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BLACK THEOLOGY AND THE END OF TIME

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY

by

Charles L. Krysinski

December 2022

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Table of Contents

Abstract……………………………………………...……………………………..iv

Acknowledgements……………………………………………………...…………v

Introduction: Last Things First………………………………….…………….……... 1

Chapter I: The Promise of Black Theology………………………..…………..…... 36

Chapter II: In the City of Prophets……………………………..……………….. 80

Chapter III: Waiting on the Black Messiah ………………………….……………….... 124

Bibliography…………………………………………………….…………………... 168

Abstract

Black Theology and the End of Time

Charles L. Krysinski

The radical Black Christians I compare in this study situated their god-talk precisely at the intersection between Black futurity and Christian eschatology**.** *Black Theology and the End of Time* examines how Black theologians during the 1960s and 70s preached, wrote, and organized around the return of Christ at the end of time by looking at how and why they used discourses of Christian eschatology to call forth transformative political futures. In particular, my dissertation stages an encounter between the preeminent Black theologian of the twentieth century, Dr. James Hal Cone (1938-2018), and the founder of Black Christian Nationalism and minister at Detroit's Shrine of the Black Madonna, Rev. Albert Cleage Jr./Jaramogi Abebe Ageyman (1911-2000). Far from figuring Christianity as something that was essentially opioidic, these Black Power theologians developed a radical, eschatological vision centered on the problem of white supremacy.

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I am forever grateful to all my Northland College students, and especially while working on this project, to my Theologies of Liberation seminar students.

Every week you all pushed me to think more deeply about the relevance of religion and race to understanding our contemporary world.

Thank you to my community and watershed on the south shore of Lake Superior, especially the barista staff at the Black Cat coffee house for the countless cappuccinos that fueled my writing.

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Introduction: Last Things First

With the still freshly painted fresco of the Black Madonna and Child adorning the altar at his back, the Reverend Albert Cleage Jr. interpreted Detroit's infamous 1967 Twelfth Street uprising in decidedly apocalyptic terms. Rather than focusing on the burning buildings or images of looting Detroiters, Cleage's interpretation during his "Grapes of Wrath" sermon of this infamous incident of civil unrest portrayed its apocalyptic meaning somewhat differently. Sporting the signature tuxedo that he wore throughout the era, Rev. Cleage announced to his congregants that "you were sifted during the riots."[1] This sifting was itself a metaphor for judgment. That is, they had been sifted in the sense that during the July 1967 uprising they were made to decide whose side of the conflict that they were on: the side of the revolutionary Black Messiah or the side of American empire.[2]

Across the broader literature on American eschatology, there has been a distinct focus on the history of the apocalypticism found within white evangelical Christianity. Largely, this body of literature has tended to note the efficacy of apocalyptic discourses within the context of post-World War II American political culture. Historians have cited examples ranging from Ronald Reagan's obsession with the Book of Revelations as a guide to Cold War nuclear policy, to the rise in popularity of Hal Lindsey's apocalyptic literature, and even the growing popularity of Christian identity apocalypticism in the context of contemporary white power movements, as evidence for the persuasive power of imagining the end times.[3] Given the focus of this body of scholarship, there remains a need to examine another face of

eschatological discourse that, while not abandoning the political, has instead promoted a radical eschatological hope for causes like racial justice. The distinctive flexibility within the American apocalyptic tradition that this project points to suggests a set of questions that any student of modern American religion ought to consider: What exactly does eschatology unlock in the imaginations of those who believe that the end times are approaching? How is it that this eschatological imagination can be wielded in such staunchly different ways? And, what is the connection between post-World War II American religion and an apocalyptic perspective on time?

From the perspective of African American religious history, in particular, the eschatological imagination has had a special significance. The first mass conversions of enslaved Africans during the Second Great Awakening led to a two fold historical process whereby American historians have marked the emergence of a) the first large-scale African American Christian communities, as well as b) the emergence of independent 'visible' Black congregations.[4] This period of African American religious history is sometimes associated with the phrase "pie-in-the-sky" theology, which was intended precisely to designate the essentially quietist effects that a belief in heaven had upon enslaved African Americans.[5] This style of theology remained problematic for the Antebellum Black church inasmuch as it portrayed the suffering of Black people under bondage as both just and righteous, all in the name of future heavenly joys.

Deeply felt concerns over the end times are not as unique as these questions regarding African American Christianity might suggest. According to scholars of the early church, stretching back nearly two thousand years Christians have proclaimed the imminent return of Jesus.[6] Indeed, for most of its history Christianity has told a story to its believers about breaking time through the performance of a transcendent – yet corporeal – Christ figure. In this narrative, Christ as God incarnate breaks the power of death through the miraculous act of resurrection and, in this sense, disrupts the tyranny of mundane time that carries on bringing death and decomposition ever more imminently on our bodily horizons. Jesus, as such, arbitrates for all sinners through his suffering and transcendence on their behalf. The miracle of the resurrection binds Christians to their faith, in part, by anticipating the future fate of all believers. It is a connection that is not just dialectical in its nature but deeply metonymic in the logic that it suggests: faith in Christ's resurrection generates symbolic analogies between part (Jesus as 'first fruits') and whole (the ecclesia, in general). Therefore, as Christians throughout the centuries have announced, Christ was born, is risen, and will come again. With this return at the end of time, Jesus inaugurates a period of cosmic warfare, judgment, and final reconciliation with God, as the 'Kingdom of Heaven' becomes a reality for all believers, with annihilation awaiting those who are judged to be sinners.

It is worth noting that this Christian eschatological tradition, not to mention the Jewish one from which it originally emerged, is not as uniform as this brief account might at first suggest. [7] For thousands of years, there have been Christians

who believed that the end time fate of sinners represents a kind of total-end (i.e., annihilation to a state of nonexistence), and there are also those who believed that judgment day would inaugurate a period of eternal torment for those who are not reconciled to God prior to their deaths. So too, there are those Christians who have tended to espouse a non-apocalyptic understanding of their faith altogether, wherein one's soul simply goes either to eternal paradise or everlasting damnation immediately upon death. In some Catholic contexts, purgatory has been invoked as the probationary space of temporary torment where souls purify themselves in preparation for their eventual ascent to a heavenly paradise.

These theological variations on the end times must also be balanced against the sheer breadth of the American apocalyptic tradition. Infamous bouts of eschatological panic throughout American history include the Great Disappointment and the Millerites movement of the 1840s, the eschatological message of the Antebellum slave spirituals, and the mid-twentieth century science-fiction inflected apocalypticism of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam (NOI). As the last example suggests, not all of these apocalyptic examples have been Christian in their orientation. While Elijah Muhammad's movement incorporated significant elements from African American Protestantism, it melded these themes with symbolism derived from both Islam as well as secular science-fiction. Depending on where one looks, at times these movements have been quietist, at times revolutionary, and at times reformist, as in the case of the Social Gospel movement.

These diverse views on the end times and the ultimate destiny of one's soul indicate the interlocking tension between what some scholars have described as "vertical" and "horizontal" eschatologies within the Christian tradition.[8] A vertical eschatological perspective is often portrayed as being inherently more individualistic and spatial in as much as it assumes the immediate transcendence (or descendance) of the individual's soul upon death. According to scholars of the early Jesus movement, such as Bart Ehrman, it seems unlikely that the historical Jesus of Nazareth himself espoused this kind of vertical eschatological view when he declared the coming of the Kingdom throughout his ministry.[9] By way of contrast, horizontal eschatologies tend to be both collective in nature and more concerned with the disruption of temporal orders. In the horizontal tradition, individual souls are still judged by the creator God, but this sifting happens collectively at a particular juncture in time. In this more horizontal scenario, the transcendent comes crashing down; the hierarchical spatial order holding heaven/earth/hell apart, collapses; the dead are resurrected and the end of time begins.

What comes after the beginning of the end of time? For many Christians, this post-judgment period is imagined as a return to an original (though now eternal) Edenic state. This new Eden is usually depicted as a utopian space, wherein alienation from God has been overcome and eternal dwelling with God has been (re)established – only this time, the connection is generalized beyond the primordial parent figures of the Genesis myth: Adam and Eve. Temporally, then, this kind of eschatology is not so much linear as it is ovular in shape: stretching from Edenic state to Edenic state by

way of human history. This temporal pattern also retains the metonymic logic noted when examining the role of the resurrection in cementing Christian faith: after the end of time proper, all who are judged righteous are themselves brought into the unalienated condition that Adam and Eve enjoyed prior their expulsion from the garden.

Part of the historical problem for adherents to any horizontal conception of Christ's dramatic eschatological return has been its stubborn refusal to actually take place. For many Christians, past and present alike, Jesus is decidedly late. His failure to materialize and usher in God's justice places Christians who would hold onto the hope of his return in an unavoidable future tense – they strain toward the horizon of God's judgment by anticipating its reality in their norms and ways of being together in the here and now. Though eschatology is often defined simply as speculation on the end of time,[10] I argue that it does more then tell Christians a story about the end of the world. Rather, eschatological narratives provide Christians past and present with a template for imagining conflict, its ultimate resolution, and something resembling historical causation.

It is true that this is not the same kind of causal thinking that tends to animate the imaginations of secular historians. But it is the very fact of this difference in perspective that, in part, make eschatological beliefs such a compelling field for historical scholarship: eschatologies are discourses which are always concerned with the nature of change over time. As such, they tend to lay bare a given historical subject's understanding of historical agency – what we might call 'the difference that

makes a difference.' For those who have faith in the end times, the second coming of Jesus represents a sort of temporal framework for understanding dramatic transformational change and, perhaps more importantly, tends to frame their role within that change.

…

Black people throughout the history of the United States have had multiple future horizons to bear in mind, only some of which have included transformational changes inaugurated by the second coming of Jesus. At least since the first bound African laborers landed on the continent in 1619, striving toward a livable and just future was defined for hundreds of years by the promise of freedom from chattel slavery. This problem remained an inescapable concern for African Americans from the colonial era through the end of the Reconstruction period in the 1870s. The traditions of resistance to chattel slavery that we know of from this period were themselves often highly apocalyptic, as seen, for instance, in the writings of David Walker and his famous 1829 *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* or in the examples of North America's most well-known enslaved preacher-rebels: Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey.[11] As scholars like Albert Raboteau have shown, these enslaved spiritual leaders were enamored with the liberatory message latent within the Christian tradition – they used the prophetic strain of Christianity to call for transformations in their political situation, especially that of bondage.[12]

Even more broadly throughout American history, however, African Americans have conceptualized Black futurity as the attempt to imagine a future free from the oppression of white supremacy. Though profoundly related to the history of chattel slavery, this tradition of American white supremacy has represented a multitude of evolving concerns for African Americans during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries: from the continued presence of white terroristic violence, to ingrained forms of race-based economic exploitation, to the judicial discipline and criminalization of Black personhood during Jim Crow.

If futurity is precisely that which cannot be contained by the present, then the study of Black futurity is deeply related to discourses of freedom within the African American tradition. Freedom, as such, is a future-oriented concept; its logic suggests the establishing and embodying of norms that are 'not yet' in place under white supremacy. This study of post-World War II African American eschatology joins works like Gary Wilder's *Freedom Time* and Eric Porter's *The Problem of the Future World* in their investigations of Black futurity vis-à-vis the life of its twentieth century intellectuals. Though both Porter and Wilder's works focus primarily on scholars known for their secularism (with Porter's looking at W.E.B. Du Bois and Wilder at Aimé Césaire, with his examination of Léopold Sédar Senghor forming the more religious exception) the fundamental methodological premise of our work remains the same: an effort at recouping reified figures of the past for the purpose of investigating their views on the future. Wilder, in particular, invokes the phrase "untimely" to describe the work of Césaire and Senghor in relationship to anti-

imperialism. Wilder argues that these two African diasporic intellectuals theorized forms of post-colonial federations between colony and metropole that were untimely in the sense that they represent historical paths that were not pursued, but whose frameworks remain suggestive for understanding present conflicts.[13]

Some have argued that the very essence of African American Christianity has its inception in precisely this future-oriented notion of freedom.[14] In doing so, these scholars tend to invoke the Black church's history as a source of refuge and resistance to white supremacy – often citing as examples radicals like Walker, Turner, and Vesey, but also the more establishment approaches of church founders like Richard Allen and Absalom Jones. While this position is supported by plenty of historical evidence, it is a claim that became more complicated to maintain without certain qualification following the end of the Civil Rights movement. By the time Black theologians like James Cone and Cleage were publishing their theological treatises in the late-1960s, Americans were feeling the full presence of the Black Power movement and critiques of the Black church as an essentially assimilationist and anti-revolutionary structure were widespread in American culture.[15] Especially among young people of color and their militant allies, the notion that Christianity could be a vehicle for revolutionary change seemed naïve and misguided. Whether these freedom movements have been religious or otherwise, studies into Black futurity involve tracing instances where the self-determining will of Black people cannot be contained by the present but, instead, imaginatively strike out and point forward toward visions of a more just future. So though these freedom narratives were

certainly shared and collective in nature, the visions of the future they proffered were never univocal.

The division over the radical potential of Christianity was only one debate that animated Black political life in post-World War II America. Indeed, twentieth century African American freedom politics have often been understood as being animated by a tension between two dominating poles: separatism on the one hand, and integration on the other. For Black people in America following the war, the pressure between these possible political directions bespoke the fact that the future looked both open and deeply uncertain. The gains of the Civil Rights movement seemed to hold out the possibility, on the one hand, for a positive transformation vis-à-vis race relations in terms of judicial equality with the passage of both Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts and successful campaigns to desegregate parts of the south. On the other hand, as the movement declined and the 1970s began, there were plenty of signs that pointed towards the terrible intransigence of American racism, especially the stubborn nature of police brutality and continually evolving threat of militant white supremacists. The threat of vigilante violence and the reality of police brutality represented two sides of the same Jim Crow, white supremacist coin. These two faces, however, don't exhaust the forms of white supremacist violence that shaped American culture during the 1970s and 80s: racialized attacks on social welfare programs and affirmative action, in particular, were galvanizing political projects that solidified white identity politics (even in an age of ostensible color blindness).

So too, as the decades drew on there seemed to be a certain immovability to problems like economic inequality that was both racially-fueled and geographically widespread. Indeed, this was a problem that Dr. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) had attempted to address head-on with their organizing around the Poor Peoples Campaign of 1968. This was a campaign which used the method of prolonged occupation to demand, among other things, that the federal government adopt an economic bill of rights that would institute reforms, including a guaranteed annual income for all Americans. Their plan of action included gathering a diverse coalition of poor people from across the U.S. – Black tenant farmers, striking Chicano/a farm workers, welfare rights activists, indigent Appalachian whites, etc. – to merge on the National Mall. Together they established "Resurrection City" – the base from which they engaged in acts of civil disobedience targeted at the White House, Capitol Hill, and the Department of Labor, among other government agencies. In the end, no legislation was passed and the protesters' Resurrection City was destroyed at the hands of National Park Police wielding tear gas and nightsticks.[16]

Though, as the example of the Poor Peoples Campaign demonstrates, at times these efforts resulted in ostensible political 'failures,' the cultural and civic value of historical inquiries into African American collective action remains both deep and broad. The value of these studies is deep in the sense that this scholarship adds insight into an already rich field of African American/Black Studies. Its value is broad in the sense that the lessons taught through Black futurity are applicable well beyond the

Black American experience in and of itself. As Nikhil Pal Singh notes in *Black is a Country: Race and The Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, even while African Americans have been systematically denied the full protections of citizenship, throughout U.S. history they have at the same time been the country's foremost theorists and advocates of expanding constitutional freedoms for all. Singh notes how "from the 1930s to the 1970s, Blacks developed broad and coherent challenges to the racist limitations of U.S. democracy. In doing so, they consistently found themselves straining at both the borders of the U.S. nation-state and the boundaries of its liberal creed."[17] He connects this insight to the need for a richer, and longer, periodization of the Civil Rights Era.

Singh is not alone in arguing that the truncated timeline that stretches from the Montgomery Bus Boycott of the mid-1950s to the Poor Peoples Campaign of 1968 is problematic. Extended conversations of this literature can be found, for example, in Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's review of the "political uses of the past" within the framework of the long Civil Right era.[18] Generally speaking, these scholars have argued that a shortened Civil Rights periodization has served a false ideological vision wherein African American's miraculously burst onto the American political landscape as fully-formed liberal subjects in the mid-1950s. Not only does the short Civil Rights era narrative truncate the beginning of the movement, but by ending the movement's periodization with the 1968 Poor Peoples Campaign it often ends up overemphasizing the movement's successes. This is problematic inasmuch as it

misleads Americans into thinking that many of the problems that the movement itself sought to address were adequately resolved during the 1960s.

As a part of this reconsideration of the periodization of African American history, I argue that we need a deeper appreciation of midcentury African American intellectuals as theorists of futurity. While African American religious history dovetails with themes of futurity in ways beyond the apocalyptic, in this study I focus on the eschatological dimensions of midcentury African American intellectual history. Within that framework, this project responds to the need to reexamine the role of African American religionists as movement leaders in the post-Civil Right era.

The radical Black Christians I compare in this study situated their god-talk precisely at the intersection between Black futurity and Christian eschatology. *Black Theology and the End of Time* examines how Black religionists during the 1960s and 70s preached, wrote, and organized around the return of Christ at the end of time – looking at how and why they used discourses of Christian eschatology to call forth transformative political futures. In particular, my dissertation stages an encounter between the preeminent Black theologian of the twentieth century, Dr. James Hal Cone (1938-2018), and the founder of Black Christian Nationalism and minister at Detroit's Shrine of the Black Madonna, Rev. Albert Cleage Jr./Jaramogi Abebe Ageyman (1911-2000).[19] Far from figuring Christianity as something that was essentially opioidic, these Black Power theologians developed a radical, eschatological vision centered on the problem of white supremacy. As Dr. Cone famously asserted: Jesus is Black. We might add to this claim that he is also coming

back. What is the nature of the relationship between these two claims? Indeed, in what ways might Christ's blackness be relevant to believe in his eschatological return?

…

There are a number of reasons why these two particular Black theologians, Cone and Cleage, make such compelling figures for a comparative historical study. Broadly speaking, they shared a common context: the twentieth century transition from Jim Crow to the post-Civil Rights and Black Power eras – what I often refer to in this dissertation simply as the post-World War II period. At times, the two shared a common geography. Most notably this was the case during the pivotal months both before and after Detroit's 1967 Twelfth Street rebellion. Around the time of what has variously been called the Detroit riot/uprising/rebellion, Rev. Cleage was busy preaching his Black Power gospel at the Shrine of the Black Madonna. Meanwhile Cone was teaching groups of mostly young, white divinity students at Adrian College, a small college and seminary on the outskirts of Ann Arbor west of Detroit. As Black Power Christians, Cone and Cleage often embraced a set of overlapping theological interests, especially around articulating the blackness of Jesus. And yet, Cone and Cleage remained so very different in terms of their vocational paths and praxis as Black theologians. Ultimately, it is both the values that they shared and those tensions which kept them distinct that make them compelling figures for

comparison precisely because it demonstrates the flexibility of Black theological praxis.

