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Psychological Warfare: Jehovah's Witnesses and  
The African American Experience

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in African American Studies

by

Markus Issac Hicks

2021

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2021

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Psychological Warfare: Jehovah's Witnesses and  
The African American Experience

by

Markus Hicks

Master of Arts in African American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Marcus A. Hunter, Chair

This study explores the psychological warfare Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) engage to recruit African Americans as some studies cite membership as high as 52 percent of JWs U.S. membership demographics. Despite succeeding in recruiting more than their "fair share" of African Americans, there has been little research to account for their success. I posit that JWs' precise understanding and acknowledgment of the African American plight made the organization especially attractive to Black Americans. Utilizing discourse analyses of JWs' literature 1879 through 2014, I offer three emerging themes that reveal JW's outreach strategies. 1. A hope offering Black people a racial paradise 2. A strategy corroborating African Americans' reality of racial oppression 3. Providing favorable coverage and representation among the Black community.



The thesis of Markus Hicks is approved.

Jeffrey Prager

Sobukwe Okpara Odinga

Marcus Hunter, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

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## Psychological Warfare: Jehovah's Witnesses and The African American Experience

While nations “occupy” and annex land for the interests of their empire, religions engage in psychologically warfare to lure their members. According to the *Watchtower*, a prominent journal of Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs), Western Christianity is a “chord which has drawn, and still draws, from sympathetic purses, millions on millions of money (“The Worlds Hope Not In Missions...”).” If religious leaders, represented across Christendom, manipulate the notes from the bible to accomplish their monetary gain, then what are the device(s) JWs arrange to secure its membership?

In 1906 Joseph Booth, a successful businessman and prominent English missionary consultant traveled from South Africa to the headquarters of the Watchtower society (Allegheny, PA) “to confer...the possibilities of presenting the harvest message to the Christian converts of Africa (“Harvest Work Amongst The Blacks”, p.3942).” This meeting signals an important moment in the social orientation of Jehovah's Witnesses, and one that would affect the lives of millions of Black people world-wide for generations to come. Although once opposed to recruiting Black people, Charles T. Russel, the founder and president of the organization, in response remarked that, “Brother Booth's zeal for Black brethren had the effect of stimulating our interest...and the more we reflect...the more deeply interested do we feel in the harvest (Harvest Work Amongst The Blacks”, p.3942).

Booth, with a successive track record for establishing several missions in African for Christian denominations including Baptist and Seventh-day Adventist churches, no doubt brought a wealth of knowledge that not only stimulated Russel's interest in recruiting decedents from African, but also establishing a legacy within the Black community. As receipts of the gospel order (i.e., religious ideology), this paper will unpack the psychological manipulation, the process by which religious leaders engineer consent as they persuade individuals to act against their own interests.

In this paper, I explore how Jews successfully recruited into their ranks so many African American's, becoming one of the most successful historically white religions to enlist a Black cohort with studies citing African American membership to be as high as 52 percent<sup>1</sup> of Jews U.S. demographics. Despite succeeding in recruiting more than their "fair share" of Black Americans, there has been little research to account their marketing strategies.

This study will reveal the mechanisms responsible for enlistment as well as demonstrate how Jews target African Americans for the purposes of membership. I posit that Jews' particular understanding and acknowledgement of the African American plight (e.g., their understanding of Black unfreedom in relation to historic racial oppression, distinctive and different from other members of American society), made the organization especially attractive to Black Americans. With the use of racial systematized frames, Jews provides favorable coverage to African Americans, hiding their nature of dominance, to facilitate enrollment.

Utilizing discourse analyses of Jews' literature 1879 through 2014, I offer three emerging themes that reveal Jews outreach strategies. These devices are not mutually exclusive nor exhaustive but often overlap to achieve Jews' ideological objective. These analytical categories include:

1. A hope offering Black people a racial paradise
2. A strategy corroborating African Americans' reality of racial oppression
3. Providing favorable coverage and representation among the Black community

Part I identifies the historical use of religious ideology and predatory practices aimed at reinforcing the economic, psychic, and material interests of the slaveholder.<sup>2</sup> Part II provides the

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<sup>1</sup> According to Lipka, 2015; Keysar, Kosmin, and Mayer 2001, Black Americans account between 27 percent and 52 percent of Jews U.S. demographics. When considering the null hypothesis, if African Americans are 12 percent of the U.S. population, we would expect to see 12 percent of blacks represented across social institutions. Instead, within Jews, we see that blacks are well overrepresented.

<sup>2</sup> An important note for the reader: Throughout this paper "Black", "African American", and the Black community are used interchangeably.

background/historical context which discusses key events that crystallized Jehovah's Witnesses' choice to target the Black community for membership. And, how JWs as receipts of the gospel order utilized colonial logics, *the blessing in disguise* thesis, as incentive to justify and begin enrolling Black Americans. Part III discusses methods and how I gathered data utilizing discourse analysis. Part IV reveals JWs' outreach strategies which I argue account for the disproportionate rates of African American membership represented among U.S. Jehovah's Witnesses. Part V concludes with future directions.

### **Part I. Religious Ideology and Predatory Practices**

“Ideologies are about meaning in the service of power...by definition dominant frames must misrepresent the world (hide the fact of dominance) ...Dominant racial frames, therefore, provide the intellectual road map used by rulers to navigate the always rocky road of domination (Bonilla-Silva, 2006 p.74).”

It has been long understood how slaveholders used religious ideology, or the precepts within Christianity, to perpetuate conformity among racialized “slaves” for the benefit of their colonial project. (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Pestana, 2011; Raboteau 2004; Snow, 2004). During slavery, religious ideology worked to simultaneously reassure “slaves” their freedom in the afterlife, while subtly reinforcing the economic, psychic, and material interests of the slaveholder. Southerners utilized systemic biblical instruction to persuade “slaves “to find pleasure in their oppressed condition directing their hopes and desires into a supernatural domain (Marx as cited Davis, 1971).

Hiding their dominance, as Raboteau (2004) tells us, conversion of the “slaves” to Christianity was viewed by the emerging nation of Western Christendom as a justification for Africans subsequent enslavement, exclusion, and political disenfranchisement. Despite creating the conditions of racial discrimination and inequality, the religious elite believed “the greater benefit” belonged not to Western civilization “but to the captive Africans...which would now possess true



freedom (Raboteau, 2004, p.97).” The discursive formation of this *blessing in disguise* doctrine,<sup>3</sup> which became an elaborate theory aimed at identifying the supposed benefits of European exploitation, chattel slavery, and anti-Black racism would later be known as scientific racism, presently considered a “pseudo-science.”

