in this dissertation was applied to their views of religion. Similarly, when Botham Jean’s brother hugged the police officer who unjustly killed his brother, it would have been morally valid for him to have snapped the officer’s neck rather than bringing her comfort.

However, many would not find this approach appealing. This brings the author full circle from the opening of this dissertation that questioned the feasibility of a violent revolution by people of African descent. Aside from other concerns Covington voiced, she mentioned the inadequacy of the religion of Black people during her time to support revolutionary praxis. Yet, it is the author’s contention that the theory constructed in this dissertation would make religion compatible with revolution. If applied, it would help develop a robust paradigm for religion strong enough to sustain revolutionary praxis. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to decide whether it would be appropriate for this theory to be applied given other concerns not addressed in this document. Rather, the concern here was simply to develop a theory that would resolve the apparent antagonism between religion and revolution. Whether the aforementioned objective was accomplished, that is for readers to decide.
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# APPENDIX

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Africana Critical Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMI</td>
<td>Muslim Mosque Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOI</td>
<td>Nation of Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAAU</td>
<td>Organization of Afro-American Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCNA</td>
<td>Tactical Cooperation with Nonviolent Activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPRI</td>
<td>The Priority of Revolutionary Immediacy</td>
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CURRICULUM VITA

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EDUCATION

University of Louisville
Doctor of Philosophy (Pan-African Studies) 2019-present
Comprehensive Exam Fields: Africana Religions, Africana History, Africana Critical Theory (Passed: March 2022; ABD; Anticipated Dissertation defense date: April 2023)
Exam Committee: Dr. Michael Brandon McCormack (chair); Dr. W.S. Tkweme; Dr. Tyler Fleming; Dr. Edward Curtis IV (IUPUI)

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Master of Divinity (Islamic Studies) 2018

Ohio Mid-Western College
Bachelor of Arts (Christian Ministry) 2013

Kingdom Life Bible College
Associate of Bible Degree 2010

PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS


“Malcolm X and the Christian Ethic of Violence” in
2017

2016

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

Expected 2024

Major Revisions

PUBLISHED BOOK REVIEWS

2022

2020

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“We are Africans in America’: Malcolm X’s Theory of a Pan-African Identity” Paper presented at the National Council for Black Studies Conference.  
2020

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Simmons College of Kentucky
Instructor in Residence- “Religious Studies”  
Classes Taught:  
- Malcolm X: His Life and Thought  
- Church History II: African and African-American  
- World Civilizations II  
- Introduction to Hebrew Scriptures  
- Introduction to Christian Scriptures  
- Old Testament II  
- New Testament II  
- Pastoral Epistles

University of Louisville  
Graduate Teaching Assistant 2020 - Present  
- Introduction to Pan-African Studies  
  (Spring, 2023)  
- African American Religion (Spring, 2021; Fall, 2022)  
- Religion and Hip Hop (Spring, 2021)  
- African History Since 1800 (Fall, 2020)  
- Civil Rights Movement (Spring, 2020)  
- African American History I (Spring, 2020)

Forest Baptist Church, Ninth Street Baptist Church, and First Baptist Church of Walton  
Ecclesiastical Teaching 2012-2018  
Taught classes and developed lectures on Christian Theology and Church History.

AWARDS  
- Who’s Who Among Students in American Universities 2013  
- & Colleges Award Recipient  
- Ohio Mid-Western Higher Calling Award Recipient 2013

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS/INVITED LECTURES  
Afrikan Esquire TV  
Interview/Presentation June 2021  
St. Steven Baptist Church  
Lecture  
October 2018  
Gave a lecture on Malcolm X and African American Religions  

Bates Memorial Baptist Church  
Lecture  
May – July 2018  
Gave a three part lecture series on the history and beliefs of the Black Hebrew Israelites  

J.L. Roberts School of Religion  
Lecture  
May 2018  
Presented a four part lecture series about African American Religions  

Against the Odds: Urban Ministry Conference  
Breakout Session Lecture  
2017  
Lecture Title: “Malcolm X and Urban Apologetics: A Sociological and Religious Overview.”  

Boyce College (Professional Development Program)  
Lecture  
November 2017  
Gave a lecture on African American Religions  

University of Kentucky Baptist Campus Ministry  
Lecture  
November 2017  
Presented a lecture comparing Christianity and Islam  

Simmons College of Kentucky  
Guest Lecture for Sociology of Religion Class  
October 2017  

First Baptist Church of Walton Kentucky  
Lecturer  
January 2013  
Co-created a class on “World Religions”  
Developed curriculum and created a Handbook for students.  
Lectured on “Orthodox” Islam, Nation of Islam and the Jehovah Witnesses.

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Jenkins Center for the Christian Understanding of Islam  
Student Associate  
February– March 2016
Planned and organized student trips, prepared content for informational handouts, and wrote blogs about Issues related to Islam for the website.

*Jenkins Center for the Christian Understanding of Islam*

**Intern**
Organized and compiled research on Islamic Studies for the student body.

*Ohio Mid-Western College*

**Research Assistant—to Professor Thomas Francis in Christian Ministry Department**
Assisted department chair in various administrative and academic projects.

**LANGUAGES**
- English—native language
- Spanish—speak with elementary proficiency
- Arabic—6 credit hours
- Greek—6 credit hours
- Hebrew—6 credit hours