One of the things that undoubtedly brought Cleage and Cone together as theologians was their shared insistence on the blackness of Jesus of Nazareth. Any inquiry into the history of Black theology must begin with this most crucial claim. Some scholars have noted how this discourse around Jesus' racial position reflected a broader post-World War II era concern with the ontology of blackness.[20] What does it mean to be Black? Cone and Cleage's conclusions about the meaning of Jesus' color – and what that meant for our understanding of race more generally – were not necessarily univocal. Though the two notions were often taken to be identical claims, there is a conceptual distance between Cone's thesis that Jesus was Black, and Cleage's insistence that he was the Black Messiah. Though they appear under the common rubric of Black theology, their racialization of Christ were inflected differently – reflecting the divergent developments in their own respective racial ontologies as the twentieth century drew on.

Both Cone and Cleage also shared in the patriarchal culture that has been historically germane to the Black theological tradition. Cone and Cleage found, as many Black men before them had, a space within the Black church to grow individually as organizers and intellectuals. In doing so, they were able to embrace a kind of opportunity which had been widely denied to Black women. This culture of gendered-exclusion was reflected in their theological works. In his sermons, Cleage tended to speak of Black women as objects possessed by Black society, to be stolen,

violated, etc. by white men. Meanwhile, Black men featured in his sermonic work as either victims of white supremacist brainwashing (i.e. "Tom's") or as latent revolutionary agents. His style of Christianity was muscular and tended to reflect problematic elements of masculinity as it has been expressed in both the Black Power and Christian movements. Cleage's version of Jesus was not necessarily the Rambo-like Christ described by some scholars of white Christian fundamentalism.[21] Though his iteration of Christ also mixed militancy with a certain tenderness, it modeled a masculinity that emphasized the importance of loving Black people and of restoring the dignity of Black men (and Black women, in as much as their dignity tended to reflect back on Black men). When compared to other Black religious examples, like Elijah Muhammad's NOI, Cleage was less puritanical in his approach to gender than some other Black nationalist movements. His use of mixed gendered self-defense groups across his Black Christian Nationalist movement is one example of this more flexible stance.

Cone's relationship to gender presents a somewhat different case. While a professor at New York's Union Theological Seminary, Cone encountered the critiques of many of the Black feminist students he recruited to the graduate program. Cone was able to absorb some of these criticisms through approaching liberation as an analogous, indeed metaphorical, theological language. He took the basic position that he was invoking the liberationist language most appropriate to his situation as a Black man, but that this did not preclude other ways of speaking about God in for instance, feminine terms. These reflections came years after the events themselves

and via Cone's own 2018 memoir *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody* and so must be taken with a significant grain of salt. Indeed, Cone continued to struggle with the Black feminist critique of the centrality of the cross within his theology as late as the 2000s. Following Moltmann and others, Cone had deeply held theological attachments to an image of Christ as the suffering servant who met his death upon the cross. Womanist theologians like Delores Williams argued that the glorification of suffering represented in this theological approach was problematic in its core assumptions about the centrality of suffering in any liberatory project.[22]

Yet another shared quality between the two theologians was the fact that both were seen as disruptive figures within the general public, and were repeatedly framed as sources of theological and civil disorder. I argue that this was especially the case with Rev. Cleage in terms of his recurring targeting by U.S. government surveillance operations. One example of the kind of surveillance that Cleage faced was the several years during which he was the subject of intelligence gathering missions conducted by U.S. Army Intelligence – as outlined by the Supreme Court case *Laird V. Tatum*. This kind of interference was especially intense for Cleage following the events of the 1967 Detroit uprising, after which young people of color from Detroit began flocking to his church.[23] In spite of the violations to Cleage's civil liberties outlined in the *Laird V. Tatum* lawsuit and recognized by the court of appeals, the U.S. Supreme Court spearheaded by Justice Rehnquist ruled in 1972 that Cleage's constitutional right to privacy had not been violated by Army Intelligence but, rather, that it was

lawful to surveil any gathering (even a church service) that posed “at least some potential” for civil disorder.[24]

The decision itself, though rather minor in terms of case law, reflected a period in which the existence of widespread illegal government surveillance programs was still considered optional knowledge for major parts of the American public. Following the Watergate Scandal and the discoveries of the Church Committee during the mid-1970s, this would cease to be true. As a result, Cleage would live out the rest of the twentieth century with the uncomfortable knowledge that everyone clearly knew he had been spied upon and subjected to covert government plotting, without any official recognition or compensation for what he had been put through.

Cone’s history as a disruptive figure comes by and large from his position within the academy. He first began to seriously study theology during his undergraduate career at Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas, before moving onto graduate studies at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and later Northwestern University. In his 2018 memoir, Cone recalled vivid moments of confrontation with white professors at Northwestern while perusing his doctoral degree during the early 1960s. Likewise, he was controversial among scholars of Black religion. William Jones is the most well-known African American critic who was also a contemporary of both Cone and Cleage. Jones published a monograph aimed at the issues raised by Cone *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology* in 1973.[25] This book began as an essay originally appearing in the 1971 issue of the *Harvard Theological Review* entitled “Theodicy and Methodology in

Black Theology: A Critique of Washington, Cone, and Cleage."[26] Jones critiqued Cone's portrayal of Black suffering and drew attention to the problem of theodicy within Black theology – asking: what actual historical evidence was there for a redemptive and just God?[27]

A part of the difference between Cone and Cleage, and the subsequent eschatologies they developed, were their institutional settings. Though an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Cone was a life-long academic theologian, working for most of his career at the prestigious Union Theological Seminary in New York. He spent his working years publishing and training seminarians that were working in the liberationist tradition – a vocation that he loved.[28] He insisted that he wrote and taught theology primarily "because writing is the way I fight. Teaching is the way I resist, doing what I can to subvert white supremacy."[29] This reflects something of a paradox in Cone's life as an organic intellectual within the African American tradition: he felt called to serve the Black community theologically, and yet he resisted the path of congregational ministry.

Cleage, on the other hand, was a Black Power preacher and a decidedly grassroots theologian. As a church founder and organizational leader, he spent his time in the throes of Black congregational life. This meant regular preaching, church administration, pastoral care, giving public lectures, and later when he officially became Bishop Jaramogi Ageyman, directly overseeing the ministry of others. This path reflects a paradox within Cleage's own sense of vocation: his insistence on the importance of theology for guiding the church, and his reticence to immerse himself

in the training of seminarians or the publishing of systematic theological texts, as Cone did.

The conversation I have staged here between Cone and Cleage is an untimely one in the sense that Gary Wilder uses the phrase in his *Freedom Time* study. I argue first, in line with Wilder's comparative approach, that there is great value in using these two figures to investigate the paradox of the other – Cone via Cleage, Cleage via Cone. In particular, I argue that their relationship to one another was an untimely one. This is to suggest that one aim of this work is to allow Cleage and Cone to 'live out' connections with one another that time and space originally did not allow.

….

As hundreds gathered in the sanctuary of New York City's famous Riverside Church to hear Cone honored during his funeral in the Winter of 2018, they were gifted with a prophetic message delivered by the theologian and activist Dr. Cornel West. Dr. West described Cone as "a love warrior with an intellectual spirit."[30] Indeed, these two forces were inseparable in Cone: his life was a demonstration of the powerful confluence between intellectual labor and revolutionary love. Others in their obituaries to Cone echoed West's sentiment, noting how "through his published works, and in the classroom, Cone shaped generations of scholars, professors, pastors, and activists, kindling in countless people the fire for dismantling white supremacy."[31] The question that remains to us now after his passing is, as Dr. West put it, "will our lives in any way be connected to the afterlife of brother Cone?"[32]

This is a fittingly eschatological question given that it asks us to consider how the death of Cone might be connected to the future of our lives, collectively, as those who inherit the deadly problem of American white supremacy. It points us toward a place where death, futurity, and memory converge.

As the commentary on his death notes, Cone has for decades been widely known as the foremost advocate of Black liberation theology. Cone's work first broke onto the theological scene with the 1969 publication of his now-classic *Black Theology & Black Power*.[33] Much to the disquiet of his theological peers, in that text Cone argued that the dawning of the Black Power movement was Christ's central message to America in the twentieth century.[34] Even more specifically, he claimed that the sole purpose of any Black theology must be to apply the "freeing power of the gospel" to African Americans living under white supremacy.[35] With these claims, Cone set the tone for the field of Black liberation theology and joined his voice to fellow liberationist currents emerging from Latin American Marxists, such as the work of Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutiérrez, as well as second wave Feminist Christians, like Rosemary Radford Ruether. These movements shared the moniker of 'liberation' inasmuch as they held in common an insistence on God's enduring favor for the oppressed. Though they tended to locate their experiences of oppression within different systems, be it primarily white supremacy, capitalism, or the patriarchy, they all formed essential parts of what we might think of as the post-World War II era political theology of the left. Cone and Gutiérrez, in particular, enjoyed a close working relationship – writing introductions to one another's books

by the early 1970s and engaging in the coteaching courses like "Theology from the Underside of History."[36]

Cone followed up his groundbreaking work in *Black Theology & Black Power* with several monographs published throughout the subsequent decades in which he elaborated more systematically on the principles of Black theology. Cone himself noted that he laid out the essential tenants of the field in a series of books, most notably: *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), *The Spirituals and the Blues* (1972), *God of the Oppressed* (1975), *Martin & Malcolm & America* (1991), *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011).[37] While he remained imbedded within a broader liberationist conversation, throughout these writings Cone developed a theology grounded in the post-World War II era African American experience. Drawing upon these texts, in chapter one I survey the foundations of James Cone's Black theology of liberation. While his intellectual interests were expansive in scope, I focus this part of my study on two fundamental features of Cone's thinking: a) his claims regarding Jesus's ontological blackness and b) his connection to white Euro-American theology. In particular, this chapter examines Cone's relationship to intellectual developments within the twentieth century movement known as German neo-orthodoxy and the work of the Marxist theologian Jürgen Moltmann.[38]

While scholars have made a point of crediting Dr. Moltmann with providing key terms for theological liberationists across the movement more broadly, the extent to which Moltmann's eschatological idea of hope intersected with Cone's specific thinking on the subject remains under-studied.[39] By looking more deeply at the

intersection between Black theology and Germany neo-orthodoxy we gain a more trans-Atlantic perspective on how race and religion have permutated across the West within the post-War period. Relating those transformations to eschatology/the apocalypse helps to lay bare certain modern concepts of futurity and revolutionary agency. This chapter represents an effort to place these two theological liberationists in a deeper conversation with one another – seeking to integrate their thoughts on specifically eschatological grounds.

Moltmann's commitment to a liberationists style of theology began in the 1950s with the publication of his *Theology of Hope.* In that text Moltmann argued that the modern world has a fundamentally eschatological character, and that this fact placed one who received God's promise of an eschatological future in a "position of insurmountable antithesis and hostility to the existing reality of this world."[40] Encountering the eschatological reality of God was, for Moltmann, a horizontal enterprise. His eschatology put forward a view of the future which, as he put it, gave the practitioner ground for both "hope and criticism" of this world based on God's eschatological promise.[41]

In putting forth this theological claim, Moltmann was building off the insights of multiple European intellectual streams. On the one hand, his eschatological hope echoed Dietrich Bonhoeffer's insistence that the world had, by virtue of certain modern historical events, finally "come of age" in a messianic sense – an idea Lillian Calles Barger explores in-depth in *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology*. So too, Moltmann tapped into what some scholars have called

the Warm Current within Western Marxism. Indeed, Moltmann's writings on hope are especially indebted to the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. From this largely secular-Jewish group of intellectuals Moltmann found a set of critical tools that he then applied to Christian theology.

Moltmann's horizontal eschatological outlook was a theological position Cone found to be useful. In particular, Cone found it helpful in terms of framing the radical effects on one's consciousness that a belief in the blackness of Christ could provide. The difference which made the difference, according to Cone's emerging discourse on Black liberation theology, was a matter of racial consciousness. As a result of his encounter with Cone, Moltmann's work would come to stand as a bridge between a theological critique which was grounded in political economy and one which was driven by a crisis of race in the West.

In addition to his theological insights, I also argue that there were parts of Moltmann's lived experience as a young man in Nazi Germany that made him an especially appealing theological source for Cone. In spite of his coming from a European theological tradition that Cone often saw himself as actively uprooting, Moltmann's conversion to a radical Christianity while he was held as a prisoner of war during World War-II shared a certain resonance with Cone's own theological awakening following Detroit's 1967 Twelfth Street uprising.[42] Both Cone and Moltmann, in their own ways, experienced deep feelings of betrayal and a sense of disassociation with the prevailing Euro-American theology of their days. This sense of alienation and desire to write theology in a more critical mode was grounded in

their first-hand experiences of racist and fascist violence. As Moltmann himself acknowledged in some of his later writings, the influence between Cone and Moltmann has for many decades cut both ways.[43] It was their mutual recognition of these shared experiences that proved grounds for further collaboration and intellectual enrichment.

…

In the midst of a Detroit winter in February, 2000, hundreds of community members gathered to carry candles and march together, chanting "Are, we are, we are…the Maccabees" in order to honor the passing of a man who by that time had for decades been called Bishop Jaramogi Abebe Ageyman.[44] Ageyman was a transformational and irreplaceable leader, according to his congregants.[45] He was a man who would be invoked as the Beloved Founder, Master Teacher, and Holy Patriarch of his religious movement.[46] By others, especially those outside of his Black Christian Nationalist movement, he would be remembered as a deeply controversial voice within the Black church. He would be recalled by his critics as someone known for claiming that it was "as hard for an educated Black man to get through the gate of liberation as it is for an elephant to pass through the eye of a needle."[47] Likewise, for his contentious insistence that "everything about traditional Christianity is false."[48]

Indeed, Cleage often saw his particular style of theological commentary as placing him "ahead of my time."[49] Such untimely behavior had a habit of landing him in difficult situations. Indeed, Cleage had the honor of being labeled an apostate by

many of his co-religionists. Such claims were more than just mere rhetoric: in 1964 Cleage was formally put on trial for heresy by the Metropolitan Detroit Congregational Church over his theological statements. The heresy hearings over Rev. Cleage's theology were held on June 8th, 1964 at Detroit's Bushnell Congregational Church.[50] In particular, the investigation was called to examine six "charges" which had been brought against Cleage. The charges insisted that, contrary to Congregationalist teachings, Cleage had espoused: 1) that nonviolence is a failed political strategy; 2) that the federal government is anti-Black; 3) that racial conflict is inescapable; 4) that integration is not the political goal of racial justice; 5) that Black nationalism is the appropriate vehicle for racial justice; 6) that he rejected Black-white cooperation.[51]

Those who have listened to recordings of his 1964 heresy hearings, such as Cleage's late-1960s biographer Hiley Ward, suggested that he sounded much like a Black Martin Luther.[52] As such controversies demonstrate, both inside and outside the church, it seemed to Cleage that people often felt him to be "dangerous" with "whites" as well as "good, stable, middle-class blacks" viewing him with "alarm."[53] Though Cleage was eventually acquitted of heresy charges,[54] he died very much as he had lived: amidst the racial and class-bound tensions that governed the city he loved; standing in the uncomfortable space between devoted admiration and widespread condemnation.

Though not considered a traditional theologian by many of his contemporaries,[55] not to mention later scholars,[56] Cleage made it a point to preach

from his pulpit at the Shrine of the Black Madonna that it was indeed “the theology” that was “the determining factor of what the church is and what it seeks to do.”[57] In spite of the attempts of his critics to distance him from the field, his own stance was that articulating the correct theology was critically important to effective religious practice and church leadership. Crucially, he linked the work of theology to the church in terms of its a) ontological state (defining “what the church is”) as well as b) its futurity (supplying it with “what it seeks to do”). The connection he articulated between ontology and futurity demonstrates the confluence in Cleage’s own sense of vocational mission: to grow a church around a uniquely Black Christian Nationalist theology.

Cleage’s early career during the 1940s involved multiple cross-country moves and theological transformations. The period stretching from 1943 to 1950 alone was packed with such diverse experiences as: a stint as the minister at San Francisco’s Fellowship of All Peoples, a few semesters in a film studies graduate program in LA, and finally to Cleage’s ministry in Massachusetts – where he served as preacher at the church which had been John Brown and Frederick Douglass’s house of worship. While Cleage represents a fascinating biographical subject in his own right, the focus of this project is on the period of time during the 1960s and 70s that he spent working out a series of decidedly theological problems explicitly using the language of the Black Power movement. During this period, Cleage identified the Black church’s central issue as one of an attachment to an “unreal, meaningless, mythical

theology."[58] This was a theology that was in contrast to an approach grounded in the teachings of a this-worldly, revolutionary, Black Power Jesus.

In this project I argue that Cleage's theology should be seen as extending well beyond this critique of the mainline Black church's pie-in-the-sky theology. His liberationist praxis included a wide range of activities ranging from Sunday preaching, to crafting original liturgy, to writing poetry, and church planting. Given that he created and promoted his theology largely outside of traditional academic spaces, Cleage is an example of what I call a grassroots theologian. While it has been argued that liberation theology as a social movement lacks examples of concrete praxis outside of the context of the seminary classroom, Cleage's work in first forming and then expanding the Shrine provides an excellent counterpoint to this rather narrow view of liberationist praxis.

Chapter two places Cleage within the broader context of Black theology and, in particular, examines the influence of the Nation of Islam (NOI) on his development of a Black Christian Nationalist eschatology. Founded in Detroit by W.D. Fard in the 1930s the NOI began a series of "temples" from which it proselytized Black people to abandon Christianity in favor of embracing the "original" religion of Islam.[59] Many scholars have failed to note that Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam was not the only Black nationalist religious movement whose origins lay in twentieth century Detroit history. Cleage's Black Christian Nationalism, as the later and the smaller of the two religious movements, was at least in part a response to the presence of Elijah Muhammad's Black Muslims. Like Cone's efforts in *Malcolm & Martin in America*,

Cleage's work in relation to the NOI was a part of the broader Black theological effort "to create synergy between the Christian commitments of King and the social critique of Malcolm X."[60] While it was Cone who would go on to publish theological treatises on Malcolm X, the theological confluences between Cleage and Malcolm were grounded in their shared experiences as leaders of Black nationalist religions: organizing together during the 1963 rally is one example. Betty Shabazz's multiple visits to the Shrine after Malcolm's assassination, is another. But even more broadly, both men launched their prophetic religious careers in the city of Detroit.[61]

As a way of exploring the connections between these two movements, using Cleage's sermonic work throughout the 1960s and 1970s, I argue that he developed his Black Christian Nationalist movement using the NOI as a model for growth. Indeed, during a time when the Shrine was undergoing internal strife locally, it extended its network outwards in ways that reflected the influence of the NOI. For example, when expanding his religious movement beyond its original base at the old Central Congregational building, Cleage decided to number the Shrines of the Black Madonna as they expanded throughout African American enclaves across the U.S. This structure of enumerating Shrines: #1, #2, #3, etc. was an echo of the NOI's own temple naming structure. Likewise, by the 1970s Cleage looked to the NOI when forming the Shrine's spiritually-infused self-defense organization to serve the needs of his congregation. Modeled on the NOI's Fruit of Islam, BCN's 'Maccabees' were a vital, visible presence in congregational life – present at Sunday worship services and other Shrine sponsored events.