Christianity then became a form of technology that set rigid and narrow parameters around Black agency while elusively encouraging racial inferiority, patriarchy, docility, piety, and asceticism (self-denial of pleasure). By the 1820s, religious leaders and planters formed a “southern Christian consciousness (Raboteau, 2004, p.154)” a centralized body concerned with the task of systematic slave conversion. “Through the circulation of pamphlets and papers, plantation missions were brought to the attention of thousands (Raboteau, 2004, p.154).” Religious journals such as *The Gospel Messenger* (Episcopal), *The Christian Index* (Baptist), and *The Southern Christian Advocate* (Methodist) aimed “to show from the Scriptures of the Old And New Testament, that slavery is not forbidden by the divine law (p.154).” In 1834, *The Charleston Observer* (Presbyterian) ran a series on the “biographies of servants” which served as a template for religious instruction and catechism. Pamphlets such as “Detail of a Plan for the Moral Improvement of Negroes on Plantation,” “The Colored Man’s help,” and “The Duties of Christian Masters to Their Servants<sup>4</sup>” were part of a massive campaign to give favorable coverage for slave conversion.

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<sup>3</sup> The blessing in disguise thesis was born out of a need to justify slavery where “white Southerners insist[ed] that black chattel slavery was a blessing rather than a curse” (McLoughlin, 1974, p.375). This ruling episteme used divine favor as an impetus for colonial, racial, and Christian conversion. It advanced that the supposed incivility, savagery, and hedonistic ways of groups like African Americans should be treated as justifications to oppress, lord over, and restrict their movements (Hernandez 2017; Raboteau, 2004; Amponsah, 2013). The thesis also reveals how “Slaveholders ha[d] no other idea than of holding slaves.” (p.78).

<sup>4</sup> According to Raboteau (2004), “a Baptist State Convention...sponsored a contest for the best on the topic Conversion of the slaves, which was won by Holland N. McTyeire” for his paper *The Duties of Christian Masters to Their Servants* (p.154).

Biblical conditioning also served as a register, barometer, and approximation of whiteness<sup>5</sup>. Christianity, in the hands of slaveholders, acted as a sanitizing instrument that served to sterilize and clean the supposed inhumanity of the Negro where he would become “...unconsciously ripe for a new philosophy (Du Bois, 2008, p.143).”<sup>6</sup> For Amponsah (2013), religions’ symbolic power resulted in the perception that Whiteness was associated with morality, purity, and cleanliness while Blackness was associated with immorality, pathology, and uncleanness (see Amponsah, 2010, p.438). Religious leaders decided to alter the state of reality in cerebral ways, in which the ruling social order functioned fundamentally to shift Black people’s consciousness “visually, psychologically, ontologically (Spillers 2003, p.155).”

Despite their attempts, Christianity proved to be a double edge sword. Unlike the accommodation thesis that paints early African Americans as agents of acquiescence (see Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, p.15), the majority of enslaved Africans responded to this religious ideology as Raboteau (2004) tells by rejecting “White folks’ religion (Raboteau 2004, p.295)”, fashioning a faith that preserved their sense of manhood and womanhood (Lincoln and Mamiya p.201). As argued by Du Bois (2008), what emerged from the legacy of “Negro religion” was “the dream of Abolition” (Do Bois, 2008, p.144) and a strong affinity for Christian religious symbols. The impact of religious affiliation for subsequent African American generations is staggering. A Report of the Surgeon General, in 2001, stated 85 percent of African Americans describe themselves as “fairly religious” or “religious,” and prayer was the chief coping response in handling mental-health anxieties for Black Americans (Office of the Surgeon General U.S., 2001).

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<sup>5</sup> Brownlow, once a U.S. Senator, Governor, and Methodist minister, asserted unlike their African counter parts— “who were poor, half-clad, half-staved savages” —southern slaves lived in a content and happy state. But most importantly in Brownlow’s estimation it was “simply impossible to change an African into an Anglo Saxon.” Here Brownlow alludes to the connection between witnesses (colonial logics) and what blackness symbolizes (as cited by McKenzie,2002, p.303).

<sup>6</sup> According to Du Bois (2008), this new philosophy, worldview, and faith was foreign to the transplanted African. Where formally she was “Endowed with a rich tropical imagination and a keen, delicate appreciation of Nature, the transplanted African lived in a world animate with gods and devils, elves and witches; full of strange influences, —of Good to be implored, of Evil to be propitiated” (p.142).

In the hands of the planter religious elite, the symbolic power of Christianity, became a powerful ruling idea. While White religious leaders advertised Christianity as a message of salvation to enslaved Africans, in reality, slave Christianity aimed at alienating “slaves” from their own lived experiences to exploit their labor power. Slave instruction through systemic advertising intended to unconsciously persuade “slaves” to buy into their racialized condition. These targeting practices were the first case in the literature where religious ideology was systemically carried out to misrepresented the world for the purposes of economic benefit and racial domination; but also, such unscrupulous practices, pertaining to this study, highlight what I demarcate as predatory religious practices.

These strategies included targeted-marketing schemes<sup>7</sup> designed specifically to appeal to early African Americans’ unfreedom while also working subversively to legitimize their “legalized” social position. Slave Christianity premised divine freedom in the next life - catapulting Black collective freedom into a non-existent realm never to be realized. In short, slaveholders did not bring the gospel if you will to African Americans as a means of altruism and freedom, but as a means to maintain their material interests. As I will discuss in the next section, like their predecessors, JWs elites used biblical instruction to mask their participation in the “civilizing project,” to ultimately exploit Black Americans for membership. Similar to White planters, whose entire system was built on the commodification of the slave labor, JWs, who are among the receipts of this Gospel Order, mobilized Black individuals to increase their membership.

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<sup>7</sup> Target marketing is a conscious effort to engage in methods a business undertakes to advertise their product. It is a project that requires studying (learning their audience) and identifying specific personas. The goal of target marketing is to efficiently select consumers, based on buyer persona, most likely to engage with the brand (see Grier & Kumanyika, 2010 and Revella, 2015).

## Part II. Background: A blessing in Disguise

“...Even the infamous slave trade, which brought thousands of black men from Africa to this favored land, was, as viewed in the light of God’s overruling providence, **a blessing in disguise**; for the black man in America has enjoyed advantages of civilization here that he would never have known in his native land (Watchtower “Special Divine Providence” p.1561).”.

Before Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) started targeting and enrolling Black Americans, there was an assessment period. In the early stages of JWs, they were, in fact, not very interested in recruiting Black Americans. They embraced the broadly-based racism,<sup>8</sup> shared by nearly all Christian sects (except for the Black churches) and, by American society in general. Early JWs began to theorize about the possibility of recruiting Black Americans for the first time in 1887. Citing missionary reports from Protestants and the Catholic church, JWs’ explored whether “the negro was capable of development (“The World’s Hope Not in Missions, But in The Kingdom,” p.934). After first declining Booth’s invitation to “harvest” individuals of African descent, “Early JWs made it known that they “...no longer [felt] that the salvation of the world [was] a responsibility upon our shoulders,” apparently JWs preferred harvesting over “sowing,” where their energies would focus on “perfecting character amongst those who are his” (see “Harvest Work Amongst The Blacks”, p.3942 and “Christianizing The World”). What changed their perspective?

Impressed with early JWs literature, Brother Booth traveled to their headquarters (Allegheny, PA) “to confer...the possibilities of presenting the harvest message to the Christian

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<sup>8</sup> During the early formation of JWs (1879-1907), the organization expressed disparaging racial views about African Americans. On several occasions, early JWs implied that black skin turning white, a condition contemporarily known as Vitiligo, was God's way of supporting the superiority of white skin (see the articles “From Black to White He Slowly Turned; “Encouraging Words From Faithful Workers,” and “Can the Ethiopian Change His Skin”). The organization also referred to “blacks... average standards of intelligence” (“Letters From The Home Field,” p. 334; see also the article “The Volunteer Work”) which led to subsequently excluding African Americans from volunteering in the preaching work.

converts of Africa (“Harvest Work Amongst The Blacks”, p.3942).” Confer is really a euphemism for presenting what JW’s would see as an irresistible business opportunity. As an established missionary in Central Africa where he was the originator of “Industrial Missions”, from one businessman to another, Booth “assure[d] us that there [were]...true Christians amongst the blacks of Africa as any he had ever found amongst the whites anywhere (“Harvest Work Amongst The Blacks”, p.3942).”

As a result of this meeting initiated by Booth, the organization concluded, “Brother Booth’s zeal for black brethren had the effect of stimulating our interest in them, and the more we reflect...the more deeply interested do we feel in the harvest” (“Harvest Work Amongst The Blacks”, p.3942). More importantly, the meeting gave JW’s the confidence that if they “tell them very briefly something about...the dawn of the Millennium, and the kingdom that then is to be established in the earth...We believe that invitations of that kind would be frequently accepted...amongst the blacks (p.3942-3943).”

Now that Brother Booth successfully stimulated early JW’s’ desire to recruit Black Americans, JW’s posited slavery as a “blessing in disguise.” No longer concerned with Black inferiority, JW’s reasoned that since African Americans are in “this favored land,” they now also have the opportunity to “enjoy advantages of civilization.” Like their predecessor, JW’s viewed Christianity as part of the civilizing project, one that would allow Black Americans to enjoy benefits “he would never have known in his native land.” Borrowing from colonial logics, the “blessing in disguise” theory gave JW’s a racial frame where they came to view Black Americans as capable of being the recipients of Christianity’s “civilizing mission.”

After assessing whether black Americans possessed the intelligence to absorb Christianity, and consulting with Brother Booth as well as developing a rationale, the organization then moved toward systemic recruitment.

The more we think of this the more it appeals to us. In nearly every city of our land there are colored people whose parents were brought from Africa as slaves, and who in the Lord's providence are now free and able to speak and read the English language. Many of them give evidence of deep religious sentiment and fervency of spirit. Why is not the truth for these! Perhaps the Lord allowed us to overlook them to some extent in the past; why may we not now make a general movement all along the line for their aid? ("Laboring Amongst The Colored People", p. 4001.)

Framing the decision to recruit Black Americans as "aid," hides JW's true intentions and choice to recruit African Americans. Once opposed to recruiting within the Black community because of concerns of Black inferiority, there several key events that crystallized Jehovah's Witnesses' choice to target the Black community for membership. Booth's knowledge in establishing several missions in African for Christian denomination was important in stimulating JW's interest in the "Harvest Work Amongst The Blacks." The socio-historic process of U.S. Slavery, where as a result Black Americans were "free", "able to speak and read the English language" and demonstrated "deep religious sentiment." Like their precursors JW's early discourse reveals how they mobilize religious ideology to disguise their participation in the "civilizing project," to ultimately exploit Black Americans for membership. Borrowing from colonial rationalities, the "blessing in disguise" thesis gave JW's a racial frame where they saw Black Americans as "worthy" recipients the "civilizing mission." JW's reasoned that since African Americans are in "this favored land," they now also have the opportunity to "enjoy advantages of civilization."

### **Part III. Data & Methods**

My research will stem from Jehovah's Witnesses'(JW's) official online library (wol.jw.org). JW's' library gives patrons public access to its vast number of books, monthly journals (i.e., *The*

*Watchtower*)<sup>9</sup>, videos, and brochures that contain the group's teachings, doctrines, and policies.

Furthermore, this database allows users free access to published materials from 1950 through the present. For publications before 1950, websites such archive.org and avoidjw.org provided access.

I uncovered JW's recruitment instruments by tracing their racial rhetoric, from 1879 through 2014, using *Discourse Analysis*. Michel Foucault (1998) viewed discourse as “influenc[ing] how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others (as cited by Hall, 2001, p.72).” In that manner, I reveal how JW's utilize discourse in alluring and targeting African Americans for the purposes of control and membership.

From 1879 until 2014, I combed through well over three thousand electronic PDF editions of *The Watchtower* magazine (*WT*) to tease out JW's radicalized rhetoric. Since PDFs are text searchable, I queried, “Black,” “Black Men,” “Negro,” or “Colored” in the search bar of each article. As matches were generated from the query, I retained results relevant to my investigation in a spreadsheet, dividing my findings into classes. For example, when I queried “Black men” in the 1889 *WT* PDF, I discovered the following familiar quote: “ Even the infamous slave trade, which brought thousands of black men from Africa to this favored land, was, as viewed in the light of God’s overruling providence, a blessing in disguise (p.1561).” While highlighted, I transmitted the excerpt in the “recruitment strategy” section of my database. I repeated this sequence with the terms “Black” and “colored” in the same manner uncovering the following themes: “JW's recruitment strategy,” “theorizing,” “racial paradise,” “corroborator of racial oppression,” and “pamphlets.” At this stage of my research, I had comprised a dataset containing not only JW's quotes but dozens of images from JW's literature.