While the NOI was, of course, much more Islamic and explicitly anti-Christian in its orientation, I argue that Cleage found within the NOI essential tools for building his own Christian movement. The inspiration Cleage took from his Black Muslim neighbors demonstrates the ongoing syncretic exchange that has marked Black religious life in cities like Detroit during the Black Power era. Additionally, the influences that the NOI exerted on the Shrine were eschatological inasmuch as Cleage took up their pattern of religious separatism as a preparation for the end of time.

…

The wise and resolute eyes of the Black Madonna that watched over Rev. Cleage while he preached from his pulpit at Detroit's Shrine #1 were not the only watchful presence bearing witness to the Reverend's growing Black Power theology. Even as his congregants and guests listened to this deeply controversial, light-skinned, radical Detroit minister, the eyes of federal agents stared back at him. Their watchful presence shaped how he delivered his message from the pulpit. But instead of letting the presence of informants and agents intimidate him, as Cleage preached he would regularly weave in explicit references to the surveillance he was experiencing, saying unabashedly from the pulpit how he knew "that the Justice Department has agents here this morning."[62] The persistent threat of surveillance and interference from multiple government agencies (the FBI, Army Intelligence, the Detroit City Police) would ultimately come to shape Cleage's end of time concerns. I argue that it made the thin line between threat and hope more deeply immanent in his eschatology.

In chapter three I take up questions of how vertical and horizontal forms of eschatology have converged in Cone and Cleage's lived experiences by comparing how these apocalyptic moments ultimately shaped their theological outcomes. In particular, I use chapter three to focus on the role of government surveillance in establishing a sense of immanent threat that shaped the overall context of Cleage, and to some extent Cone's, intellectual production. Integrating sources from Cleage's collected papers, Freedom of Information Act requests from the FBI, and his sermonic works, I argue that Cleage's response to major crisis events of the Black Power era drove him toward a more separatist eschatological movement. Whereas, in regards to Cone, I argue that his experience within the academy working across lines of racial difference and within a broader liberationist milieu pushed him toward a more ingratiated or ecumenical racially-inflected eschatology. As a part of unpacking the eschatological conversation between the two thinkers I examine how Cone and Cleage's understandings of the demonic shaped the Black theologies they developed. I argued that their uses of demonology, though racially charged, ultimately connect the Black eschatological narratives to ideas of racial justice/transformation.

…

Across all three chapters this study draws on research from both published and archival sources. The principal sources on Rev. Cleage include his collected papers at the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library, the New Detroit Inc. papers at Wayne State's Ruether Labor Library, information gathered through the Freedom of Information Act and collected primarily by the FBI, as well as his published works.

Reflecting Cleage's strength from the pulpit, I emphasize his sermonic work in my examination of his eschatology. Without ignoring his theological production in terms of systematic texts, liturgy, etc. this allows me to emphasize his position as a grassroots theologian – those who were attracted to Cleage's movement came, in part, for the sermonic experience it offered them. Cleage made it a point to always edit his own sermons before they went off to publication.[63] He insisted that the pulpit, the column, and the book were different art forms that required differing touches.[64] All of this demonstrates the kind of care for craft that makes a compelling preacher.

Given his more recent death, the available archival sources on Cone are more limited in nature. Therefore, my argument draws predominantly from his published works. Given his strength as a widely read and published academic theologian, I emphasize Cone's systematic treatment of eschatology as seen in his monographs, interviews, and articles. I privilege his references to and intersections with Moltmann's theology of hope.

Though their Black theological journeys included distinct meeting points, the eschatological conclusions reached by Cone and Cleage positioned them within different moral temporalities. This research is an attempt to place these two in conversation with one another in order to attempt to stage a more concerted theological dialog than ever happened in the actual course of their lives. This work is, therefore, an untimely one in as much as its method involves reaching back toward reified fragments of the past in an attempt to shake them loose and interrogate their purpose for the politics of the present. Such untimely topics call for untimely methods

– they encourage us to reconsider how exactly it is that the space between past, present, and future ought to be traversed.

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[1] Albert Cleage, “Grapes of Wrath,” in *The Black Messiah* (Trenton: African World Press, 1989), 132.
[2] Cleage, “Wrath,” *Black Messiah*, 132.
[3] See for example the discussions of eschatology in Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement in Paramilitary America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Angela Lahr, *Millennial Dream and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[4] Albert Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 79-102.
[5] Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 101-103.
[6] See for example Bart Ehrman’s discussion of Paul’s understanding of the resurrection in Bart Ehrman, *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 172-175.
[7] Ehrman, *Heaven and Hell*, 93, 100-101, & 106-108.
[8] Ehrman, *Heaven and Hell*, 192-193.
[9] Ehrman, *Heaven and Hell*, 147-168.
[10] See for example Jerry Walls, Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[11] Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 81-98 and Raboteau, *Fire in the Bones*, 63.
[12] See especially Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 89-91.
[13] Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 12 & 14. On the uses of W.E.B. Du Bois for the purposes of Black futurity see Eric Porter, *The Problem of the Future World: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Race Problem at Midcentury* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 12-13.
[14] Raphael Warnock, “The Gospel of Liberation” in *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 13.
[15] William Van De Burg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 29-32.
[16] For accounts of the Poor Peoples Campaign see: Thomas Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Sylvie Laurent, *King and the Other America: The Poor People’s Campaign and the Quest for Economic*

Equality (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019). Gordon Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition & the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

[17] Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 214.

[18] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Era and the Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233-34.

[19] For the purposes of clarity, and in keeping with the broader literature on him, I use Cleage throughout most of the following chapters. I reintroduce Cleage as Agyeman in chapter III as my argument regarding changes to the politics at the Shrine of the Black Madonna develops. For other examples of Cleage's name use see Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 10 & 303.

[20] Anthony Pinn, "Black Theology" in *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 25. See also: Singh, *Black is a Country*, 221.

[21] See for example Barger, *Bring the War Home*, 6-7. Or Kristin Kobes Du Mez's discussion of white Evangelical portrayals of Jesus in *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

[22] James Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 121-122.

[23] Laird V. Tatum, 408 U.S. 1 (1972).

[24] Laird V. Tatum, 408 U.S. 1 (1972).

[25] Pinn, "Black Theology," 23.

[26] William Jones, "Theodicy and Methodology in Black Theology: A Critique of Washington, Cone, and Cleage," *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971): 541-557.

[27] Pinn, "Black Theology," 23.

[28] See, especially, Cone's comments on his students in *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 108-125.

[29] "In Memoriam: Dr. James Hal Cone," Union Theological Seminary, accessed December 9, 2022, https://utsnyc.edu/james-cone/

[30] Lafayette Jefferson, "Cornell West - Cone Funeral Comments," YouTube Video, 10:20, May 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNAAS3ZzvrA

[31] "In Memoriam: Dr. James Hal Cone," Union Theological Seminary.

[32] West, Cone's funeral at Riverside Church, May 2018.

[33] Barger, *The World Come of Age*, 3 & 14.

[34] James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 1.

[35] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 31.

[36] Cone, *Said I wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 114.

[37] James D. Kirylo & James H. Cone, "Paulo Freire, Black Theology of Liberation, and Liberation Theology: A Conversation with James Cone," *Counterpoints,* 385 (2011): 198- 199.

[38] The major works by Moltmann I deal with in this project include: Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1967). *The Coming of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).
[39] Barger, *The World Come of Age*, 47.
[40] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 143.
[41] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 143.
[42] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 1-2.
[43] Moltmann, *Experiences In Theology*, 190-191 & 214-215.
[44] Darren Nichols, "Hundreds mourn Cleage's death," *The Detroit News* (Detroit, MI), Feb. 27, 2000.
[45] Nichols, "Hundreds mourn," *The Detroit News.*
[46] Liberation Statement, 2000, 2010025 Aa 2, box 1, Albert B. Cleage Jr. Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Cleage Papers).
[47] An Introduction to Black Christian Nationalism: Second in Series, 12, December, 1984, box 2, Cleage Papers.
[48] Cleage quoted in Hiley Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), ix.
[49] Cleage quoted in the Detroit Free Press. Author Unknown, "A 'Black Nation' Is Achieved," *Detroit Free Press* (Detroit, MI), Dec. 26, 1972.
[50] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 146-147.
[51] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 147.
[52] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 151.
[53] Cleage quoted in the Detroit Free Press, "A 'Black Nation' Is Achieved," *Detroit Free Press*.
[54] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 152.
[55] Even his biographer Hiley Ward, who was writing in the late 1960s, makes no substantive mention of black theology and Cleage's relationship to James Cone until page 134 of *Prophet of the Black Nation.*
[56] See commentary in the Detroit Free Press claiming that, after the post-riot aftermath, "Cleage was again a prophet without much honor, one who shook up things but was not taken seriously." "A 'Black Nation' Is Achieved," *Detroit Free Press*. See also Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 237-239.
[57] An Intro to BCN: Second in Series, Cleage Papers.
[58] An Intro to BCN: Second in Series, Cleage Papers.
[59] Louis DeCaro, *On The Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 22-23.
[60] Pinn, "Black Theology," 18.
[61] DeCare, *On the Side of My People*, 100-101.
[62] Cleage, "But God Hardened Pharaoh's Heart," *The Black Messiah*, 151.
[63] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 118.
[64] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 119.

Chapter One: the Promise of Black Theology

Theology is like a network of rivers, with reciprocal influences and mutual challenges.[1]

- Jürgen Moltmann

During their first meeting with one another in the late 1960s Jürgen Moltmann and James Cone likely appeared an odd intellectual couple. Moltmann was a middle-aged, tweed-shrouded East German Marxist. While Cone was an Afro-sporting, recent-Ph.D. and Black theologian, originally hailing from Arkansas. The two crossed paths for the very first time in 1969 at the the American Academy of Religion's annual meeting during Moltmann's time living in North Carolina and teaching as a visiting professor at Duke University – an appointment which had been organized for him by the German-American theologian Fredrick Herzog. [2] As a young man in Germany, Herzog had been a student of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth. Following Herzog's move to the United States he became involved in both the Civil Rights and labor movements, in addition to working as a scholar with a growing affinity for theologies of liberation.[3] The connection between Moltmann and Cone that began with their 1969 meeting was theological in the way it embraced confluences and fluidity: in one another's god-talk Cone and Moltmann discovered both "reciprocal influences" and "mutual challenges."

When Cone and Moltmann first encountered one another at that 1969 gathering in New York their initial connection was a specifically sonic one.[4] Amidst

the assembly of religion scholars, their first face-to-face conversations were grounded in an exploration of their shared interest in Christian hope as it has been expressed through song and hymn. Cone disclosed to Moltmann that he was currently working on research in preparation for the publication of his exploration of African American music, *The Spirituals and the Blues.* Moltmann, having become acquainted with the subject through this meeting with Cone, would later write the forward for the German translation of the text.[5] Indeed, as Moltmann's engagement with Cone demonstrates, both Cone & Cleage seemed to have a enjoyed at least a small European readership. For his part, Rev. Cleage's work in *The Black Messiah* was translated into Italian with the help of the famous Detroit leftist radical Grace Lee Boggs.[6] Boggs, along with her husband and partner in political activism, James Boggs, attended the Shrine for many years starting in the 1960s and were personal friends of Rev. Cleage.[7]

It seems that in Moltmann Cone had found someone whom he believed had, in spite of his privileged racial position in society, "caught the spirit of the black slave preachers" in his theological meditations on the meaning of hope in the midst of oppression and suffering.[8] While he is still known as first and foremost a Black theologian, this cross-racial connection between Cone and Moltmann was indicative of the overall character of Cone's Black theology. Rather than monochromatic, Cone's theology was, in fact, often multi-racial in terms of its source material and intellectual affiliations. In keeping with this multi-racial aspect of Cone's work, I argue that Cone's Black theology should be seen as deeply ecumenical in character,

rather than as an example of religious separatism, as such. Cleage's intellectual affiliations were more complicated in this regard, as will be explored later.

Even when he articulated Moltmann's theological strengths, Cone held out room in his work to critique Moltmann and other white theologians like him inasmuch as their scholarship remained tied to centering the norms of the European theological canon. Upholding and promoting this canon, according to Cone, ultimately came at the cost of exploring other more relevant liberatory perspectives. Cone argued that it was the overall tendency of European theologians, even Marxists like Moltmann, to outright ignore the present bearers of the hope that they purported to describe in their theological texts. In doing so, their theological work, however sophisticated, inevitably became another form of "abstract talk geared to the ideological justification of the status quo."[9]

As I explore in this chapter, Cone's critique of European theological abstraction here mirrored the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory's critique of philosophical positivism. The central issue of both critique being that, as an epistemology, they amount to an endorsement of the world as it presently is. From an eschatological perspective, the consequences of such an epistemology are profound: temporally, it ignores critical dimensions of futurity (i.e. that which cannot be contained by the present) and, in doing so, reifies the present as the "status quo." I argue that Cone provided a critical framework for intensifying the eschatological principles of Christian hope that Moltmann pointed to in his theology. Using one another as both inspiration and foil, they sought to find a way of doing theology that

embraced futurity as the mode of critical consciousness proper to the religion of Jesus.

I investigate the relationship between these two enigmatic thinkers first by focusing on Cone's fundamental theological claim regarding the blackness of Christ. In particular, I argue that this essentially theological position was deeply tied to his critiques of European theology. I then explore the outbreak of what has variously been called Detroit's 1967 Twelfth Street rebellion/riot/uprising and the profound effects that this event had on the religious trajectory of Cone's life. For the purposes of this project, I refer to this event as the Twelfth Street uprising. This is because the trouble that occurred on Twelfth Street during July of 1967, in my opinion, contained both elements of planned rebellion/revolt (such as sniper fire that targeted particular Detroit City Police precincts and the involvement of the militant groups like the Revolutionary Action Movement) as well as the more spontaneous elements of civil disorder that many tend to associate with a riot. Finally, I end this chapter by returning to a discussion of Cone's relationship with Moltmann. Beginning with an in-depth look at how Moltmann's biography shaped his ability to receive Cone's ideas and ending with the German scholar's ensuing 'conversion' to writing in an explicitly Black theological mode. As a part of this discussion, I engage with the intellectual history of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, it's critiques of philosophical positivism, and its views on religion as a potentially usefully revolutionary venue.

This chapter is significant within the overall argument of my dissertation because it demonstrates the complex theological exchanges that happened between European and African American theology in the development of Black theology as a scholarly field. It is also significant inasmuch as it shows the roots of key concepts that will be important for interpreting Cone and Cleage's eschatological positions together in chapter three. This chapter also makes a number of scholarly interventions. First by reevaluating Black theology within the broader history of Civil Rights and Black Power eras. As a part of the broader history of these periods the developments within the field of Black theology, and especially Cone's relationship with Moltmann, demonstrates the long lasting impacts of the concerns unearthed during the tumultuous period of the 1960s and 70s.

More broadly speaking, this work contributes to the underwritten intellectual history between these figures – both Moltmann and Cone, as well as Cone and Cleage. Whereas William Van De Burg in his broad cultural history of the Black Power movement covers Cleage and the Shrine movement, he fails to make any substantive mention Cone's trailblazing work in Black theology.[10] Similarly, Angela Dillard's comparative study of Cleage and the Detroit based Rev. Charles Hill mentions Cone's work only briefly.[11] On the other end of the spectrum, Lillian Calles Barger's intellectual history of liberation theology takes up Cone and to a certain extent she also covers liberationist connections to Moltmann.[12] However, in her effort to uncover the connections between all three liberationist traditions (Latin American Marxist, Second Wave Feminist, as well as Black theology), she omits any mention

of Cleage's Black Christian Nationalism or later Pan-African Orthodox Christian movements.[13]

As a means of expanding these conversations within the intellectual history of Black theology this chapter explores Cone and Moltmann's shared interest in what hope meant for developing a Christian-based praxis in the midst of a post-World War II Western culture that was undergoing crisis. In particular, their works reflected an interest in the temporal meaning of hope and how it intersected with other eschatological themes like those of justice or promise. This post-World War II period represented a time when hope became a key word in relationship to a variety of moral crises associated with the rise and fall of "modernity" or "Western civilization," as such. These crises included the genocidal violence of the Holocaust, outpourings of anti-colonial revolutions throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, but also, and on a level much closer to home for both Cone and Cleage, the series of racial uprisings throughout major American cities that came to define their experience of religious and racial crisis in the late 1960s.

Though their work resonated on the important liberatory key word "hope" and a shared interest in what it could do for reimagining Christian eschatological consciousness, the depths of the intellectual confluence between Moltmann and Cone ran much deeper. Beginning with their initial encounters with one another in the late 1960s, the relationship between the two would ultimately move toward Moltmann's unexpected conversion to writing Black theological treatises "for whites" (as he would put it) by the late 1990s. Over those decades he developed an important thesis

for thinking about the meaning of Cone's work: that Black theology held out unique, and indeed liberatory, promises for white people that were living in a racist society.

…

Before their ever having met one another, Moltmann's work served as both inspiration and obstacle for the emerging Black theologian within Cone. Indeed, prior to their first meeting in North Carolina, Cone had become familiar with Moltmann's eschatological work in his book *Theology of Hope* as a part of his seminary training in systematic theology. Though he wrote and studied European theologians such as Moltmann at length, Cone had a complicated relationship with the canonical status of European theology as a body of scholarship. When considering the nature of their early encounters during the late 1960s and early 1970s, it's worth noting that Cone was already well-studied in terms of Moltmann and his work, and therefore must have held at least some preconceived notions about him. Whereas the inverse was not necessarily true – Moltmann had yet to read any of Cone's theological writings (or the work of any other African American theologians, for that matter). Moltmann also, having lived his life on the European continent, lacked significant first-hand experiences with America's system of racial hierarchy and Jim Crow culture – a context which surely would have shaped his reception of both Cone's work and his understanding of his status as an academic theologian.

Theological authorities, like Moltmann, quickly became Cone's theological peers. Cone's ideas about race and the divine made a profound impression on his

colleagues within the academy during his emergence as scholar in the late 1960s. I argue that Moltmann's interest in eventually writing Black theology for whites can be traced back the theological challenge that Cone's claim of Christ's blackness presented to post-war Euro-American scholars of Christianity. In scholarly journals and at academic conferences following the 1969 publication of *Black Theology and Black Power* Cone became a target of serious and sustained critique over his views on Black theology. Even after his appointment to the faculty of the prestigious Union Theological Seminary in the early 1970s many of his white senior colleagues, in particular, didn't know what to make of him or his seemingly extremist theological view that God's liberation of the oppressed was the "central message" of scripture.[14] From fellow Black scholars of religion Cone also received criticism over how one ought to intellectually square his claim regarding God's liberatory work with the problem of evil in the world. Indeed, William Jones's invocation of the problem of theodicy in Black theology became a famous counterpoint to Cone's views on the topic.[15] The problem of theodicy remains a vulnerability for the field to this day.[16]

In order to unpack Cone's insistence that Jesus was Black I argued that it should first be assessed it for what he intended the argument to be: a theological claim. (i.e. one aimed primarily at describing the nature of God). In his insistence upon the blackness of Christ, Cone connected God's essential nature not so much to blackness as a set of physiological characteristics such as skin color, facial features, or relative hair texture, but rather to the human experience of oppression under colonial circumstances. Cone's reading of race as an outgrowth of colonial conditions

dovetails with Patrick Wolfe's argument that our contemporary experience of race is "colonialism speaking."[17] This is to suggest that, temporally, race operates as the ghost labor of colonialism – a history which is compressed and comes to live in our bodies presently as race. Hence the need for diverse racialization schemes based upon particular colonial conditions – such as the different forms of racialization that grew out of the colonization of a population for the purpose of possessing their land vs. for the purposes of extracting their labor. Cone developed his thesis throughout the 1960s and 1970s that the nature of God within Black theology was such that the divine is always already present with those that suffer unjustly under colonial conditions – hence, for Cone, God was racialized in the sense that Jesus-as-God embodied certain colonial conditions.

The intellectual foundations of Cone's theological claim regarding God's relationship to race and colonial oppression were multifaceted. On the one hand, the roots of this idea came from a growing recognition among a variety of seminary-trained clergy of the relative social position of the historical Jesus. It suddenly seemed important to understand Jesus as someone who lived and organized his community as a member of an oppressed Jewish minority in imperial Roman occupied Palestine. Yet another source of these anti-colonial interpretations of Christianity were the works of Latin American theological liberationists such as the writings of Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Paulo Freire. These Latin American liberationists were writing their theologies at the same time as Cone and were drawing upon analogous

arguments within their own (post)colonial contexts when they declared that God expressed a clear and preferential treatment for the poor.[18]

A theological recognition of the importance of the relative social position of Jesus had been present among Black theologians stretching back at least to the early part of the twentieth century. In the spirit of the African American theologian Howard Thurman, for example, Dr. Cone had lit upon what Thurman had called "the striking similarity between the social position of Jesus in Palestine and that of the vast majority of American Negroes."[19] Merging his theological analysis with the problem of colonial oppression, Thurman explained in his *Jesus and the Disinherited* how Jesus's life was intimately tied to imperial state violence. As he put it, "Jesus was not a Roman citizen" and, as such, "He was not protected by the normal guarantees of citizenship – that quiet sense of security which comes from knowing that you belong."[20] Instead of the sense of security and belonging, "if a Roman soldier pushed Jesus into a ditch, he could not appeal to Caesar; he would be just another Jew in the ditch."[21] Building off of these insights, Cone in his later writings explicitly named Thurman as one of his "theological ancestors" alongside the famous Baptist Minister and longtime president of Morehouse College Dr. Benjamin Mays.[22] Cone also explicitly cited the influence of Mays's one time student Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.[23]

Cone explicitly used the language of Black Power to make a point very similar to that of Thurman's. By declaring that God was Black Cone named (racially) the structure that Thurman merely suggested through historical analogy. From the Black theological position, then, God was with those who are continuously pushed

unjustly into the ditches, and working alongside those who lack the ability to meaningfully appeal to Caesar. This made God about race, for Cone, in both a sociological and a theological sense. The theological declaration that God is Black was very much intended to be about how the colonial state has historically structured (racial) identity. And whether that imperial state power was Roman or American, it always represented something in opposition to (indeed, oppressive toward) God. By naming Jesus as Black Cone used religion to destabilized (historicize) racial difference as a production of colonial relations. Cone's theological use of race/blackness was ahistorical in terms of reading race backward into a pre-racial era (the first century world in which Jesus lived was pre-racial if we take race to mean a genetically inherited structure).

If, for Cone, the blackness of Christ was a theological claim with roots in previous African American theological insights, then it was also by necessity an argument about the spatial-temporal nature of that God. Cone could not have made his argument about the racial ontology of Christ without recourse to spatial-temporal narratives/justifications. Inasmuch as he argued that if Christ were in America today that he would be Black, he seemed to suggest through this historical analogy an immanent eschatological position. "God is Black" as a theological claim worked both backwards and forwards, so to speak: it described the past nature of Jesus as a historical person belonging to an oppressed colonial minority – while also at the same time describing God's future/presence as Black.

In regards to questions of agency, then, Cone' racial ontology directly informed his eschatological position. According to Cone, understanding Jesus's racial ontology was essential to grasping him as present again with those who currently suffer oppression. Hence, his racial ontology unlocked certain political affinities/solidarities, pointed toward certain actions, and was decisive for him in a temporal sense. Cone's claim regarding Jesus's blackness meant that he had returned, but this 'return' or dwelling in the world had not yet generalized inasmuch as racism continued to prevail in his experience of spacetime (a condition leading god to be 'present' in some place, but not others). We have an image of an incomplete eschatological moment: God is present again within the Black community, but not yet generalized as eschatological justice.

…

Cone found the divine in some places through discovering its lack in others. His undergraduate and seminary training had immersed him in the prevailing trends of the mid-twentieth century Euro-American theology including mastery of Karl Barth, but also Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Rudolf Bultmann, among others.[24] Of these experiences, Cone wrote in his memoir about how this education was one of immersion into a system of racialized control. He noted how it was "white teachers [who] introduced me to theology" instructed him on what it was, and told Cone precisely "who the great theologians were."[25] Seminary training meant, for Cone, being told to read the books written by European theologians and "to write about them" such that his white professors could tell him "when I interpreted them correctly

and when I didn't."[26] By his own admission, Cone gained mastery of this body of European thought – and though these skills ultimately made him successful within the academy as a teacher and scholar of theology, it was also a costly existential process in terms of Cone's sense of his own dignity as a Black person.

At first following the path which had been laid out for him by his doctoral professors, Cone completed his Ph.D. in systematic theology at Northwestern and immediately set out "to teach European theology."[27] First, going out to teach African American students at Philander Smith College in Little Rock Arkansas, and then later to "white students at Adrian College" who Cone felt expressed "even less interest in Bultmann, Barth, and Tillich."[28] The distinct lack of engagement that Cone noted among his students echoed his own growing dissatisfaction with teaching the traditional European theological canon during this period of his life.

One pivotal moment of religious transformation during Dr. Cone's early career came during Detroit's 1967 Twelfth Street uprising. The eruption of trouble in Detroit's Twelfth Street neighborhood, the reaction of various state and federal law enforcement agencies, and the body count of Black people caught up in the unrest all made a profound impression on Cone. During the unrest in July of 1967 Cone was teaching theology at Adrian College, approximately 70 miles west of Detroit's Twelfth Street neighborhood. The Twelfth Street uprising also marked Cone's first actual encounter with Rev. Cleage's preaching and the congregation he had been busy building at the Shrine of the Black Madonna.[29]

Aside from the biographical details that weave together both Cone and Cleage during this moment, the particulars of the 1967 Detroit uprising make it an emblematic case study for an investigation into post-World War II urban unrest. Nationally famous for the prolonged nature of the uprising and the Johnson Administration's involvement of the U.S. Army in quelling the unrest, all eyes were on Detroit during the late-summer of 1967. In addition to helping to launch well-known national level efforts at understanding the nature of racial unrest in American (such as the Kerner Commission) it also brought together city leaders, automobile industry giants, as well as labor officials in the name of the New Detroit Commission in order to study the cause of Twelfth Street's unrest.

All this concerted study was to determine the meaning of what began as a fairly routine raid on one of the many blind pigs located in Detroit's Twelfth Street neighborhood.[30] These afterhours bars had been a staple of Detroit's Black economy for decades leading up to the 1967 uprising. During the pre-World War II era they had been mainstays of Detroit's Black middle class who were routinely refused service in Detroit's white-owned bars and pubs. Post-1948, when many of these white-owned establishments began to serve Black people, blind pigs morphed into one of Detroit's primarily Black working class gathering spaces.[31] The particular blind pig at issue during the Twelfth Street unrest was especially crowded the night of July 23rd, 1967. It was bustling with a crowd of more than eighty persons who had gathered to host a party for two Detroit-based Vietnam veterans who had recently returned back to the city from their tours overseas.[32] The early hours police raid on

the bar quickly escalated as a crowd of onlookers watched as the Detroit City Police (DCP) proceeded to arrest those who had been caught inside the crowded pig. Incidents of police brutality stirred up the growing crowd – especially in regards to the treatment of women arrestees. As a result, many of those gathered began yelling at the officers and throwing beer bottles and rocks at the police.[33] Refusing the DCP's orders to disperse, the crowd, over the course of several hours and days, morphed into more widespread confrontations with city and state police, followed by National Guardsmen and, eventually the United States Army. All told: over 7,000 police, Guardsmen, and military personnel were needed to end the unrest which spread across the city over the course of serval days.[34]

The unrest itself was multifaceted. It included arson, looting, sniper fire, mixed with police brutality, unlawful police killings, mass-arrests of innocent Black people, the overcrowding of Detroit's jails, and the abuse of arrestees due process rights.[35] Though such a complex confrontation was surely multicausal in terms of understanding what occurred, I argue that the primary reasons underlying the outbreak of unrest on Twelfth Street were tied to racial segregation across the city's housing and the patterns of Black urban overcrowding that this segregation ultimately caused.[36] Secondarily, I argue that the roots of the unrest lay in the DCP's racist over policing of Detroit's illegal Black-run bar scene.[37] This was, after all, a peaceful gathering which could have been handled by the DCP issuing a citation or fine, breaking up the party, and sending everyone home. Instead, they decided to storm the blind pig, engage in indiscriminate arrests of those inside, and then proceeded to

abuse those they were arresting. Given these actions by the DCP, it is no wonder a little trouble broke out on Twelfth Street that night.

The immediate aftermath of these events was the context in which the young Dr. Cone first encountered the preaching of Rev. Cleage. According to Cone's recollections of the encounter in his 2018 memoir *I Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody* Rev. Cleage "was the only preacher I heard who had the courage to be unashamedly and unapologetically black."[38] Following this encounter Cone noted how he "began to read the Bible through the lens of Black Power, black arts, and the black consciousness movement."[39] The Shrine itself, located on Linwood Avenue, was in close proximity to Detroit's Twelfth Street. For Cone to have taken the journey from the outskirts of Ann Arbor into the heart of downtown in order to hear Cleage preach at the Shrine is suggestive of the magnetism of Cleage in the weeks and months following July 1967. This encounter also gives concrete evidence to Cone's claim that it was this particular urban uprising that spurred his search for a Black theology. In terms of the direct effects on his intellectual production, from the time of the 1967 Detroit uprising onward for Cone "writing about Black Power was different from writing about European theologians" precisely because "nothing was at stake in European theology."[40] Ultimately it "didn't matter whether Barth or Harnack was right in their debate about the meaning of revelation" because he "wasn't ready to risk my life for that."[41]

To walk openly into Cleage's Shrine in the immediate wake of the 1967 Detroit uprising was to take certain risks with one's life. The threat of violence

continued to haunt Cleage's Shrine even after the National Guard and U.S. Army had withdrawn from the city. Given this fact, I argue that Cone's statement in regards to his growing dissatisfaction with European theology should be read eschatologically. His claim that "nothing is at stake" in the theology of Barth and Harnack was a refutation of what he saw as a vertical, individualistic European-style theology. A theology with stakes was one which was horizontal in its eschatological orientation – it was the kind of theology which one was ready to die for. Or, as Cone put it in his memoir, after July 1967 he simply could no longer continue teaching Tillich and Barth to apathetic white seminarians when Black people were being gunned down by National Guardsmen in the streets of Detroit.[42]

The 1967 Detroit uprising was, then, from the perspective of Cone's Black theology something of a revelation. That is, it was revelatory in the apocalyptic sense of the term: meaning an unveiling or disclosure. The trouble that broke out on Twelfth Street manifested a truth about white supremacy that was always already present, but which had been systematically ignored or veiled Detroit's own image of itself as the "model city" of modern race relations.[43]

…

The European theologians from which Cone was pivoting during this post-Detroit uprising part of his theological career had experienced their own sense of moral dislocation, albeit within their own rather different contexts. It is difficult to overstate the degree to which the developments in European theology were tied to the

moral catastrophes of Worlds Wars I and II. The horror of these total wars and the genocidal violence of the Holocaust, in particular, posed something of a moral crisis for many of the European Protestant theologians Cone encountered during his doctoral program. By the end of the 1950s, expressing a bourgeois faith in inevitable progress of man under the auspices of modernity no longer seemed like a workable position for many of these thinkers. The theological discourses they in turn developed tended to reflect this moral and temporal sense of crisis.

Moltmann was among those European theologians whose lives, both spiritually and intellectually, were deeply changed by the outbreak of World War II. By his own admission, Moltmann's upbringing in Germany prior to the war was "not particularly Christian."[44] Indeed, according to his own account many decades later, it was his experience as a young German man living through Allied bombing raids which ultimately changed the religious trajectory of Moltmann's life. As he put it in his 2000 book *Experiences in Theology*, "at the end of July 1943…I experienced the destruction of my home town Hamburg through the RAF's 'Operation Gomorrah,' and barely survived the fire storm in which 40,000 people burnt to death."[45] The experience of fire and bombardment reigning down from on high pushed Moltmann toward a subsequent existential question: "Why am I alive and not dead like the rest?"[46]

Following the bombing of Hamburg, the young Moltmann was called up to serve in the National Socialist forces in 1944.[47] Six months later, in February of 1945, Moltmann was taken prisoner by the British – spending the next three years as a

prisoner of war in the United Kingdom.[48] The circumstances by which Moltmann was taken prisoner by the British involved walking off at night, unarmed, into Allied occupied territory.[49] This was a strategy that some of those who were conscripted into the German forces took up as one possible method of resistance to participation in fascist violence (or, at the very least, it was used in an effort to swap the terrors of active combat for the problems of imprisonment).

Moltmann came to the study of theology first, then, in this context as a Nazi prisoner of war in the United Kingdom at Norton Camp.[50] It was during his time at Norton that Moltmann began his emotional reckoning with the Christianity of the Third Reich. This need for a deeper reflection on German Christianity came primarily through his discovery of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writings and the resistance work of the Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer was considered a martyr by many post-war liberationists for his outspoken fight against Hitler, critiques of German Christian complicity with fascism, and eventual execution at the hands of Nazis officers.[51] Prior to his work organizing the Confessing Church in resistance to the Third Reich, Bonhoeffer spent 1930-1931 living in New York and working as the Sloane scholar at Union Theological Seminary (future home of Dr. Cone).[52] Bonhoeffer's theology was also notable for its eschatological themes, particular around the question: how is one to announce God in a world that has come of age?[53]

In this sense, for Moltmann, theology came prior to any really meaningful experience of Christian worship. As he put it, "in 1948 I came back from the prisoner-of-war camp as a Christian, but I had no relationship to the churches."[54] He

only became formally involved in Christian congregational life after returning to post-war Germany. It was upon his return that he began his study of philosophy and theology in the city of Göttingen in central Germany.[55] The basic pattern of theological/intellectual engagement with Christianity coming prior to any particular embeddedness in church communities echoes (to a certain extent) Cone's own lived experience. In keeping with their vocations as systematic theologians, both Cone and Moltmann became primarily known for expressing their Christian commitments through ideas first and direct-service to Christian communities, second.

This is not to suggest that Moltmann and Cone's theologies were not grounded in social experiences – these just may not have been the church, traditionally defined. Even as Moltmann's experience of conversion as a prisoner of war in World War-II receded into the past he continued to consider the moral catastrophe of Auschwitz to be his most immediate and pressing theological problem. As a son of Germany whose youth coincided with Hitler's rise to power, Moltmann wanted to know: Why the "appalling silence" of German Christians?[56] Indeed, what was it about the political theology of German nationalism that allowed fascism to take such deep root among the German people? Especially throughout the 1960s, the "name Auschwitz became" for Moltmann the term for "the hermeneutical conditions in which we had to think about Christian talk of God in post-war Germany."[57]

Moltmann's theological answer to this dilemma built directly off the work of the group of scholars known as the Frankfurt School.[58] The roots of this intellectual movement lay in 1920s Germany when the organization known then as the Institute

for Social Research was founded.[59] This Frankfurt Institute that was broadly designed to produce Marxist social research would eventually become known as the Frankfurt School. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, the members of the Frankfurt School went into exile across Europe, with some eventually making their way to the U.S.[60] The interests of this group of theorists that included Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Theodore Adorno, Ernst Bloch, among others, were wide ranging in nature. As a cohort of theorists they contributed to areas as diverse as the study of political authoritarianism, the philosophy of technology, and scholarship on the culture industry.[61] Religion, in particular, was treated by the Frankfurt School from multiple perspective. These theorist's treatment of religion reflected, on the one hand, an understanding of religion as an institution embodied in churches, sects, etc..[62] However, they also analyzed religion on the level of discourse – with a particular interest in how it provided a potentially revolutionary language for addressing social problems.[63]

For the Frankfurt School theorists it was not sufficient to think of religion as simply the 'opioid of the people.' Rather, many of the Frankfurt School theorists tended to view religion as a necessary part of the fabric of culture that one must theoretically grasp in order to account for life under capitalist conditions. Religion was not alone in possessing this important theoretical status: other analogous aspects of culture that these theorists worked on included poetry, music, literature, and other secular examples. As a part of this suite of interests, some within the Frankfurt School maintained that it was precisely because religion was something that intersected "with

many levels of human experience, both systematic and subjective” that positioned it “as providing necessary language of hope and despair, freedom and submission.”[64]

Of all the Frankfurt School thinkers, Moltmann’s work was particularly influenced by Ernest Bloch’s 1959 publication of *The Principle of Hope*. Moltmann first encountered Bloch in person while out lecturing in eastern Germany during the late 1950s – and he subsequently became fascinated with Bloch’s *The Principle of Hope* while he was on holiday in Switzerland in 1960.[65] On the nature of this intellectual lineage, Moltmann asserted that: “from Bloch’s philosophy of hope I learned basic categories for [*Theology of Hope*], but without engaging in his atheism.”[66] Moltmann’s statement demonstrates the paradoxical depths between how these two thinkers have conceptualized hope. Genealogically, Moltmann, the Christian theologian, derived his understanding of hope from Bloch, a secular Jewish Marxist, who in turn developed his own conception of hope by wedding Jewish-Christian messianism with Marxist revolutionary history.

Bloch’s lengthy writings on the nature of hope demonstrated a method that worked to recover certain reified aspects of culture which had been dismissed by previous strains within Marxist critique. This project of revitalization centered on a type of human hope that was recovered immanently through engaging with one’s eschatological imagination.[67] Religion, especially in its messianic mode, according to Bloch, retained within itself the latent potential to create the “subject conditions necessary for revolutionary change” to occur.[68] In contrast to a warmed-over positivist belief in the ineluctable progress of (Western) civilization then, Frankfurt

School theorists like Bloch tended to be drawn to more eschatological paradigms of change.[69] Interestingly, the extent to which these frameworks were eschatological and progressive (vs. negative) depended on where one looked within the school itself.