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<sup>9</sup> The Watchtower magazine is the organization’s chief medium communicating how JW's represent themselves, to themselves, and the public (“How the Governing Body Is Organized”).

Part IV. JW's outreach strategies



Figure 1. *God's Kingdom Rules!* 2014 Publication.

*Courtesy Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.*



Figure 2. *God's Kingdom Rules!* 2014 Publication.


*Courtesy Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.*



# GOD'S KINGDOM

## A REAL GOVERNMENT

Is God's Kingdom a real government? Consider just a few of the features of God's Kingdom. Ask yourself, "Does not each feature show that the Kingdom is just as real as—and far superior to—any human government on earth today?"



### A RULER

Enthroned in 1914, Jesus Christ is a powerful, just, wise, and merciful King who is humble before Jehovah God. (Isa. 9:6, 7; 11:1-3) Unlike imperfect human rulers, he cannot be corrupted, nor is he hampered by fractious congresses and parliaments or self-seeking lobbyists and special-interest groups.

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### LEGISLATIVE AND JUDICIAL POWERS

Jesus' life and example while on earth form the basis for a perfect law, "the law of the Christ."—Gal. 6:2; 1 Pet. 2:21.

Jehovah has entrusted all judging to his Son, and Jesus carries out that assignment perfectly, as no human judge ever could.—John 5:22.

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### A BODY OF ADMINISTRATORS

Jesus has 144,000 corulers who will share in administering his just reign over the earth. A key objective of his rule is to reconcile humans to God, so his corulers will also serve as priests for that purpose.—Rev. 14:1; 20:6.



### AN ARMY

As Leader of Jehovah's vast army of mighty angels, Jesus commands the most powerful military force ever to exist. It will soon wage war on all wickedness.—Ps. 45:1, 3-5; Rev. 19:11, 14-16.



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### A SEAT OF GOVERNMENT

Jesus' throne is in heaven, at the side of his Father. Heaven is Jehovah's "lofty abode of holiness and glory." (Isa. 63:15) Is it a real place? Yes, more so than any capital city or government building you can see, for heavenly things do not decay.—Matt. 6:20.

### A TERRITORY ON EARTH

Today, Jesus' subjects are like foreigners who live as law-abiding citizens in every land and nation. But Jehovah has provided a spiritual land for them, a realm of activity in which they carry out the King's will. (Isa. 60:2; 66:8) Soon, Jesus' Kingdom will claim the entire earth as its physical territory.—Ps. 72:8.

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HEALTH    HOUSING    NOURISHMENT    EDUCATION    EMPLOYMENT

### GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

God's Kingdom will soon fulfill God's promises to provide all these blessings and more.—Ps. 72:16; Isa. 2:3; 33:24; 35:6; 65:21.

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### A POPULATION OF LOYAL SUBJECTS

"A ruler without subjects is ruined," explains the Bible, whereas "a multitude of people are a king's majesty." (Prov. 14:28) The Kingdom's population of loyal subjects has surged in number to well over seven and a half million.—Ps. 72:8; Isa. 60:22.



**Figure 3.** *God's Kingdom Rules!* 2014 Publication.

*Courtesy Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.*

## Racial Paradise

The imagery found in Figure 2 illustrates a world without racial lines, a life that is based on peace, tranquility, and harmony. For Witnesses this system is not just a distant possibility, but a reality that can happen at any moment. Racial Paradise<sup>10</sup> is a time pointing to the future where "...all the prejudices and injustices based on racial differences [will] be eliminated ("When All Races Live Together in Peace" Awake! Apr 15, 1993, p. 9-11)." It is a time where pain and death will be no more, and the only tears shed would be those of joy. It is a promised time where loved ones who have passed will be reunited with their loved ones. Preceding these paradisiac conditions, is the cataclysmic event of Armageddon where only "faithful" witnesses will be spared while the rest of the world's population will be annihilated. It is a utopian vision, where animals and humans coexist peacefully on earth while only 144, 000 anointed<sup>11</sup> Witnesses go to heaven.

As citizens of God's Kingdom, with the hope of living forever on earth Black Witnesses become "convinced they are Jehovah's chosen people. One is no longer identified as Bill Green, Negro..[instead they now possess]...an identity impervious to outside opinion... a new image of self-esteem to overwhelm feelings of self-hatred" (1966:165; Cooper 1974:715). As one unidentified Black Witness remarked, "do not get me wrong, I am not saying that Jehovah's witnesses are perfect. At times I detect among certain ones of them leftover attitudes of racial superiority...However, because they live by the constitution of God's government, Jehovah's witnesses have, to a degree unmatched by any other people on earth, rid themselves of racial prejudice" ("Racial Injustice-Will We Ever Be Relieved of It," p.714).

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<sup>10</sup> Racial Paradise is a term I created based on recurring themes discussed in the methods section. According to JWs, "God's Kingdom is not some abstract condition of the heart. Rather, it is a government that will have profound effects on our earth—the very place that God intended for all peoples to dwell without racial barriers" (see "Racism").

<sup>11</sup> According to JWs', "Jesus has 144,000 co-rulers who will share in administering his just reign over the earth." (See Figure. 3)

The claim that JW's have eradicated racial prejudice is substantial. According to Pew Research, Jehovah's Witnesses are among the most racially and ethnically diverse religious groups (see Michael Lipka 2015 and Figure 1). As a racial spokesman, JW's not only promote their racial paradise to African Americans, but as I will discuss, the organization also offers guidance in overcoming deep seated racial biases to some 700, 000 people visit their official website daily (see "A Unique Site").

I first notice JW's racial paradise doctrine in *The Watchtower (WT)* 1964. The article, "Equality for All" the article starts off:

will people of all races and nationalities ever be treated as equals? Are inequalities inevitable? IMPOSSIBLE! It will never be realized! Equality for persons of all races and nationalities is unrealistic. There will always be inequality ("Equality for All," p.389).