Unlike his fellow critical theorists Adorno and Horkheimer, Bloch did not cleave exclusively to a negative dialectical method when working out the what we might call "the problem of the future." According to Bloch's approach, the articulation of concrete images and symbols formed an essential part of the dialectical process that defined our experience of time as such. Though an avowed atheist since his youth, Bloch was notable even among his fellow Frankfurt School theorists for his persistent and intense interest in theological motifs.[70] One of the most important insights of this effort to interrogate theology for critical theory was the Frankfurt School's ability to render the "future as an object of dialectical thinking," which permitted them to "employ the future (*qua* higher states of truth and justice) as a criterion for judging the past and the present."[71] It is precisely the role of religion, according to Bloch, to generate these concrete symbols of futurity through which we may judge the value of present conditions. Though this end time utopia is to be attained through human effort rather than through some kind of divine revelation or agency, human narratives of the eschaton as the "source of regulating action in the present" became a theme of Bloch's life work.[72]

It is true that Moltmann largely disregarded Bloch's atheism during his early engagement with Bloch's work on hope. Indeed, Moltmann used Bloch's concept of hope to produce arguments that were, exclusively, theological in nature and he

embedded them in books aimed at other professional systematic theologians. However, In some of his later work that was aimed at a broader public readership, Moltmann explicitly asked a number of interesting critical questions of the secular tradition to which Bloch's Marxism ostensibly belonged. For example, "is not every unbeliever who has a reason for [their] atheism and [their] decision not to believe a theologian too?"[73] In asking this question, Moltmann suggested that "the modern criticism of religion put forward by Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud is still theological in its anti-theology."[74] In true Protestant fashion, Moltmann here discerned an indissoluble link between individual belief (*qua* Luther) and the choice not to believe at all (atheism). Hence for Moltmann even, and maybe even especially, the atheist is a theologian (that is: one who uses their intellect in order to consider the nature of God).

In putting forth this critique of Marxist atheism I argue that Moltmann seized upon an interesting dialectical movement present within the workings of secularism/modernity itself. The Frankfurt School Marxists, though ostensibly secular in their orientation, turned toward religion in their rejection of the leading philosophical schools of their day. In doing so, these theorists made a temporal switch: they exchanged the world of positivist certainty for one of apocalyptic chance and revolutionary opportunity. Indeed, in the midst of a historical situation that seemed to be governed hegemonically by liberal positivist philosophies that could not truly account for the horrors of the past/present, Bloch insisted that scientific epistemologies "manifestly cannot provide the desired cognition of the future *qua*

alternative reality," precisely because they continued to identify the existing reality with the realm of necessity.[75] It was, according to Bloch, their intellectual investments in the stability of their empirical subjects which corrupted any radical potential in the work of such positivism.

In the face hegemonic positivist logic, Bloch argued that the present distinction between hope (*qua* a utopian grasp of the future) and chance (*qua* empirical possibility) must be correlated in order for justice is to be realized.[76] According to the chief "atheist for God," as he was sometimes called, working toward a temporal correlation between hope and chance was a guide to political praxis. This was a way of understanding praxis as about temporal re-coordination. This was not necessarily as abstract a process as it sounds. Rather, Bloch portrayed it as one grounded in imagination and passion: "If socialist action is to remain both ontologically authentic and morally compelling, it requires eschatological passion."[77] As a historical pattern, then, Bloch's position on praxis formed something of a paradox: in order for the secular to fulfill itself as generalized human freedom, secular progressive notions of history had to give way to a passionate belief in eschatological promise. By implication, the activation of human hope required the presence of an apocalyptic horizon. This logic is itself another way of describing the effect of Bloch's work on Moltmann: its secular critique ignited his eschatological passion.

…

Following their initial meeting at the American Academy of Religion conference, Cone made an overseas journey to Germany in order to visit Moltmann at his university in Tübingen. Cone's first visit to Moltmann's homeland during the 1970s was not nearly as well received by the German public as Moltmann would have liked according to his own reflections in *Experiences in Theology*. The lack luster nature of his German community's reaction demonstrated, for Moltmann, one of the profound short comings of post-war German intellectual culture. Moltmann argued that the lack of critical thinking which kept Europeans from appreciating that the plight of African Americans was, in fact, an expression of the whole "inner problems" of the Western world.[78] Echoing Marx's own analysis of so-called primitive accumulation, Moltmann used his theological writings as a venue in which to point out to his fellow Germans that "without the slavery of the Black masses there would have been no investment capital for the build-up of Western industrial society."[79] Hence, one needed to be able to historically and theoretically grasp the role of race in order to understand the dilemmas of Western modernity, of which the twentieth century story of German nationalism formed a critically important part. Moving beyond the origins of his radicalization via his encounter with the Frankfurt School and the Confessing Church, then, it was the linking of these two stories (that of Auschwitz and Virginia) that became critical for Moltmann's growth as a theologian.

Moltmann's intellectual encounter with Black theology, and personal relationship with Dr. Cone, helped him to address the theological problems of the

West in a deeper and more historically complex way than he had prior to his encounter with Cone. In Cone's work, he found the tools he needed to help him understand the problems within Western culture which had produced the horrors of the concentration camp and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade alike. Moltmann's later work suggests that any adequate understanding of the West (and, indeed, any ability to grasp its temporal or eschatological trajectory) seemed to require a theological comprehension of both of these crises and their shared relationship to modernity.

In taking up these themes of race, modernity, and fascism, Moltmann decided to position himself as something of a European translator of Cone's ideas. By the late-1990s he was authoring entire chapters titled things like: "Black Theology for Whites."[80] Moltmann's approach to the topic of Black theology specifically for whites included, first an engagement with the basics of African American history stretching from the Antebellum period to the Black Power era. Moltmann followed this narration of African American history with a theological reading of the significance of the history itself.

Moltmann's writings on African American history are a part of what should be described as his untimely approach to theology. I use untimely here to signal Moltmann's status as someone who sought out intellectual affiliations and moved toward theological projects that anticipated a future beyond his own time. The work of recalling certain events within African American history and rendering it as theological subject were not neutral acts that left author and reader unaffected. Rather, Moltmann argued that we should understand the work of interpretation as

"translation, in the literal sense – the transfer of a text from a context belonging to the past into a context in the present," in which case "of course the text and the thing it talks about will not be able to remain unchanged either."[81] For Moltmann, the true work of "*Hermeneutics does not merely interpret. It also transforms.*"[82] [original emphasis] Moltmann's theoretical approach to hermeneutics bares a distinct resemblance to the untimely work of scholars like Gary Wilder in his study of Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor in *Freedom Time*. In his comparative study of their approaches to decolonization, Wilder uses the analytic of untimely as a way of "thinking with" intellectual history as a form of critical theory.[83] I argue that these intellectual genealogies ought to be linked together such that one can identify untimely threads running through the works of Bloch, Moltmann, Cone, and Cleage.

While I have used the phrase untimely to describe Moltmann's approach, he defined his method in doing this particular kind of hermeneutical work as doing theology 'crosswise.' Under this crosswise rubric he took up multiple theological projects: Black theology for whites; Liberation theology for the First World; Feminist theology for men; etc.[84] Such a crosswise methodological approach was, for Moltmann, an ethical expression related to the experience of love: "Creative love is involvement which opens the eyes of others and is itself open-eyed."[85] As a form of intellectual production it worked to integrate one's personal subjective position with the desire to work across difference in a collaborative way. It also spacializes the untimely metaphor – for what is an untimely approach other than one which works 'crosswise' through time? An untimely theology is precisely one that cuts against the

grain of positivist spacetime categories in the name of, in this case, an eschatological future.

As a part of Moltmann's crosswise theological work he took up the need to explicate Cone's argument regarding the blackness of Christ. By drawing upon familiar German references that were meant to prick the consciousness of the post-War European reader, such as the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Moltmann's insisted upon on the essentially anti-Fascist connection between the theological positions of Black theology and the Confessing Church. Moltmann took this logic so far as to conclude that the revelation of Black theology meant that "we must become Black with God."[86] He immediately followed this claim by arguing that "Bonhoeffer said something similar in his Gestapo cell: 'Only the suffering God can help,' and 'Christians are beside God in his suffering.' In the history of injustice and violence God takes the part of the oppressed and the poor, in order to redeem all human beings from evil."[87] It was precisely because of this divine motion that moved from oppressed particular to universal redemption that, according to Moltmann, "in this history, to be partisan is the dialectical way to the universality of the kingdom of freedom."[88] For Moltmann, the present demands of that divine-historical dialectic were clear: to become Black with God.

This notion of becoming Black with God, or as it is sometimes put in the literature, becoming 'Black in Christ,' was a particular turn of phrase Moltmann lifted from Cone's work. What are we to make of this rather suggestive imperative that the only adequate expression of Christian love is for one to become Black with God? The

very first place we find this idea in Cone's work is in his sections regarding 'Reconciliation' in the later chapters his 1969 *Black Theology and Black Power*. Becoming Black in Christ, according to Cone, was deeply tied to the theological notion of reconciliation. But this Christian watchword (reconciliation) was a complicated area of thought for Cone to write about from a Black theological perspective.

One major problem with any discussion of reconciliation in regards to Black theology was the fact that, as Cone put it, "white people have short memories."[89] Their desire for so-called reconciliation was born out of a kind of deep discomfort with the past – especially in regards to America's history of race-based chattel slavery and its post-Reconstruction culture of Jim Crow segregation. Whether it was openly acknowledged or not: this past haunted them. Ultimately, this discomfort with the past created a fundamental problem in that the guilty parties felt the need to be forgiven without first demonstrating their understanding of what it was exactly that needed to be forgiven/reconciled. As Cone would put it, "the real question is not whether Black Theology sees reconciliation as an end but, rather, on whose terms we are to be reconciled. The problem of reconciliation is the oppressor's problem."[90] This is not to somehow suggest that it was not a problem. Indeed, from the perspective of Cone's Black theology, one might argue that the oppressor had a profoundly and existentially serious problem. Hence the need for Moltmann's intervention technique in developing a historically-infused Black theology for whites,

not to mention his Feminist theology for men and other ‘cross-wise’ theological interventions.

Though he did not regard it as his primary duty to instruct the oppressor on the meaning of reconciliation, Cone did at times address the subject directly in his writing. When he did so, he would often use the language of heresy to diagnose the basic theological issue at hand. Cone insisted that: “the assumption that one can know God without knowing blackness is the basic heresy of the white churches.”[91] Cone’s invocation of the heretical should be taken as a serious theological claim. He argued that white churches made a basic theological error inasmuch as they wanted “God without blackness, Christ without obedience, love without death.”[92] Their desire to look away from historical suffering meant that “they fail to realize is that in America, God’s revelation on earth has always been black, red, or some other shocking shade, but never white.”[93] Or, to put it in more explicitly eschatological terms: “The coming of Christ means a denial of what we thought we were. It means destroying the white devil in us. Reconciliation to God means that white people are prepared to deny themselves (whiteness), take up the cross (blackness) and follow Christ (black ghetto).”[94] Though the language of heresy is undoubtedly one of condemnation, I would argue that it isn’t necessarily one of racial essentialism. Here Cone used the religious notion of reconciliation/conversion to lay out a path for transforming racial understanding. If theorists of race like Patrick Wolfe are correct in their analysis that, at least in the North American context, the moment when race and religion become separated from one another as social identities was a major moment in the colonial-

racialization process, then Cone's use of religion to undercut race here demonstrates one immanent approach to transforming racial paradigms.[95] That is, his was a strategy that went back and in through religion in order to destabilize race.

Thus, for Cone, true "reconciliation makes us all black."[96] He insisted, ultimately, from a theological and political point of view, that "being black in America has very little to do with skin color."[97] Rather, to be Black meant "that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are."[98] Writing in a broadly liberationist fashion, Dr. Cone argued that the God who was beside us in history was also the God who demands that we stand alongside one another in solidarity amidst our experience colonial oppression. Becoming Black with God did not, therefore, mean the adoption of a naïve color-blind ethos but rather it meant an embrace of the desire to destroy whiteness as a marker of social privilege. As Moltmann put it, "the liberal abandonment of talk about God's wrath is false. God's love for the whites can only mean wrath, and that means *the destruction of their whiteness and all the privileges which they associate with it*." [my emphasis][99] This made becoming Black with God an eschatological project inasmuch as it brought together themes of ultimate justice and utopian (racial) transformation.

Moltmann affirmed Cone's central claim regarding the blackness of Jesus as a critically important theological assertion that was relevant beyond the Black church itself. His defense of Cone's claim included an affirmation of his reading of the scholarship regarding the historical Jesus. For Cone's interpretation of Christs' ontological blackness was, according to Moltmann, first and foremost in keeping with

the historical Jesus scholars have come to know through a critical reading of the synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – rather than the Johnian "Christ of patristic dogma."[100] But he also insisted that this historical Jesus that Cone drew upon was the "prefiguration of the Christ of the present" who was "beside and in the blacks who rise up out of their oppression."[101] History then, for Moltmann, did not exist for the sake of reifying itself as a document trapped in the past – but rather it existed for it's ability to disclose the future, indeed its value lay precisely in its ability to enable future action. This is to suggest that history had, for Moltmann, the structure of an unfulfilled promise.

Moltmann saw the German public's negative reaction to Black theology as stemming from a guilt that was endemic to all of Western society. A revision of this attitude required the expression of a kind of radically imaginative empathy that dialectically attempted to grasp the historical experience of the other 'cross-wise.' In terms of his advice on how to ultimately exercise this sense of Western historical guilt, and so bring about a blackness with God, Moltmann argued that "the person who has incurred guilt can no doubt admit" their guilt, but, crucially, "only his victims know what suffering his injustice has caused."[102] Therefore those who have incurred some kind of historical guilt vis-à-vis their inheritance of, for example, the privileges of whiteness "only become free of our own blindness if we see ourselves through the eyes of our victims" and by doing so learn to "identify with them."[103] Reconciliation was an active process that required certain things of the guilty: study, learning, dialogue, and a sustained critical excavation of the self. These were the tools

Moltmann offered white people who sought out his guidance on how to become Black with God. Such transformations were not purely negative – they sustained a promissory structure in their attempt to call forth a future without the limitations of white supremacy.

This was a deeply intellectually-drive way of imagining change. Moltmann and Cone were, after all, theologians who embraced their work out of a sense of faith but also out of a deep intellectual curiosity and habit of critical thought. Given this epistemological emphasis, this understanding of Black theology must be balance with other projects in order to be more than mere scholarly production – hence why this project brings in Rev. Cleage and the Shrine movement into the eschatological conversation with Cone and Moltmann in chapter three. Even with his heavily theoretical paradigm of change, in the way he brought together his Marxism and Christianity, as well as race and theology, Moltmann was not an ordinary dialectician. While his integration of these diverse strains of thought happened largely outside of a secular theoretical scholarly audience, he demonstrated a parallel series of concerns. I argue that the way these fields have been segregated within the academy is problematic. Indeed, it reinforces a kind of punitive separation of secular theory and religious practice that harms our ability to understand across communities of difference.

…

If Moltmann has been primarily known theologically for his writings on the theological politics of hope, then he is secondarily known for his analysis of the notion of “promise.”[104] It would be difficult to fully appreciate the charter of Moltmann’s eschatological hope without understanding his theological analysis of the notion of a ‘promise,’ and what he thought it meant for grasping the dialectics of history. By his own admission, his early theological works were completely dominated “by prophetic concepts such as protest and promise, promise and Exodus, Exodus and liberation.”[105] For the systematic theologian within Moltmann there was a critical conceptual distance between each of these concepts.

Moltmann thought it particularly important to distinguish between “promise” and “prophecy.” Moltmann wrote on the distinction between “promise” and “prophecy,” insisting that “a prophecy is not a promise, for prophecies have a different determining subject from the event which they prophesy.”[106] In this sense that Moltmann was using the term here a prophet was someone who speaks on behalf of the sovereignty of another (usually, God). Whereas, by way of contrast, a “promise is a speech-act, which is authenticated by the person who promises” and hence “it is performative.”[107] To promise something invokes the agency of the one who promises – in the promise of its fulfillment it dialectically calls forth certain actions and not others. In this sense, a promise is also a deeply social structure. A promises can be made between and among a variety of different types of people, not just between God and an individual prophet. So too, a promise is a flexible form of covenant inasmuch as it binds two (or more) parties together without the need to prefigure and/or

foreclose upon the content of what it is that is promised between parties. For Moltmann, the power of a promise was more than just anthropological in the sense I have just described. Rather, the work of the "promise" was what made God's future present and comprehensible.[108] For Moltmann, belief or faith in God's promise was precisely that symbolic fragment of the future (*qua* Bloch) that enabled liberatory action in the present.

Becoming Black in God was for Moltmann, a promissory symbol. Hence the deeply theological need to articulate what exactly the blackness of God promised for the guilt of the West. For, according to Moltmann, it was the unique work of the theologian to interpret the nature of God's promises – and in so doing to make those promises live again, such that "the divine promises uttered in the past are not past but make their future present."[109] To make God's past promises live again in the present – and so to call forth God's future – was the overall thrust of Moltmann's eschatology. Whereas Moltmann's theology of hope implied the need for individual belief in future justice – by expanding his eschatological perspective to include promise he refined the structure of hope as beyond individual sentiment: it became about promises between subjects.

Eschatological promises of justice and the symbols they produced were not ends in and of themselves, for Moltmann. Rather, "the apocalyptic images of catastrophe" that they generate are to be used subversively "against this self-complacent, titanically self-deifying world."[110] The use of such "counter-histories and counter-images," according to Moltmann, do not in and of themselves "constitute

immediately real alternatives to the present systems of the world."[111] Rather, their power was in the fact that "they dissever or estrange those who hope from the laws and compulsions of 'this world' so that they no longer permit themselves to conform to it, or to be brought into line."[112] Acting upon fragments of God's hope helped to make one, in a certain sense, ungovernable from an authoritarian point of view. Hence the utility of a theological language that centered the blackness of God and the eschatological destruction of whiteness. With the eschatological destruction of whiteness, white people are able to see themselves and others as full persons whose moral, cultural, and cognitive values are not essentially tied to their racial physiology. From Cone/Moltmann's perspective, the ways in which race hierarchically arranges differences based on physiological characteristics heretically convinces white people that their worth is derived from their skin color in relation to others. This is obviously problematic for people of color who are abused in the name of racist logics, but it is also degrading to white people inasmuch as it tricks us into believing that our self-worth is derived from race as opposed to our moral character as persons. Moltmann saw the promise of Black theology as laying precisely in its ability to exercise the white supremacist demons of European theology, such that a deeper knowledge of what it means to be of value might emerge.

…

Moltmann recognized through his theological work that fights against authoritarianism were fights for futurity. That is, they were efforts at igniting the active presence of hope in the midst of unjust oppression and suffering. Moltmann

suggested that it was through the work of historical analogy that we find a future horizon upon which we can gaze and which can orient ones sense of justice. As Moltmann put it:

> In the historical interlacing of present and future we form metaphors of what is to come. The future is 'like…' These analogies of the future are formed out of remembrances of the past and must have the same playful, experimental, transformable and amenable character as metaphors if they are not to lead to…prejudgments towards what is surprising and new in the future.[113]

A principled openness was built into Moltmann's theology of "promise" as he articulated it here. A theological approach to history was one which embraced the element of the "not yet" contained within it. To do this kind of eschatological work was to walk a fine line between vertical and horizontal imagery: lest one's "not yet" image become other-worldly in the extreme, traveling so far off the immanent horizon that it losses it revolutionary character and becomes an image of quietism.

Cone used his opening remarks in his section on eschatology in the first edition of *Black Theology and Black Power* to call out the role of the Black church in perpetuating precisely this over-vertical style of eschatology. In that 1969 text Dr. Cone argued that "the most corrupting influence among the Black churches was their adoption of the 'white lie' that Christianity is primarily concerned with an otherworldly reality."[114] For people who have become deluded by this individualistic theology Jesus "becomes a magical name which gives the people a distorted hope in another life."[115] Therefore, through a simple identification with a that name, "unbearable suffering becomes bearable."[116] This was a profound theological problem according to Cone precisely because it lacked any sense of earthly or immanent

futurity: "instead of seeking to change the earthly state, they focus their hopes on the next life in heaven."[117]

By way of contrast, as Cone put it a liberationist, Black theology "has hope for this life."[118] Or, to put it *via negativa*, "the idea of heaven is irrelevant for Black Theology."[119] "Heaven" when portrayed as a space of individual attainment in the afterlife, for Cone, was one of the watchwords for a quietist theological position. When considered from the Black theological perspective, "eschatology comes to mean joining the world and making it what it ought to be."[120] Cone insisted that the only "purpose for looking to a distant past" or to as yet "unrealized future is that both disclose the ungodliness of the present."[121] To linger on images of heaven was to displace justice onto a transcendent and ultimately unreachable plain of existence (save through death). A more earth-bound eschatology was one that could reach cross-wise through time and use it to "disclose" the unjust present. If an apocalypse is in part defined as a disclosure, then as an event it does not so much foretell the future prophetically as it breaks open the present as something occupied with a kind of injustice that requires human action.

In the lines immediately following his comments on heaven in *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone explicitly cited Moltmann's writings on theological hope in order to shore up his argument about Black eschatology. He quickly latched onto Moltmann's idea of hope as a form of liberationist praxis: "hope is not a theoretical concept to be answered in a seminary classroom or in the privacy of one's experiences. It is a practical idea which deals with the reality of this world."[122] The

activation of hope required present action in the world. According to Cone, a Christian was not one who asked "what Jesus would do, as if Jesus were confined to the first century."[123] Rather, a Christian trained in Black theology asked: "What is he doing? Where is he at work?"[124] The answers to these questions were meant to serve as a guide to praxis: join him in his identification with the poor, suffering, oppressed, etc., and realize his message by striking off imperial chains wherever they are found.

Christ, for Cone, was clearly present in the Black Power movement. It was what drew him to visit Rev. Cleage's church in 1967 in the first place, and ultimately it was what pushed him to publish *Black Theology & Black Power* in 1969. What was so radically powerful about the emergence of the Black Power movement, for Cone, was its timeliness. As he put it:

> Black suffering is not new. But what is new is 'black consciousness.' Black people know who they are; and to know who you are is to set limits on your being. It means that any act of oppression will be met with an almighty Halt! Any act of freedom will be met with an almighty Advance![125]

Thus the eschatology that Cone developed was both "presentative and aggressive." Cone's eschatological future meant embodying a Christian hope by participating "in the world and making it what it ought to be."[126]

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[1] Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), xvii.
[2] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 190. For an example of Herzog's work see: Fredrick Herzog, "God: Black or White," in *Theology from the Belly of the Whale: A Fredrick Herzog Reader*, ed. Joerg Rieger (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999).

[3] Lillian Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 23.
[4] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 190.
[5] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 190.
[6] "Phillip Scharper to Rev. Cleage," 18, July, 1968, 2010025 Aa 2, box 1, Albert B. Cleage Jr. Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Cleage Papers).
[7] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 27.
[8] Cone quoted in Barger, *The World Come of Age,* 169.
[9] Cone quoted in Barger, *The World Come of Age,* 169.
[10] William Van De Burg, *New Day In Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 236-247.
[11] Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 237 & 293.
[12] Barger, *The World Come of Age*, 30, 47, 122, 148-49, 164, 169, 203, & 228-29.
[13] See Barger especially on Cone without Cleage, *The World Come of Age*, 36, 38, 40, & 224.
[14] James Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 80-81.
[15] William Jones, "Theodicy and Methodology in Black Theology: A Critique of Washington, Cone, and Cleage," *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971): 541-557.
[16] Anthony Pinn, "Black Theology" in *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 34.
[17] Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016), 5-7.
[18] Barger, *The World Come of Age*, 4-5.
[19] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 110-111.
[20] Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited, 110-111.
[21] Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited, 110-111.
[22] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 99.
[23] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 99.
[24] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 27.
[25] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 61-62.
[26] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 61-62.
[27] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 61-62.
[28] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 61-62.
[29] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 14.
[30] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 155.
[31] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 4-5 & 155.
[32] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 156.

[33] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 160-161.
[34] This included a mixture of U.S. Army, the Michigan National Guard, the Michigan State Police, and the Detroit City Police. Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 233.
[35] For the most detailed scholarly discussions of all of these facets of the unrest see Fine, *Violence in the Model City* & Thomas Sugrue. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[36] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 39-40.
[37] The police had attempted to raid that particular blind pig nine times in the year leading up to the July 1967 unrest – succeeding twice. Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 156.
[38] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 12.
[39] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 12.
[40] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 8.
[41] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 8.
[42] Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 1-2.
[43] Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, 32-33.
[44] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, xiv.
[45] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 3.
[46] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 4.
[47] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 4.
[48] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 4.
[49] "Jürgen Moltmann," The Gifford Lectures, accessed December 9, 2022, https://www.giffordlectures.org/lecturers/j%C3%BCrgen-moltmann
[50] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, xiv.
[51] Barger, *The World Come of Age*, 140.
[52] Barger, *The World Come of Age*, 140.
[53] Gustavo Gutierrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 28-29.
[54] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, xxii.
[55] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 4.
[56] Moltmann, *Experience in Theology*, 115.
[57] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 116.
[58] Including, principally, Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Ernst Bloch, and Walter Benjamin.
[59] Eduardo Mendieta, Introduction to *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.
[60] Mendieta, Introduction to *The Frankfurt School*, 1.
[61] Mendieta, Introduction to *The Frankfurt School*, 2-3.
[62] Mendieta, Introduction to *The Frankfurt School*, 8-9.
[63] Mendieta, Introduction to *The Frankfurt School*, 8-9.
[64] Barger, *The World Come of Age*, 122.
[65] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 92.
[66] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 92.

[67] Barger, *The World Come of Age*, 148.
[68] Barger, *The World Come of Age*, 123.
[69] Paul Mendes-Flohr, "'To Brush History': The Eschatology of the Frankfurt School and Ernest Bloch," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51, no. 4 (1983): 633.
[70] Mendes-Flohr, "To Brush History," 636.
[71] Mendes-Flohr, "To Brush History," 636.
[72] Mendes-Flohr, "To Brush History," 640.
[73] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 15-16.
[74] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 15-16.
[75] Mendes-Flohr, "To Brush History," 638.
[76] Mendes-Flohr, "To Brush History," 641.
[77] Mendes-Flohr, "To Brush History," 644.
[78] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 190.
[79] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 190.
[80] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 189-216.
[81] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 124.
[82] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 124.
[83] Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 12 & 16.
[84] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 184.
[85] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 59.
[86] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 213.
[87] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 213.
[88] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 213.
[89] James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 144.
[90] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 145.
[91] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 150.
[92] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 150.
[93] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 150.
[94] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 150.
[95] Wolfe, *Traces of History*, 70.
[96] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 151.
[97] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 151.
[98] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 151.
[99] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 214.
[100] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 214.
[101] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 214.
[102] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 215.
[103] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 215.
[104] See, for instance, Barger, *The World Come of Age*, 148-149.
[105] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 313.
[106] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 93.

[107] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 94.
[108] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 98.
[109] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 105.
[110] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 55.
[111] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 55.
[112] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 55.
[113] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 163.
[114] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 121.
[115] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 123.
[116] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 123.
[117] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 123.
[118] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 123.
[119] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 125.
[120] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 126.
[121] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 126.
[122] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power,* 127.
[123] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 140.
[124] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 140.
[125] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 141.
[126] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 214.

Chapter Two: In the City of Prophets

The Church
Crumbling and empty,
Its steeple titled,
Pointing crazily into the sky,
Stood among the rotting buildings
And stinking debris
Ministering in death
As it had in life,
Stating its theology
In mute elegance
With its crazy tilted steeple
Pointing at the sky.

- Albert Cleage, "Eulogy For the Black Church"[1]

As this poem by the Rev. Albert Cleage illustrates, he often stood out for his critiques of mainline Black Protestant churches. And as the metaphor of the titled steeple suggests, these criticisms were often eschatological in nature. By pointing its theology "crazily into the sky" the Black church had, Cleage seemed to suggest, actively ignored the world crumbling in its midst. The invocations of how the Black church was now "ministering in death" and the use of the word "eulogy" in the title of the poem also suggest an eschatological reading along these lines. The Black church, according to Cleage's poem, itself seemed on the verge of death. It had become empty of theological meaning – hence it only articulated itself through a "mute elegance." The sonic metaphors are important here – the church itself (and even more specifically its theology) was attractive (elegant) but silent (mute) on the most important questions of life and death.

The closeness James Cone enjoyed with figures such as Jürgen Moltmann and the facility which he demonstrated with various streams within European theology made him attractive to certain progressive-minded white theologians in a way that Rev. Cleage, by way of contrast, simply never became. This fact, in part, accounts for Cleage's absence from the ranks of Black theological 'founders' – at least so far as its tradition within the academy has been concerned. Whereas Lillian Calles Barger's well-structured intellectual history of liberation theology makes extensive use of Cone's work, she fails to engage with Cleage's branch of Black theology in her discussions of the field.[2] Angela Dillard, on the other hand, who looks at Rev. Cleage's preaching in *Faith in the City*, lacks any significant engagement with Dr. Cone.[3] That the literature on Black/liberation theology has tended to marginalize the role of Rev. Cleage, and so sunder his work from Cone's, is a sign that as a field, it is still caught up in a fairly narrow view of theologian as someone who produces systematic, academic treatises on God. This focus on systematic theology causes blind spots in regards to less traditional forms of theological production and those who practice them (such as, for instance, Cleage's sermonic work).

The fact that he is often omitted from the literature on Black liberation theology should not suggest that Cleage was not a compelling figure within his own context. Indeed, for African Americans who were living in a city like Detroit that, by mid-century, was known for its abundance of excellent preachers he proved to be extraordinarily compelling.[4] One especially stark example of Cleage's captivating abilities as preacher came during the period from 1950 to 1957. After theological

conflicts within the church itself caused him to lead an exodus out of Saint Mark's United Presbyterian where he had been called to serve in 1950, Cleage managed a small, devoted, remnant congregation as they wandered from one temporary worship space to another throughout the city. This small congregation was unable to secure a building or hire a paid staff for a full seven years.

One of the things that is remarkable about Cleage's capacity to lead this much more informal type of religious gathering is precisely that it required an unusually high level of commitment on behalf of the laity. It means, for instance, that for years at a time religious education volunteers were storing art supplies in their own personal closets and that groups of congregants gathered to redecorate rented-out spaces before each worship service began. Likewise, it meant the necessity of holding services at odd hours when the owners of the church buildings weren't otherwise using their worship spaces for their own Sunday gatherings. All of this extra effort was put forth at a time when one could have instead walked down the street to hear a young Aretha Franklin singing in the choir at her father's church.[5]

Rev. Cleage would reinvent himself (and his church) many times over the course of his life. Born in Indianapolis on June 13th, 1911 – at the age of 15 months, the Cleage family moved to Kalamazoo Michigan where they had extended family residing.[6] Growing up, Cleage was often bullied by his peers due to his father's relationship to Detroit mayor Charles Bowles – a politician who was rumored to have connections to the KKK.[7] As a young adult, Cleage was a drummer – playing at local jazz venues and beer gardens throughout the Metro-Detroit area.[8] Eventually, Cleage

started at Wayne State University in 1929 – where he went to school on and off for over a decade, finally finishing his bachelor's degree in 1942.[9]

While still registered at Wayne State, Cleage began pursuing his Masters of Divinity at Oberlin College, enrolling in 1938 and finishing his degree in 1943.[10] Following his graduation from seminary, Cleage accepted a pastorate at a Congregational church in Lexington Kentucky, staying for less than a year before accepting the position of interim pastor at the newly organized San Francisco Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples.[11] His stay in the Bay Area was short lived and later he would become highly critical of the Fellowship of All Peoples' approach to integrated worship. After leaving San Francisco, Cleage briefly enrolled at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles for their graduate program in visual education run through the college's cinema department.[12] Before finishing the requirements for the film program in LA, in the mid-1940s Cleage was called back east to the pastorate at St. John's Congregational Church in Springfield, Massachusetts. This call was appealing for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the fact that the over 100 year old congregation had been the worship place of both Frederick Douglass and John Brown.[13]

Finally, Cleage arrived back in Detroit in May of 1950 – traveling from Massachusetts back to his home town in order to serve as minister at St. Mark's United Presbyterian mission on Twelfth Street.[14] Quickly, Cleage became unsatisfied with the culture of worship at St. Mark's, and lead a group of dissidents out of the church in the early 1950s.[15] This remnant group of congregants gathered in homes

and other rented spaces for several years prior to securing permanent facilities at Central Congregational.[16] It is from this base that Cleage would eventually grow his Black Christian Nationalist movement.

Even in this highly competitive preaching context, Rev. Cleage's sermonic star rose with the July 1967 outbreak of unrest on Twelfth Street. In this chapter I first explore the changes in congregational life that ensued at the Shrine around the time of Detroit's Twelfth Street uprising. I then draw upon Cleage's sermons from the late 1960s through the early 1980s in order to investigate the nature of his theological conflicts with the more mainline Black churches that dominated his religious context. I argue that this body of sermonic work formed a major part of what should be considered his scholarly production that expresses his eschatology. Finally, I end the chapter by turning to Cleage's relationship to Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam (NOI). I argue that scholars have often overlooked the fact that Elijah Muhammad's NOI was not the only Black nationalist religious movement to be founded in Detroit during the twentieth century. In bringing Cleage's efforts at the Shrine in conversation with Detroit's tradition of African American Islam, I argue that his approach to religious syncretism vis-à-vis the NOI ultimately went on to inform his apocalyptic imagination in ways that shaped how he directed his religious movement. While Rev. Cleage is occasionally included in historical overviews of religion and the Black Power movement, few studies have been dedicated to him as an individual religious leader.[17] Likewise, there are currently few studies in existence that place into conversation Cleage's work building up his Black Christian Nationalist

Movement and the growth of the Nation of Islam.[18] By drawing on Cleage's sermons and the writings of the NOI, this work aims to a) better represent Cleage in the overall literature on Black Power religion, as well as b) work to uncover the historical conversation between Cleage's BCN and Elijah Muhammad's NOI.

…

The 1960s were a pivotal decade for Rev. Cleage. In June of 1963, Cleage served as the director for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "Walk to Freedom" rally in Detroit.[19] This was an event that gathered many thousands of African Americans to Woodward Avenue – where Dr. King would deliver a version of his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Later that same year in October of 1963 Rev. Cleage helped to found Michigan's "Freedom Now" party – later serving as the third party's gubernatorial candidate in the 1964 election.[20] In November of 1963 Cleage organized a rally with Malcolm X at Detroit's King Solomon Baptist Church – each speaking to the gathering for about 45 minutes.[21]

One of the most important parts of Cleage's Black theological legacy prior to the outbreak of an uprising on Twelfth Street in July of 1967 came when he commissioned the Shrine's Black Madonna altarpiece. Cleage organized to unveil the fresco of the Black Madonna on Easter Sunday 1967 – less than six months prior to the uprising.[22] The fresco itself dominated the front of the church, standing at thirty feet in height, and was done by the African American artist Glanton Dowdell.[23] Following the creation of Dowdell's mural and the renaming of Central

Congregational to Shrine of the Black Madonna, Cleage became increasingly interested in reinventing the Shrine's rites and rituals.[24] Eventually he would go onto establish a complex religious hierarchy under the auspices of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church with bishops, priests, and himself serving as "Holy Patriarch."

In line with these congregational shifts, in the 1970s Rev. Cleage changed his name to Jaramogi Abebe Ageyman, meaning "holy man, liberator, savior of the nation" in Swahili.[25] Another major Shrine initiative that he began in the 1970s was the Beulah Land Project. This was, essentially, an experiment in Black food sovereignty. Shrine fundraising efforts focused on the goal of acquiring some agricultural land in order to link food production more directly to other Shrine ventures, like their Black Star co-op grocery stores. Cleage began in earnest to look for suitable land starting in 1982, but the Shrine wouldn't actually purchase its first 2,600 acres until 1999. Later, it expanded its holdings to 4,100 acres. Although original plans dating from the late 1970s indicated Georgia was the desired location of their farm, all of the Beulah Land Project's current acreage is located in Abbeville County South Carolina.[26] The search for land in the south, and the resulting purchases made in South Carolina location were significant from an African American political perspective. South Carolina, in particular, was a former slave state and was the site of Denmark Vesey's nineteenth century slave revolt. At the time of Cleage's death on Sunday February 20th 2000, the Beulah Land Farm was reported to be at 5,000 acres.[27]

Before the Beulah Land Farm could take root and grow, Cleage had to build himself a movement that could sustain such a project. Like his Black theological counterpart Dr. Cone, Cleage's religious trajectory was profoundly changed by the uprising that broke out on Twelfth Street. The eruption of a 'race riot' in what many had considered to be the 'model city' of midcentury race relations, Detroit, had a deep effect on congregational life at the Shrine of the Black Madonna. One immediate result of the Detroit uprising was a rather dramatic increase in attendance at the Shrine: with Sunday services growing to gather as many as 600 attendees. Many of these newcomers were drawn, like Dr. Cone, to the Shrine of the Black Madonna precisely because of Cleage's preexisting Black Power politics. Especially with such visible manifestations of his politics, like the well-publicized installation of Dowdell's Black Madonna altarpiece, Cleage was relatively well positioned to receive a cohort of younger and much more radical Detroiters into his flock.