The *WT* here points to the fact that inequalities are inevitable in which, for example, singling out Black Americans, the organization says U.S. churches "...either only grudgingly accept or positively exclude Negroes from their fellowship" (p.389).<sup>12</sup> For JW's, while "not all persons are equal in the strictness sense" (p.389), God's will nevertheless welcomes "all races and nationalities to enjoy...equal rights and privileges" (p.389). As JW's explain, the hope for racial equality lies, not in human governments because "prejudices and hatreds are too deeply engrained" (p.391), but in God's kingdom. Like Jesus whose affection extended outside normative standards, Jehovah God, by extension of Jehovah's Witnesses, demonstrate God's qualities of love and impartiality.

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<sup>12</sup> Segregation was practiced, by Jehovah's Witnesses, as early as 1914 appearing to have concluded as an institutional practice in the late 1960s (see Cooper, Lee 1974). Also, scholar Werner Cohn (1956) notes in the mid-1950s that "the Witnesses practice a very rigid racial segregation" and consequently did not make real efforts, compared to other denominations, in propagating racially integrated meetings in the South. Even in the case where segregation was the law and mandatory, JW's practiced segregation in border areas the Southwest of the U.S. (Arizona and New Mexico), as well as in New Jersey (Asbury Park Congregation).

JWs assures its Black readership that under God's Kingdom, not only will Jesus heal but resurrect individuals who are "faithful" (see p.391). The article contends, like Christ, "Jehovah's Witnesses...welcome people of all nationalities, treating them as equals" (p.390) and invites African Americans "to obtain a foregleam of how equality will be realized in God's righteous new system...associate with the organization of Jehovah's witnesses..." (p.391). As another unidentified Black witness testifies, "they invited me to the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses...I was deeply impressed by how warmly I was welcomed by both blacks and whites, and by the genuine friendliness among them. Skeptical, I went to other Kingdom Halls. But the situation was identical. The unity and warmth that existed among the Witnesses was beautiful to me" ("Racial Injustice-Will We Ever Be Relieved of It,?" p. 712-713).

In a more recent example in 2013, the organization, in the article "A World Without Prejudice..." goes as far to quote Dr. Martin L. King. According JWs, while King's speech sparked many initiatives, including "...over 100 countries adopt[ing] the...Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, racial injustice is still pervasive. Quoting the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon: "There are many valuable treaties and tools...to prevent and eradicate racism...Nevertheless, racism continues to cause suffering for millions of people around the world." JWs thus conclude while some progress has been made in combating racial prejudice, what remains are entrenched biases.

For JWs, racial intolerance and racism are the result of two factors. First, there is sin and human imperfection...[which] from time to time, our imperfect heart will resort to "injurious reasonings" that can lead to prejudice" (p.7). Second, "there is the influence of Satan the Devil" who "is misleading the entire inhabited earth...[this] explains why prejudice is so prevalent" (p.7). As evident in biblical scripture JWs argue, "God's Kingdom is the means by which all injustices—

including all forms of intolerance and prejudice—will be done away with” (p.7), which are perpetuated by human imperfection and Satan the Devil.

In their view, “...discrimination is an act that can be seen and punished by law, whereas partiality is related to people’s inner thoughts and emotions, which cannot be easily regulated” (p.5). Since governments cannot force individuals to make inward changes, JW’s believe that the only way to eradicate racial bias is through God’s Kingdom and biblical conditioning. For example, the article uses as an example of an individual who overcame deep-rooted biases by studying the bible with JW’s, whose name is Sandra.

“My mother was from...Nigeria...my father’s family was from Edo [and]...because of these differences my mother was the victim of intense prejudice from my father’s family...Since the Bible says God is not partial and that anyone who fears him is acceptable to him, who am I to hate people because of their tribe or language” (p.6).

Sandra was able to overcome her biases by adjusting her thinking and making peace with her father’s family and applying bible principles. These are the adjustments that Sandra claimed “made [her] happy...[and] helped [her] to get along with others regardless of their...race” (p.6).

Instances like Sandra’s, according to JW’s, demonstrate the power of the bible to help individuals “overcome deep-seated hatred and prejudice (p.6-7).” A core belief however is that the hope for racial equality lies, not in human governments because “prejudices and hatreds are too deeply engrained” (p.391), but in God’s kingdom.

#### Corroborator of Reality

“When Malcolm talks or the Muslims talk, they articulate for all the Negro...their suffering. The suffering which has been in this country so long denied. That’s Malcolm’s great authority over any of his audiences. He corroborates their reality” (A Conversation With James Baldwin).

Corroborator of reality refers to how JWs, through their discourse in *Watchtower* literature (*WT*), acknowledge African Americans' reality of racial oppression. While African Americans are frequent on the news in handcuffs or being killed by police, less frequent are the images showing favorable coverage (see Diaz-McConnell, 2019; Hall, 2000). On the contrary, many institutions including media in the US tend to reflect a color-blind ideology that, instead of acknowledging the social forces regulating Blacks to the margins of society, blame African Americans for their social position (see Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Alexander, 2020; Omi & Winant 2014). Nonetheless, JWs not only publish articles that witness to the collective struggle of Black people but explain structural factors that reinforce racial difference.

JWs first articulated this idea of corroboration in "Maryland and Missouri Lynchings," 1934. For example, in addressing African Americans lynching, the article mentioned:

...In St. Joseph, Missouri, a colored boy was slowly strangled to death by a clumsy attempt to execute him. While his body jerked and twitched in its death agonies petrol was poured over it and his clothing was set afire. As his body became a torch and was burned naked... It is hard to conceive of the immense harm to civilization that is done by connivance with or condonement of these illegal acts. You may be the next to be hanged and burned ("Maryland and Missouri Lynchings," p.245).

In the above example, the article spoke in detail about the gruesome lynching of an African American and how it is hard to conceive "the immense harm" such violence enacts. In another example, in the *WT* 1935, a letter addressed to Brother Rutherford (president of the organization at that time) and Lewis Pittenger (a traveling representative) acknowledges how in the southern states, Blacks were "the most oppressed people" ("Letters," p.352). These articles are early examples of how JWs corroborated Black people's racial oppression.

Starting in 1973, JWs began to take a more aggressive stance on upholding racial oppression. They became more explicit in denouncing racism as they used scholarly literature to expose its fallacious nature. Some examples of JWs dispelling the myth of racial difference are in the 1973 *WT*, where the article quotes Adolf Hitler:

Adolf Hitler once remarked to former German politician Hermann Rauschnig: I know perfectly well . . . that in the scientific sense there is no such thing as race...I as a politician need a conception which *enables* the [existing] order . . . to be abolished. ...With the conception of race National Socialism [Nazism] will carry its revolution abroad and recast the world (“How Do You React to Racial Differences?” p.515).

In another example, the 1988 *Awake!* says

Some have attempted to justify their prejudice by claiming that God cursed the black race. However, no such curse is recorded in the Bible. True, Genesis 9:25 says: “Cursed be Canaan. Let him become the lowest slave to his brothers.” However, that off-cited verse says nothing whatsoever about skin color (“How Can I Overcome Feelings of Racial Prejudice?” p.22).

In these examples, JWs spoke of the importance of identifying the institutionalized myths that perpetuate racism citing world leaders like Hitler and the biblical teaching of Canaan. Also, these articles demonstrate how well-researched JWs are regarding Black oppression. As noted earlier, targeted marketing and unscrupulous practices requires organizations to learn their audience as they identify specific behaviors, habits, motivates, desires, and needs. Pointing to the fact that the *WT* cited four professors while citing two encyclopedias in their 1988 *Awake!* Article, this demonstrates the research, commitment, and energy the organization put into targeting Black Americans.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In 1919 after “consideration and consultation with a number of the colored brethren,” the organization committed considerable resources to open a “Colored Branch” (“The 1931 I.B.S.A. Year Book,” p.73). According to the organization, the purposes of this office came as a result of “rac[ial] prejudice existing amongst the peoples of the

The most prominent example regarding JWs' position on racism, is the 1993 *Awake!* "When All Races Live Together in Peace?". In addition to dispelling racism's mythical nature, the following articles discuss racism's origins, prevalence, and how it is maintained. Finally, the article provides a compelling counter-narrative that sought to humanize Black people.

First, the 1993 *Awake!* names race the "most dangerous myth,"<sup>14</sup> and in a different article that same year, examined its origins. The idea of racism (i.e., group superiority) stems from ethnocentrism, "...that one's own people and ways are the only ones that count" (p.10). This idea along with Satan the Devil are reasons individuals have "...been fanned into a consuming flame...spread[ing] all the false teachings about race that have been responsible for racial problems (p.10-11)." In "Why is Race Such an Issue?" the 1993 article explains how race is maintained systemically.

Discriminatory laws—as well as segregation in schools, churches, and other public institutions and discrimination in employment and housing—led to the civil unrest, protests, and violence that have become the realities of life in the United States and many other places... racism has become one of the most divisive forces afflicting human society (p.8). Next, the article claims that to "believe in one's [racial] superiority is one thing; to attempt to prove it, by using the findings of science, is something else"(p.5). Subsequently, the *Awake!* identifies the social forces at play, which serve in the maintenance of racism, noting how the multiplicity of discourses from Christianity as well as science have been integral in reinforcing the idea. Moreover, the 1993 *Awake!* article notes how "Highly developed Negro kingdoms existed in various parts of

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world" and was "not for the purpose of segregation" ("The 1931 I.B.S.A. Year Book," p.73. On the contrary, "it [was] believed that through a separate branch the public [the African American community] can be reached in a better way" ("The 1931 I.B.S.A. Year Book," p.73). Lasting until 1934, the official to head the Colored Branch was Brother T. E. Banks, of Cincinnati, working out of the headquarters in Brooklyn, New York. Under his leadership, in 1929, there were 304 public meetings held, throughout the U.S. exclusively for Blacks in which the attendance was 13,315 (see "The 1927 I.B.S.A. Year Book" and Pinn, 2009).



Africa hundreds of years ago” (p.6). Exposing the origins, prevalence within society, and effects of racism on the individual confirms Black people’s reality of racial injustice often negated within the larger society.

Favorable coverage and representation among the black community

Starting in 1985, the organization featured testimonials: accounts of how Black people became Witnesses. In addition, the organization utilized high quality images, in their brochures, to target African Americans as they aimed at appealing to Black’s people’s collective sensibilities. The combination of acknowledging racial difference while edifying and empowering Black women and men, act as a powerful peripheral cue to influence decision making.



Figure 4. *I Was a Rastafarian*, in the AWAKE!—Feb 22, 1985 magazine.

*Courtesy Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.*

The first image I will analyze is the *I Was a Rastafarian* (Figure 1). This testimonial offers a compelling story of a Black man who was once a self-described “criminal” and is now an exemplary JW. Before he was interested in Rastafarianism, “Small-I” as he was once referred to, had interest

in “living without dying” (p.14). While reading his bible one day, “a Rastafarian...joined me [and] stressed that there was a way for man to keep on living without dying. I wanted to hear more” (p.14). Small-I soon learned about Rastafarian beliefs which he believes encouraged an unkempt appearance, regular use of foul language and marijuana, laziness, and maintaining employment. Additionally, in Small-I’s opinion, Rastafarianism led to his arrest for kidnapping and five different charges: robbery, assault, possession of stolen goods, possession of marijuana, and driving a defective vehicle (See p.16). Although he was spared imprisonment, the death and imprisonment of his fellow Rastafarians started to cause Small-I to question his beliefs.

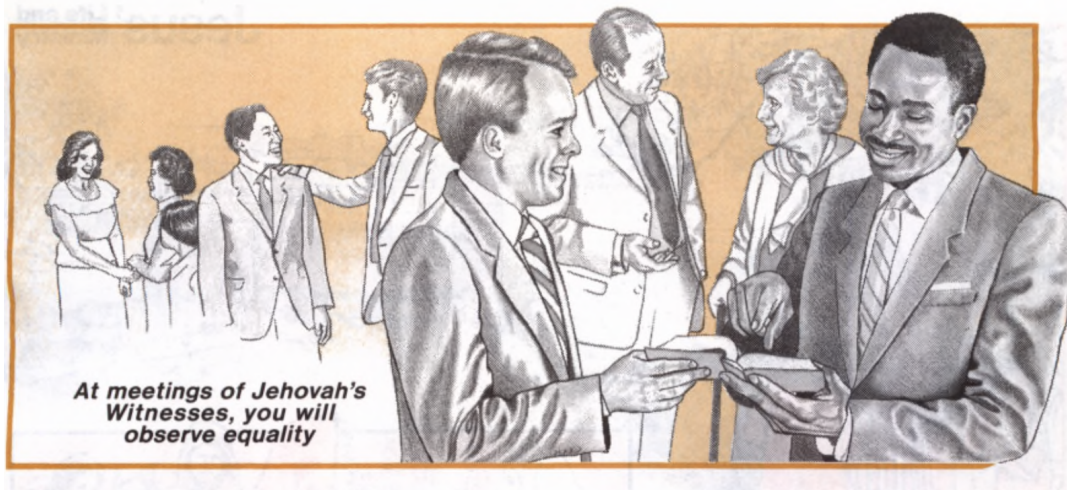
Rastafarianism, evidently proved to be dissatisfying in his desire to “...understand the reason for the inequities of the world[s] social system.” This all changed when one day, two JW’s, performing door-to-door evangelizing offered a publication *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*. While reading this book, Small-I, learned how Jehovah would bring about social equality, and how soon the whole earth would become a paradise. Once again, Small-I “...was thrilled at the prospect of living forever.” Small-I then made an effort to “clean himself” which meant cutting his long hair, a gesture symbolizing his former unclean life as a Rastafarian. He saw himself as ungodly because in *WT* literature he read a scripture: “does not nature itself teach you that long hair is a dishonor to a man”(p.16). Having found the answers, he longed for he began sharing the bible’s message with others. Within 6 months of studying, he became a dedicated Witness.