Cleage argued that his commitment to a new way of doing theology was demonstrated in powerful fashion when he took up the Black Madonna as the church's emblem. He reflected from the pulpit in his June 1979 sermon entitled "The Fall of Man" how "when we unveiled the Black Madonna here in 1967, it was important, not just because it was a part of a Black consciousness that was going around at the time" because, as he put it, "everybody had some kind of Black consciousness."[28] Rather, what was most important was that "the Black Madonna was before the riots in Detroit," making it, by his own estimation, "the first Black theological statement that had come out in America in a long, long, long time."[29]

Indeed, even during the late-1970s when he had already rebranded his religious movement as the Pan African Orthodox Church, he insisted that the "unveiling of the Black Madonna is a statement of faith."[30]

That he should view the unveiling of the Black Madonna as a theological statement is interesting in considering the history of intellectual production within Black theology. If we take his statement seriously, then scholars should consider pushing the "founding" moment of this field from the 1969 publication of Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* back to Easter Sunday 1967, when Cleage unveiled the Black Madonna at the Shrine. Cleage originally intended to add other images alongside the Black Madonna fresco as permanent parts of the altar, also, at his insistence, to be done by a Black artist.[31] Cleage wished there to be, on the one side, an image of "the Crucifixion with the white Romans at the feet of the Black Messiah, the jeers of mockery upon their faces and the hatred in their eyes."[32] While, on the other side, he "would like to see a picture of Jesus driving the money changers our of the Temple, a powerful Black man supplanting the weak little mamby-pamby white Jesus."[33] The theological significance of these images that never were require some unpacking. As a pair of symbols, they bring together themes of: a) racialized imperial violence, as well as, b) a powerful Black anti-capitalist Christ. Cleage's intentions around the development of the Shrine's altar show that in 1969 Cleage was already weaving together certain strains with the Black leftist imagination, with a specifically Christian iconographic language.

The artist that had painted Rev. Cleage's Black Madonna mural, Glanton Dowdell, was at the time of the painting a 43 year old former convict at Jackson prison where he had served ten years on a second-degree murder charge.[34] While in prison, Dowdell had won artistic acclaim for his self-portrait titled "Southeast Corner of My Cell."[35] When asked about the process of painting the Madonna fresco, Dowdell said that the Black Madonna was an extension of himself: "This is me," he said.[36] "I can't divorce the Madonna from black women. I don't think that any of the experiences of the Madonna were more poignant or dramatic than those of any Negro mother."[37] Hiley Ward, Rev. Cleage's 1969 biographer, noted that Cleage considered an important precursor to Dowdell's Black Madonna was Marcus Garvey's use of the Black Madonna and a Black Christ at his African Orthodox denomination.[38] The Easter Sunday service in 1967 when the Black Madonna fresco was dedicated was the same service that Rev. Cleage also officially made his call for the forming of a Black Christian Nationalist Movement.[39]

If high-profile symbols like the Madonna altarpiece drew crowds into Cleage's church, they didn't necessarily succeed at keeping them there. The high attendance rates Cleage enjoyed as a result of the 1967 uprising had, by the time 1968 rolled around, fallen off considerably.[40] By early 1968 regular attendance at Cleage's original Shrine #1 was estimated to be at around 250-350 people per Sunday.[41] Reductions in attendance notwithstanding, the post-1967 notoriety that the Shrine enjoyed enabled it to expand the geographical reach of Rev. Cleage's religious movement. Following the 1967 uprising, Cleage did successfully launch Shrines in

other cities throughout the U.S., including founding congregations in both Kalamazoo, Michigan and Atlanta, Georgia.

The ebb and flow of regular attendees at Shrine #1 reflected the complexity of factors that shaped Black Power religious movement of the late-1960s and early 1970s. Ultimately, some left the Shrine because, for them, the theology that Cleage espoused from his pulpit was not radical enough in terms of its Black Power politics. Republic of New Africa founders and brothers, Milton and Richard Henry, were probably the best example of this particular type of religious fracture. After both brothers started attending the Shrine around the time of the 1967 uprising, they stepped back from involvement with Cleage's movement over their divergent views on Black nationalism – most especially the issue of physical separatism.[42] For the Milton brothers, Cleage's ambivalence vis-à-vis concrete demands for geo-political territory were a bridge too far. Rather than focusing on resettlement or territorial independence, Cleage's Black nationalist politics were more cultural in their overall orientation. On the other hand, some left the Shrine because Rev. Cleage's preaching was, for them, far too radical in terms of its views on racial reconciliation and the nature of racial conflict. Indeed, one of the persistent issues throughout Cleage's clerical career were his critiques of the radicalism of the Black church at large.

Though he espoused a theology that centered blackness as a chosen ontological status, Cleage had a reputation, especially among his fellow Black clergy, for denouncing them as "Toms" from his pulpit.[43] Cleage's use of the epithet points to a sharpening of his racial rhetoric during the Black Power era – and likely

demonstrates the influences of forces like Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam on his preaching. Throughout the 1960s and 70s Cleage's was widely known for publicly denouncing the "Tomish" behavior of his fellow Black religionists both from his pulpit at the Shrine and from his newspaper column in the *Michigan Chronical*. At times this rhetoric resulted in significant rifts within his own religious movement. One early example of this type of split occured around the time of Cleage's heresy trial in 1964. As a result of the charges brought against Rev. Cleage by his fellow metro-Detroit Congregationalists, about 30 of Cleage's flock, naming themselves the "Good Shepherds," defected from his pastorship at what was then still called Central Congregational church.[44]

In many respects, the focus of this heresy trial was more on Cleage racial politics rather than religious malpractice, as such. For example, charges 3-6 brought against Cleage focused explicitly on conflicts surrounding his (inter)racial politics. The Congregationalists targeting Cleage argued that he should be denounced for his positions, that: a) that racial conflict is inescapable; b) that integration is not *the* political goal of racial justice; c) that Black nationalism is the appropriate vehicle for racial justice; and d) that he rejected Black-white cooperation.[45] These charges were explicitly aimed at his Black Power theology rather than the management of his church or concerns over his ability to provide ministerial services like, for example, pastoral care. Given the nature of the charges, I argue that these reflect a Black Power moral panic. Indeed, this moral panic was especially threatening to those that carried out the trial because Black Power critiques were being made in the name of

Christianity/Congregationalism. Hence, it was during the midst of this trial over Cleage's racial politics that the group of defectors formed their own spiritual community known as the "Good Shepherds" and left Cleage's church for good.[46]

The Good Shepherd faction that broke away from Cleage's church was, like the vast majority of Central Congregational, made up of African American Detroiters. Their disputes with Cleage focused on his uncomfortable relationship with the Black church at large, as well as his less-than ecumenical stance toward white Congregationalists. In the midst of a city with a wealth of African American religious life, the Good Shepherd faction was concerned that Cleage's racial politics alienated him from the broader community of Black Christians working across Metro-Detroit. Cleage's criticisms of the Black church were multifaceted, and often pejorative, but one angle of his critique was forged in the tension between his more horizontal and their more vertical eschatological styles.

One example of the eschatological bent of these criticisms was the fact that Rev. Cleage often used his pulpit to denounce African American church's as comfort stations that were dedicated to preaching the gospel of individual salvation.[47] The "comfort station" language of these critiques make clear that Cleage's approach at the Shrine was more an effort at creating discomfort stations – that is, places where change was possible, but only through confrontation, struggle, and a certain amount of cognitive dissonance. Symbolically the use of the metaphor also points toward a heavenly eschatology – i.e. they are comfort stations on an individual's way to heaven.

He was also highly critical of the way mainline Black Protestant churches tended to mimic the symbolism and institutional values of the white church. He insisted that:

> Everybody else worshipped a God in their own image. Any other people in the world believed that God looked like them. But, when you get so oppressed, so bet down, so lacking in self-regard, accepting the declaration of your own inferiority, when you get so deep down that you believe that if it's God it's got to be in the image of my oppressor then you're really in trouble. And, that's the trouble Black people have been in. That's why the Black church doesn't do anything to save Black people, because it's working basically on a lie, it's working basically on the fact that it's dealing with a white superstructure, a white God, a white Jesus.[48]

Temporally speaking, Cleage argued here in his 1979 "The Fall of Man" sermon for an eternal Black divine presence – but this divine presence was one that was not necessarily embodied in the majority of Black churches. Instead, the tradition of the Black Messiah was, according to Cleage, best represented by a vanguard or remnant polity of those who possessed a true religious-racial consciousness. This emphasis on a chosen remnant further underscores the eschatological logic of Cleage's Black theology.

As a matter of apocalyptic survival, it was important that the mainline Black church reform its apostate ways. Indeed, Cleage argued that growing trends of African American secularism were rooted, not so much in generational changes, but in the Black church's essentially quietist response to the dawning of the Black Power era. With the futurity of this institution in mind, he asked his congregants:

> What is the role of the black church in all this is happening…Can the black church adjust and survive, or must it be destroyed and rebuilt from the ashes? As black people begin to re-evaluate. they more and more tend to kick out

religion and the church. They say this is a white man's thing. He has used it to keep us in subjection all these years. We'll just put it aside and forget it.[49]

Here, Cleage leveraged the Black/white binary in order to set up the idea that one of the most problematic sins of the Black religious experience was the sin of forgetting. Indeed, if the Black divine was an eternal presence, then to put it aside and forget it was to stray dangerously away from God. It was also to misunderstand the nature of God's future plans for his chosen people.

…

It is challenging to locate the dividing line where Rev. Cleage's religious ideals and racial values diverge. He used religious language and analogies in explicitly a-historical ways – all in the name of rediscovering the truth about the historical Jesus as a prophetic, nationalistic, Black Messiah. For example, according to Cleage, Paul of Tarsus had been the ultimate "Uncle Tom" of the early Jesus movement.[50] This theological critique was founded on Paul's well-known status as the 'Apostle to the Gentiles' – a position Cleage found to be at odds with his understanding of the teachings of Jesus. For Cleage, Jesus of Nazareth was at his core a Black nationalist. His message was one about the importance of divine peoplehood, a message which had been corrupted precisely by the Apostle Paul's attempts to incorporate gentiles into the Jesus movement. Paul, for Cleage, was responsible for making Christianity into an individualistic as opposed to a nationalistic movement.

Cleage used religious logic metonymically in order to both understand the racial politics of his moment and to assert a sense of historical agency among his

congregants. To be a follower of the Black Messiah – not just a member of a Black church – was a significant commitment. In terms of the question of racial conflict and what types of actions the religion of Jesus demanded of its adherents, according to Rev. Cleage:

> We cannot pray for racial peace yet. Not in this church, because we know whom we serve. We are followers of a Black Messiah who two thousand years ago tried to bring black men together so that they might fight for freedom. So we do not join in prayer for racial peace. We pray that struggle and conflict may go on until black men and women are free.[51]

To know "whom" one serves formed the bedrock of Cleage's logic here – correct knowledge of God led to correct political action or, in this case, correct political negation. It provided one with the strength to refuse to comply with the prevailing desire to moderate racial conflict. Instead, to worship the Black Messiah gave license to both protest and dissent. This protest was aimed at a achieving a greater (hence, nationalist) solidarity. By implication, eventually all Black people would realize the truth of the Black Messiah.

Though the comments he made regarding the Black church were often about confronting its apostate relationship to the Black Messiah, there were occasional exemptions from his criticism. When pressed by his 1969 biographer Hiley Ward on the question of his relationship to other Black ministers Cleage did explicitly note the influence of two important Black Detroit clergymen on his spiritual development: naming both Charles Hill and Horace White.[52] But these positive evaluations of other Black clergy form the exception that makes the rule in Cleage's case. Instead of praise, he expressed many of his fundamental concerns about change over time vis-à-

vis his critique of the mainline Black church, insisting that "the modern church has ceased to regard itself as a Transforming Community."[53] In refusing this role as a transformative force in Black culture, mainline African American clergy were their role in divine agency.

His critiques of the Black church were not just institutional but theological in nature. He argued that, writ large, Black people in America "have a hard time as Black people basically because of our theology."[54] In order to correct this, according to Cleage, Black people necessarily needed "to change our theology before we can deal with operant conditioning. We have a hard time believing that the white man has made idiots out of us."[55] The theology of the mainline Black church operated, for Cleage, much like the idea of false consciousness. Its theology formed an ideology which has to be directly confronted and undone in order for revolutionary change to take place. It is possible that this stance, implicitly, shows some of the influences organized labor in Detroit expressed over the development of Cleage's political consciousness.[56]

As his sermonic messages around the problem of "idiocy" indicates, ignorance was, for Cleage, a profound form of sin. This was especially true of Black people's ignorance of themselves as a consequence of white supremacy. It resulted, according to Cleage, in a fundamental inability of certain segments of the African American community to apprehend the present. Thus, for Rev. Cleage, "the most ignorant people I have talked to since the Detroit Rebellion have been Black professional people. They could have been living thirty years ago."[57] In Cleage's

criticism he demonstrated a clear issue with Black professional people's sense of temporality: they were, according to Cleage, out of joint with the revolutionary spirit of the times in that they seemed to be living "thirty years ago."[58] It was for this reason that Cleage claimed that Black Power advocates, like himself, "obviously" can't "expect them to play any part in the struggle to make the black church relevant."[59] Instead, he would position himself as the leader of a prophetic, chosen minority that followed in the true legacy of the Black Messiah.

When declaiming the false piety of mainline Black churches Cleage would at times tie his critiques back to American electoral politics. Hence, in one of his sermons published in *The Black Messiah,* Cleage insisted that:

> The President of the United States [LBJ] has asked us to join with Christian Churches everywhere in America in a big prayer for racial peace. By racial peace I know he means the end of racial violence. And I know that in many black churches all over the U.S. there will be pious exhortations to black congregations. Black preachers will read from the Bible and misinterpret what Jesus said and misinterpret the message of the Old Testament. And they will caution people that 'this thing has gone too far.' It hasn't gone too far, it hasn't gone far enough yet. Because we are still in chains.[60]

Rev. Cleage ended this sermonic passage by articulating a clear piece of criteria for measuring Black religious political action: it is about freedom, not comfort. Assimilation to the comforts of a white supremacist society were no measure of either one's health or one's holiness. In fact, for Cleage, these two things were often in a kind of necessary conflict with one another: to be free was to be uncomfortable, and to clearly understand the source of that systemic discomfort. In his theology he brought together an ontological state (discomfort) with an epistemological condition

(critical thought). Freedom, for Cleage, had a temporality that was broken open through an activation of Black people's critical consciousness. It was about embodying a way of thinking through discomfort that always pushed toward the 'not yet' contained logically within the concept of freedom.

Many of Cleage's favored lines of critique were epistemological in nature. Cleage's emphasis as a preacher on cultivating clear understanding can be seen in how he indicted mainline African American churches for what he saw as their repeated misinterpretations of scripture, both "Old" and "New." Cleage tied these misinterpretations to false political actions: in this case, complying with the Johnson Administration's desire to see Black churches publicly praying for racial peace. This rhetoric mirrored Cleage's own refusal to enter into the Detroit uprising as a 'peacemaker' when local Black clergy had been asked to do so by the Mayor's office.[61] For Cleage, to pray upon command for racial peace demonstrated the mainline Black church's dogmatic relationship to white American culture. Instead, Cleage would focus his theology on finding ways to express what he saw as the revolutionary legacy of the Black Messiah.

Revolutionary, liberator, and freedom-fighter – these were the theological watchwords that inspired Cleage's image of the Black Messiah. Other reasons one might turn toward religion, for instance, as a source of immediate peace or a sense of serenity, were simply distractions according to Cleage's Black Power theology. During his 979 "The Fall of Man" sermon he used the analogy of Nazi Germany to convey this theology to his congregation:

> What would it take to make you happy?... You can be conditioned so that anything can make you happy. You can be conditioned to like anything. To desire anything…What is happiness? A state of having what you think you want, right? And, that could be anything… Hitler was happy. Hitler was happy killing six million Jews. White folks in the south oppressing and brow-beating and killing Black people, they were happy doing it.[62]

Happiness, so conceived, was essentially epiphenomenal and represented no guarantee of right action. For Cleage, obedience to the legacy of the Black Messiah necessarily meant disobedience to the imperial state. To practice disobedience to white supremacy, to put it in Cleage's own specific context, meant making oneself and others existentially uncomfortable with their experience of race.

Cleage's theological vision leveraged negative images of the mainline Black church in order to foster a sense of revolutionary Black consciousness within his own religious movement. Leading prayers, and later publishing them in *The Black Messiah*, about how Black peoples spirits "may not grow weak" and "that conflict may not make of us Uncle Toms."[63] Cleage's prayers extended toward Black churches specifically: "we pray that black churches from coast to coast will someday, and not too far in the future, become like we are, churches dedicated to the freedom of black people, centers of black culture."[64] His use of the phrase "from coast to coast" in this prayer demonstrates the extent to which he continued well into the late 1960s to use the nation state as his dominant political framework. Other metaphors were possible here: why not, for instance, from 'shores to shores' to include Africa and/or the rest of the African diaspora? Indeed, he later moved toward this kind of symbolism when he rebranded his Black Christian Nationalist movement into the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church.

In his prayer that the Black church should become like the Shrine of the Black Madonna we can see Cleage engaging in some prophetic language games. Particularly in regards to futurity, two clear pieces of criteria were laid out in regards to what the Black church must become in order to work within the tradition of the Black Messiah. First, that churches must be dedicated to freedom. Second, that they must serve as centers of Black culture. Interestingly, there is nothing particularly Christian about either of these criteria that Cleage put forth. Rather, his whole appeal is predicated on a secularized audience. Through the use of such prayers he seems to have been banking on his audience's desire for racial solidarity and an end to Jim Crow, and less on their longing to be in a place that was a Black church in a traditional sense. This is not to say that these two desires were totally separable for Cleage and the broader Shrine movement – I don't think they were. The lack of severability is an essential aspect of his theological claims. But, nonetheless, his rhetoric here assumed a 'secular' basis.

For Cleage, the church was implicitly housed by a larger structure: society. Indeed, the overarching presence of modern society presented unique challenges to Black religious leadership: "The black church must understand our dilemma, and must offer leadership in complex areas totally unknown to the down-home fire-and-brimstone preacher."[65] It is the complexity of modern problems, seemingly, that necessitated religious involvement in ostensibly non-religious areas of society. Of course, if the Black church was eternal but also at the same time subject to transformations in a broader societal context, one might justly ask: what sort of

agency moves the forces of 'society' and whether or not those are also eternal. Regardless of the temporal issues such a view presents, Cleage was speaking here, more directly, of the need for theologians to be both on-time and of-the-times.

The Black Power era demand a revaluation of the political strategies of the Civil Rights Movement, which had ostensibly ended with the Poor Peoples Campaign of 1968. If the Civil Rights model of the Black church was inadequate, where then can we find a theology that is on-time in a Cleagean sense? One answer was the older style more "down-home" Black churches. These represented, for Cleage, a sort of hybridized space of partial freedoms, partial Black cultural expressions, and partial truths. From the pulpit he put it this way:

> Now, the old down-home churches, Baptist, Methodist or what have you, were in a sense a replica of white folks religion. But there we took white folks Christianity, twisted it around and made it fit at least a few of our needs. When you worship in a down-home black church, at least you feel good. The music is good, you can jump up and down, you can shout and feel free – free like you are at home.[66]

The essential nature of freedom comes here, for Cleage, through the Black church's creative appropriation of Christianity for its own use within the Black community. This included meeting the Black community's needs for things like sonic pleasure, a sense of home and belonging, etc.