Interestingly, Small I’s conversion to JW’s signals an important colonial logic intrinsic to JW’s dominant modes of thinking. After two JW’s performed their “door step sermon” thereby offering JW’s ideology, Small-I “...was thrilled at the prospect of living forever.” Very shortly, Small-I *cleansed* himself of his self-described criminality and laziness, symbolic of him cutting his hair. This cutting

of his hair, cleansing his past, is evidence of structural biographical washing.<sup>15</sup> “Biographical reconstruction refers to a double-edged process involving the dismantling of the past, on the one hand and its reconstitution on the other. Some aspects of the past are jettisoned others are redefined, and some are put together in ways that would have previously been inconceivable (Snow & Machalek, 1984, p.173).” Beckford (1978) reminds in his analysis of JWs how converts learned to “construct ‘appropriate’ verbal accounts of their personal religious development.” Those who converted to JWs “were not simply the idiosyncratic and private constructions of the individual who professed them. Rather, they were individual expressions of basic themes in the general ideology of the Watchtower organization” (as cited by Snow & Machalek, 1984, p.175). Colonial logics as discussed were originally designed to cleans and remove what White religious leaders saw as undesirable traits of the racialized other. The continuation of racial inferiority logics as demonstrate through Watchtower literature, where black people are directed on appropriate verbal accounts, and “counseled” on grooming reveal not instructions for moral development, but rather the logics of hegemonic values.

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<sup>15</sup> In his report on becoming a Zen practitioner, Preston (1981) similarly observed that practitioners must learn to make correct attributions about their spiritual development. That is, they must learn how to recognize the “correct” symptoms associated with Zen sitting, attribute these symptoms to the “proper” causes, and continue to refine their ability to identify and interpret these symptoms correctly (as cited by Snow & Machalek, 1984, p.175).



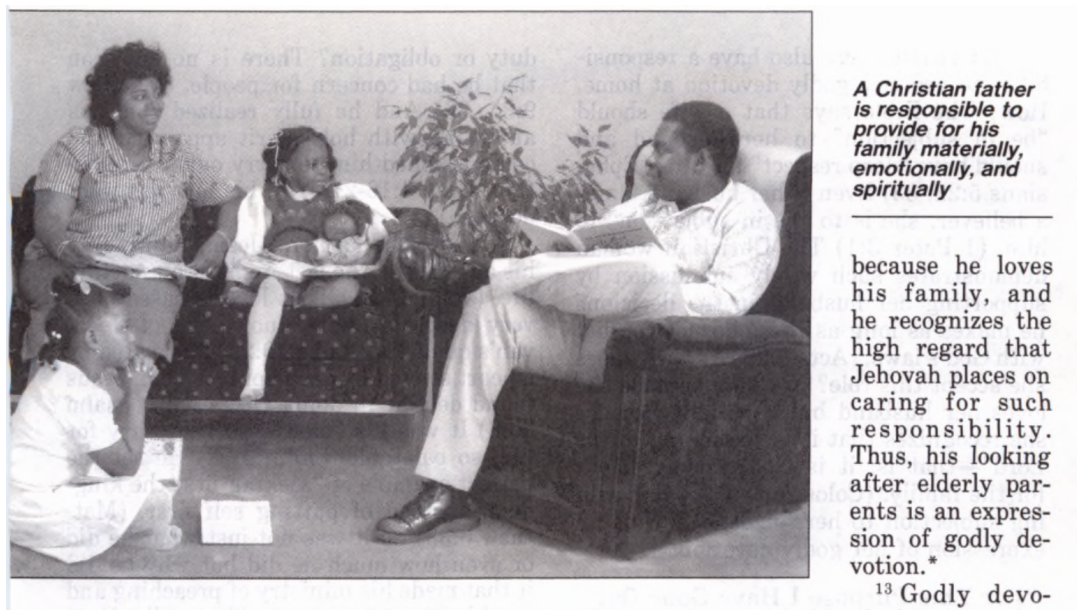
**Figure 5.** “All Men Are Equal”. *The Watchtower*, August 15, 1985

*Courtesy Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.*

The second vignette of analysis is JW's imagery depicting a racial paradise seen in figure 2. The picture reads, “At meetings of JW's, you will observe equality.” Featured predominately on the cover is a picture of a Black male, possibly serving in some leadership capacity, sharing some thoughts from the bible with his White brother in the faith. This image is part of a longer article entitled *All Men Are Equal...* in which JW's argue how it is “possible for men and women of all nations to view one another as equals” (p.5). Unlike the “present world order,” “...there are millions of Christians...” that are practicing equality, according to the article. The *WT* says, within each congregation, “Each one is called brother or sister, and the individual is not measured by race, background, or secular position. Each is appreciated for his Christian personality and qualities”(page#?).

This imagery communicates, not just the possibility of equality, but for Black men it offers a chance of upward social mobility and aspiration. According to social scientist Stark and Iannaccone (1997), “witnesses tend to see themselves as part of the power structure, rather than subjected to it”(p.147). “Because JW's depend upon lay clergy and leaders...everyone belongs among the clergy” (p.146-147). When individuals “believe that they have some impact on the decisions” (p.146), they

are enfranchised. As illuminated exceptionally by Cooper (1974), “by following the Society’s [i.e., Jehovah’s Witnesses] rules for “publishing” and morality, thereby assuring his place among the chosen, [African Americans] gain... a sense of purity and superiority, a new image of self-esteem...” (Cooper, 1974, p.715). As previously examined, the cost of this empowerment when viewed socio-historically is connected to the legacy of the civilizing project. In that, this “new image” is a persona associated with JW’s ideology. A system of ideas fundamentally designed to create the very racialized subjectivities it seeks to influence. JW’s centering Black men in avant-garde position simultaneously aims to target African American’s while signaling the possibility of higher social status, a favorable alternative reality for Black men.



**Figure 6.** “All Men Are Equal”. *The Watchtower*, March 1, 1990

*Courtesy Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.*

The last illustration of analysis is JW’s depiction of a Black middle-class family (Figure 3). The photo above portrays a Black father leading bible-based discussion as the wife and two daughters listen intently. The image is part of an article entitled “Follow Jesus’ Example of godly Devotion.” According to the *WT*, since “...a Christian father has a responsibility to provide for his

family materially, emotionally, and spiritually... he lovingly arranges for a regular family Bible Study” (p.21). Christian wives (i.e., Black woman) “should be in subjection to her husband and should have deep respect for him” and “her willing subjection...is...an expression of her godly devotion” (p.22).<sup>16</sup>

The illusion presented projects an exemplary Black-Witness family, who values intimacy, quality time, and bible study. However, behind the curtain, what is actual being portrayed, when analyzing JW's discourse, are the supremacy of White middle-class values. According to historian Evelyn Higginbotham (1994) the goal of middle-class values during 1880s, or respectability politics was to achieve “the dual goals of racial self-help and respect from White Americans” (p.15). It was believed that “respectable” behavior in public would earn [African Americans] “a measure of esteem from white America” (p.15). In this vein then, the appropriation of middle-class values is a longing to win White favorability, a strategy that 400 years of racial oppression has taught us has never worked. Framed as class values, respectability politics are colonial logics that require “psychological allegiance” to the supremacy of Whiteness. Rationalities that, Samuel Herd an African American governing-body member,<sup>17</sup> told Witnesses how “the cranial capacity of a woman is 10 percent smaller than that of a man... [therefore] this shows she’s just not equipped for the role of headship” (as cited by Remini & Rinder, 2016-2019). These directives, disguised in coded ways using biblical scriptures, are clearly discourses indicative of colonial rationalities<sup>18</sup>.

## Part V. Conclusion

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<sup>16</sup> According to the Awake! 1993 article, Paul was divinely inspired to write: “A woman must be a learner, listening quietly and with due submission. I do not permit a woman to be a teacher, nor must woman domineer over man” (“...A House Divided”).

<sup>17</sup> The Governing body of Jehovah’s Witnesses is the highest religious authority within their organizational structure. According to *The Watchtower* 1972, the term “Governing Body” refers to “an agency that administers policy and provides organizational direction, guidance and regulation” (“Questions From Readers”).

<sup>18</sup> In Sarah Haley’s (1996) research, she traces the system of ideas that allowed for the exceptional violence enacted against Black women during the 1880s-1920s. Surveying the incredible life of Eliza Cobb, a Black woman falsely imprisoned, Haley (1996) shows how Cobb was legible to authorities only as a “racialized subject—...idiocy” (p.20). White authorities’ articulation of “degrading discourses about Cobb’s alleged lack of intelligence” (p.20) was crucial in denying her case for freedom. Dr. Haley adds that, “in the white imaginary ‘black woman’ was an oxymoronic formulation... a productive negation that produced normativity” (p.21).

The outreach strategies discussed, racial paradise, acknowledgment of the African American contemporarily plight, and providing favorable coverage among the Black community work in congruence with other to achieve JW's ideological objective. These strategies offer a path towards eternal life with an identity that is impermeable to outside views and recognizes the various systems of representation that continually deny Black people's lived experiences.

In an "American social system [that] continues to reproduce a racially defined hierarchy and systematic patterns of inequality" (see Prager 2014), JW's position themselves as a faith free from racial hierarchy working covertly to engineer the consent of Black Americans. By tapping into the collective psyche of Black people, JW's have persuaded consent by way of appealing to Black people's intrinsic drive for freedom, kinship ties, and justice. JW's target racial hierarchical systems by acknowledging the forces of racial oppression and presenting Black men and women in avant-garde social positions relative to their racialized position.

Before JW's targeted Black people for membership they understood, with the assistance from Booth, how the peripheral cue of Christianity fills in the gaps of Black unfreedom. There were four qualitative differences between African Americans and enslaved Africans that stirred JW's interests: namely Black Americans were "free," as a result of so-called divine favor, "able to speak and read the English language," and demonstrated "deep religious sentiment" (see "Views From The Tower (b)", p. 1118). When understood from the position of an empire, we can reasonably conclude that if one of these factors were not present, JW's may not have pursued the venture. Once they understood their stake in their targeted market, they used these cures to draw favorability among African Americans.

The 1935 *WT* confirms this when a traveling representative from the organization, Lewis Pittenger, wrote to former president Rutherford: "one thing about them [African Americans] they are humble, they love the Lord, and they will contribute their last cent...when you inform them that



soon their condition will be changed... some of them will contribute for joy...”(Letters (b) p.352). As we have discussed, rather than a religious institution that is based on faith, the history of JWs reveals really an American empire;<sup>19</sup> one that uses religious ideology to target Black Americans for enrollment.

Future studies would be wise to consider the call for regulatory practices in the area of religious marketing and enrollment. JWs practices are manipulative because they uphold colonial logics values aimed at erasure to achieve economic output. Although we come to expect racial targeting from greedy capitalist, in the realm of the “scared and profound”, we tend to downplay the immense harm religious ideology enacts. Just as there are laws and policies that address predatory lending practices, we need similar checks in balances respecting religious authority. Further, other studies can consider how other religions, Scientology, Latter Day Saints, and other Christian denominations utilize religious ideology for purposes of social control or how other institutions, outside of religion, like the democratic or republican party, uses similar targeting schemes to secure the Black vote.

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<sup>19</sup> According to JWs *2020 Grand Totals* the organization reported worldwide 8.7 million adherents, 17.8 million attendees at their annual memorial, and a total of 120,387 congregations (“2020 Grand Totals”, n.d.). According to Newsday’s NYC top 40 companies the “Watchtower Bible & Tract Society reported JWs annual revenue of \$951 million” (see *At The Top / Nyc Company Profiles / Nyc 40*, 2009). And with the recent sell of its headquarters in Brooklyn Heights and DUMBO property sales ranked in the organization receiving \$2.19 billion (see Croghan, 2020).



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