He noted the importance of traditions like the 'shout' in actually helping to form a sense of belonging through the Black church's historical soundscape. Rev. Cleage insisted that "the uneducated Black preacher who can 'shout' a congregation" is ultimately "more meaningful than the most sophisticated middle-class Black pastor

who whispers a sermon that's unrelated to anything" in the Black people's experience.[67] Cleage was speaking here to the critical importance of sonic authenticity in the Black religious experience. The goal of a Black sermon was to rouse its congregation – hence, it should be a shout rather than a whisper. Sound was, for Cleage and Cone alike, a crucial expression of a free and creative Black conscious. To 'shout' in the context of Black worship was to practice the art of being a little less governable (vis-à-vis white supremacy) – it was an essential part of the freedom to appropriate and use Christianity for the pleasure of the Black community. The 'shout' represented the construction of a language game that could both a) build racial solidarity and b) work within the dominant norms of white society. The 'whisper,' in this context, represented something like a distorted echo of white supremacy. Its sonic structure is all but inaudible, except to the nearest at hand.

The importance of these sonic cultural connections shined through in the Rev. Cleage's juxtaposition of white Christian and Black church music. In particular, he claimed that: "everywhere the black church tries to be like the white man's church."[68] Indeed, the problem was one of both race and class because, according to Cleage, "the more education black worshippers have, the harder they try" to mimic white Christians.[69] He explicitly noted how middleclass mainline Black churches "even try to copy the dead emptiness of the white folks service, the little rhythmless songs with nothing to pat your foot to all through the service.[70] Cleage was signaling something important here in terms of his sonic politics: the tapping of one's feet represented the ability of the audience to participate in the communal rhythms of divine song. An

ability to share in the rhythm of worship demonstrated one's ability to be in-sync and, therefore, on-time with those around them. The ability of the Black church to create these kinds of moments of sonic connectivity was, however partial its expression may be in the down-home church model Cleage described, something that Cleage considered to be a theological resource and strength to build upon. To call forth the Black Messiah required becoming a people – peoplehood. And peoplehood, according to Cleage, included a kind of vision for cultural rebirth. Hence the importance of sonic themes for creating a community in anticipation of the Black Messiah's return.

Like other Black ministers before him had done, in order to further draw his congregants into a sense of their own peoplehood, Cleage leaned into a dialogical preaching style by staging conversations between himself and his audience as he preached. In performing these narrative dialogues, Cleage used questions to bind his congregants both to one another and to himself through fictive conversation. More important than any specific series of questions that Cleage raised from the pulpit was the fact that Cleage's sermonic technique established a communal logic between preacher and audience:

> You say well, if we are God's chosen people, God is our God, then we wouldn't have a hard time. We accept the covenant, why do we have so much trouble? We don't understand what it means to be the chosen people of God. We don't understand what is demanded of us if we are the children of God, the chosen of God.[71]

It is in and through this dialogical "we" that Rev. Cleage pointed to the need for collective self-consciousness and mutual understanding within the Black church. This

tied congregant to minister in a way that was more than simply monological – it made the congregant's perspective (indeed, often their doubt) central to the meaning of the sermon. So too, here we see explicit themes of peoplehood and covenant in Cleage's sermonic language – especially in regards to the demands of covenantal relationships with the divine.

The work of becoming a people was rigorous in terms of its demands on one's consciousness/self-understanding. Cleage often used these sermonic dialogues in order to generate a sense of solidarity but also feelings of cognitive dissonance within the members of his audience. From the regularity with which he used this method, I argue that this must have been one of his favorite approaches for fostering spiritual self-transformation. In working to create a sense of dissonance among his congrenants his language was often harsh. As for example, in his 1984 sermon entitled "The Black Man's Inner Conflicts" when he stated that:

> It's hard for a Black person to live in a white man's world without being niggerized. But, it's difficult for a Black person to accept his niggerization and bring it into conscious mind. A Black person's first action when he hears that he has been niggerized is to say, 'not me' and then flee. Flee as fast as he can away from the knowledge of his niggerization. Because if you began to understand that you have been niggerized, there is a tendency that you are going to change. And, the change is a difficult process intellectually.[72]

In these statements Cleage, like Cone and Moltmann, demonstrated his penchant for intellectual approaches to change. Race was portrayed here as problem of racial consciousness – the difference between being Black (with a positive valance) and the "niggerization" process was one of consciousness of their own racial being. In keeping with his role as Black Power theologian, ideas came first – they were the

first step on the road to racial transformation. In openly 'discussing' the violence of the racialization process from the pulpit Rev. Cleage forced this confrontation in consciousness. Ultimately, it meant that he and his congregants had more in common than just their shared racial characteristics (this was true of any Black church), but also possessed a shared understanding of what their Blackness meant and how it related to others.

…

These teachings on racial consciousness were not only tied to the Black church (via negativa) but also reflect the influence of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam and the ministry of Malcolm X. As the shared title of "nation" denotes, for both Elijah Muhammad and Rev. Cleage the most basic moral unit of Black religious life was not the individual but the group, variously defined. As Cleage insisted in his July 1984 sermon introducing the theology of Black Christian Nationalism, God only "deals with us as" in as much as "we come together in a group with a covenant relationship" and as a group to demonstrate commitment to the Black Messiah.[73] Religion was not solely a matter of personal belief from Cleage's Black nationalist perspective. Which was why, according to Cleage it was "not enough to say, 'I believe in God, but I don't have anything to do with anybody else who believes in God.'"[74] There was no way, according to Cleage, to make a real connection with God vis-à-vis individual belief – this was a fairly radical detachment from the major thrust of Protestantism. Instead of individualistic belief, according to Cleage, "you have to serve God as you are a part of the people of God. As you are a part of a group that is

dedicated to God. You must be part of God's chosen people."[75] This view of religion as a collective enterprise dovetailed with Cleage's eschatological beliefs, which might best be characterized as syncretic in a that they reflect a post-Pauline-Jewish-Christian model.

The only really relevant political question was, then, how to become a people? This basically Black nationalist problematic guided much of Cleage's theological explorations as well as many of the practical steps he took in building out his church during the late 1970s and 1980s. He assumed that modern problems, like white supremacy, could not be resolved through models of individual agency, but rather they require human collectives (social movements, nations, congregations, etc.) in order to enact changes that made a difference. These problems were both religious and secular in the sense that they were tied to history (modern white supremacy) but also contained eschatological consequences. So while Cleage's sense of agency may have been divinely driven it was manifest only, really, in the work of human collectives here on earth. I argue that Cleage's although Cleage invoked Ancient Israel in his sermonic rhetoric, he looked more to contemporary African American religious examples like the Nation of Islam as a means of living out this mission of divine peoplehood.

Hence the church's need to adapt itself in order to be able to connect with other areas of Black life and to offer leadership in them that was separate from U.S. state structures. This effort in framing African American religion as a vehicle for Black separatist concerns was also related to the Nation of Islam's model. By

establishing a separate culture that permeated beyond Sunday services and into other sectors of Black life, like food and clothing production, the NOI helped to set up Cleage's vision of the need for Black religious leadership in areas of society traditionally outside of the preview of the church. As the scholar of the NOI Edward Curtis described in his work on the Nation, from early on there was an emphasis on diet, nutrition, and health – including Elijah Muhammad personally profiting off the NOI's serval farms, meat processing plant, and grocery stores.[76] Elijah Muhammad's own 1965 writings in *Message to the Black Man in America* included extensive programs for Black "self-development," including calls for the creation of independent Black economic enterprises [77]

The extent to which involvement in society meant engaging directly in electoral politics formed a tension between Cleage and the NOI's positions on Black religion. Earlier on in Cleage's career in Detroit (throughout most of the 1960s) he sought out direct engagement in a number of national level politic battles. Whereas Elijah Muhammad famously censored Malcolm X for speaking out too directly in regards to American state politics (i.e. the chickens coming home to roost episode).[78] Based on Rev. Cleage's style of activism during the 1960s, which included a third party run for Michigan Governor under the banner of the left-wing "Freedom Now Party," he intended for electoral politics to be one of those areas of life that required an active Black religious presence. By the mid-1970s Cleage was still engaged with Detroit area electoral politics but not as much in national or state level activism,

except for his repeatedly positive comments from the pulpit regarding Jesse Jackson's run for President.[79]

Even as Rev. Cleage's interest in directly engaging national electoral politics ebbed and flowed with the decades, certain types of spatial metaphors meant to promote religious belonging came to balanced his interest in U.S. statecraft. For instance, Cleage's desire for a more robust notion of religious peoplehood merged with his interest in the Black church as a vehicle for the reclamation of the idea of Africa. Cleage was developing these themes in response to a broader Black Power push toward reclaiming African aesthetics. Thus, to be of the times, Cleage argued that the Black church "must speak to the needs of black people who are proud of their African heritage."[80]

Anyone familiar with the basic theological position of Elijah Mahammad's NOI, not to mention Malcolm X's legacy in regards to the continent, would find Cleage's use of 'back to Africa' symbolism intriguing. On the one hand, part of what made the NOI's cosmology unique was its insistence on the original African origins of Islam with the mythical tribe of Shabazz.[81] Muhammad's origin story in *Message to the Blackman in America* lead the NOI's publication *Muhammad Speaks* to publish articles throughout the 1960s that relied on modern archaeological and anthropological findings in order to "prove" that Blacks "were the first human inhabitants of the earth.[82] Then there was, of course, Malcolm X who often referred to the United States as the "wilderness of North America" – a place where Black people needed to be transformed into "proud, disciplined, 'Asiatic' Muslims" aware of their

African roots.[83] However, the NOI's relationship to the African continent was more complicated then a simple reading of its cosmology suggests. Toward sub-Saharan Africa, the NOI was often either ambivalent, at best, or derogatory, at worst. Rather than a positive reevaluation of the entire continent, North Africa and the Middle East were the focus of the NOI's moral geography. This shows that there was both a shared vision and critical distance between Cleage's use of Africa in the Shrine movement and the NOI.

Nevertheless, one important part of what made Cleage controversial among his fellow Black Protestants of the 1960s was his desire to welcome those associated with the NOI into his church – while at the same time alienating and criticism many Black Christians and their clergy.[84] For example, during his heresy trial in 1964, the Rev. Cleage was pointedly questioned about his joint appearance with Malcolm X when he was speaking in Detroit earlier that same year. Rev. Cleage responded by resolutely stating that "yes," he had appeared alongside Malcolm.[85] Defending himself by pointing out that: "and you'll note in reports that I gave a Christian invocation and I did it as a Christian clergyman."[86] Cleage's invocation of his Christianity in defense of his actions is interesting – seemingly, the problem as it is framed by Cleage here is Malcolm's *Islam* but if you look at the charges brought against Cleage the issues were centered around his racial politics. Cleage concluded his response by advising his inquisitors that "you ought to have Malcolm out to your churches," and insisting that "he's better than the stuff they get. He would come…he could do you so much good."[87]

At a time when many of his fellow Black clergy were taking pains to distance themselves from Malcolm X's work, Cleage argued for Malcolm's visionary status among African American Christians and pointed toward the unique role he could have played in the Black church. Through Malcolm's ability to prophetically denounce Christianity, he spurred African American Christians like Cleage to reform it. At a certain point these reforms became so pronounced that the relationship between Cleage's movement and Christianity writ large was called into question. Hence, Rev. Cleage would eventually come around to the position in his 1979 "The Fall of Man" sermon that:

> We're not saying that other churches are bad or anything, we're just saying that most of them are not trying to teach you how to be a Christian. So, there is a certain reason to be in the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church. We try to teach you how to be Christian, how to practice Christianity, how to do the things that you have to do.[88]

With inspiration taken from groups like the NOI, and religious leaders like Malcolm, Cleage shored up his vision of the Black church as a transformational and revolutionary institution. While these transformations came with a cost in terms of inner-denominational conflict (as seen in his heresy trial) they ultimately allowed Cleage to make connections across African American religious traditions, as well as use syncretism in order to enrich and more clearly define the vanguard status of his own movement.

Rather than the language of a vanguard, per say, Cleage often invoked the more eschatological logic of chosenness. Numerous times throughout his sermons in

both the 1960s and 1970s Cleage couched his concern over Black people's self-image in this language of divine election:

> We were God's chosen people. A people who came into being, who were created first. The first men who existed, who were on the continent of Africa. And, so we are God's chosen people. And the idea of considering ourselves inferior and worthless is not only demeaning to us, but is demeaning to God.[89]

Cleage's continued references to Africa as the original location of (Black) man show some of basic the influences of the NOI's cosmology on this thinking noted before. In addition, these references to Africa demonstrate his belief that the Black church would regain a sense of relevance through its ability to authorize it (African) origins – and thus rejoining itself to an unalienated state of existence. From Cleage's perspective, the reality of Black peoples divine election required Black religious institutions to reevaluate their symbolic relationship to Africa.

The image of Africa remained an issue from his perspective because "even today," according to Cleage, "when Africa has come a long way politically, we are still ashamed of Africa."[90] He explicitly invoked Malcolm X in order to drive this point home. Insisting that "Malcolm X wasn't too far wrong when he said," to Black men "you left your mind in Africa."[91] Cleage agreed this with assessment but also extended the metaphor in a more deeply racialized direction:

> We did leave our minds in Africa. We do not understand today the world in which we live because too much of the basis of our minds are rooted in Africa -- in African thought -- in African concept -- in African philosophy -- African theology. We have a weird kind of Black man in American who left his mind in Africa. That's the niggerization process.[92]

Through his framing the loss of African origins as the 'niggerization' process Cleage showed a sharpening of his views on race during the 1970s. Whereas in the 1960s he was more likely to have used the epithet "Tom" or here we have an escalation to "niggererization."

This was not a "back to Africa" movement in a literal sense. Rather, it was a reclamation of African in a symbolic and ultimately Black nationalistic way. In reflection of his political break with the Henry brothers, Cleage insisted that he personally did "not advocate a 'back to Africa' or geographic separation beyond the separation that already exists in urban ghettos of the North or rural ghettos of the South."[93] His focus, like that of the NOI, was much more American in its overall orientation. He argued that "black people living in the separate ghettos to which they have been forced have a common bond by virtue of their history, culture, and common oppression. Certainly we can think of ourselves as being a Nation within a nation."[94]

In promoting this idea of a "nation within a nation" Cleage's Black Christian Nationalism insisted on personal cleanliness and individual hygiene as "evidence of your respect for the nation."[95] Though similar to the NOI, Cleage's system was not nearly as rigid as Elijah Muhammad's rituals regarding the body which, for example, included avoiding eating the slave masters foods (such as pork) and especially strict dress for Black women.[96] Cleage's Black Christian Nationalist emphasis on cleanliness included direct guidance on fashion issued to members of the Shrine – but it was a flexible standard. For example, the 1969 guidelines on dress for Shrine

members stated that one should: “Respect the Nation and yourself through” their “dress.”[97] These guidelines also included a vision for further standardization: “The Nation will move to a standard mode of dress, but we will evolve to that standard. So don’t get hung up on what style of clothing is worn.”[98] Rather, Cleage insisted that if on one day a “a member wears African dress, that’s beautiful – don’t knock it” and “by the same token, if one wears Western dress, don’t knock that.”[99] His religious movement was about creating a chosen people. As such, he held a decidedly cultural conception of what a church was.[100]

When interviewed by Hiley Ward for his 1969 biography Cleage argued that the main issue with the NOI was that it demanded too much of a break with the past for most African Americans to get behind – most of whom grew up with Methodist, Baptist, or revivalist religious traditions.[101] This was a part of the broader give and take between the Nation of Islam and Black Christian Nationalism – an exchange that was made more complicated after internal divisions within the NOI forced Malcolm out of the organization. Even after Malcolm’s 1965 assassination Betty Shabazz, Malcolm’s widow, continued to praise the Shrine’s religious movement and vowed to help support Cleage in his work.[102]

The influence of the NOI resulted in the Shrine’s push, on the one hand, for Black cooperative enterprises as an expression of their nationalism.[103] This included the establishment of businesses under the name of Black Star: including a grocery store, service station, and clothing factory.[104] Cleage’s overt preference for cooperative economic models grew out of a critique of profit-making and its effects

on the Black community. Rev. Cleage argued that the pursuit of profit caused people to squabble over money and ultimately broke down ties of community.[105] He explicitly cited the NOI when seeking out models for Black community-run operations: “We must build for ourselves black social agencies controlled by black people. We need a black trucking line to bring food from black farmers in the South to black consumers in the North.”[106] According to Cleage in his 1969 interviews with Hiley Ward, “the only organization seriously moving in the right direction is the Black Muslim Movement headed by Elijah Muhammad…. This is a movement toward genuine Black Power.”[107]

That being said, Cleage’s overall positive appraisal of the NOI’s economic model had its limits. According to an article written about Cleage’s movement in the *Detroit Free Press* entitled “A ‘Black’ Nation Is Achieved” the Reverend was “no longer concerned with building ‘black capitalism’ in the manner of the black Muslims, who encourage their members to establish stores and then patronize them.”[108] Instead, members of the Black Christian Nationalist movement were “more likely to give away their services and goods free of charge. Cleage calls it ‘service economics.’”[109] Cleage’s model is more of a Black mutual aide system as opposed to the profit seeking ventures that were spearheaded by Elijah Muhammad and which ended up concentrating funds back into his own pocket.

…

On levels that were economic, religious, and cultural, Cleage was a man with a vision for his community. From the perspective of the relationship between his intellectual production (Black theology) and his leadership of social movements (the Shrine itself), how did his vision for the Black community effect the way others viewed him? Indeed, if he believed in divine election and defined that sense of chosenness for his movement, is it appropriate to consider Cleage's work as prophetic? If so, then I would argued that a prophet is often an important eschatological figure as well as a visionary one. Likewise, a prophet signifys a figure that is shared between Christianity and the NOI.

Instead of the term prophet, Cleage preferred to call himself a realist – preferring this title even to the more radical label 'militant.'[110] According to others who knew him well, such as his daughter Pearl Cleage, the jury was still out in regards to the question of Cleage's prophetic status: "I don't know. He may be a prophet. It's hard to think of him that way. I know him so well. There is no objection to it. It is not a negative concept."[111] Pearl Cleage would herself go on to have a fascinating intellectual trajectory – becoming a Black feminist writer and a contemporary of luminaires like Alice Waters.

Betty Shabazz answered the question regarding Rev. Cleage's prophetic status this way: "anyone who has such a beautiful picture of a black woman in his church must be a great man. Anyone with such a painting, that is so beautiful and has such a spiritual quality, I think what he would do would be for the good of black people."[112]

So, whether he was technically a prophet or not, Shabazz argued that Rev. Cleage was "a fine man and should be congratulated."[113]

Prophetic work was not just visionary in the sense that Shabazz pointed to within images like the Black Madonna altarpiece. It also had certain sonic dimensions within the Black religious tradition. According to Cleage, prophetic work "is a spoken thing – a voice."[114] This prophetic voice was more than just mere 'talk': "Just to talk is not a prophetic role. But a prophetic voice indicts, condemns."[115] The prophetic reveals God's judgements through their unique vocalization. This might account, partly, for Cleage's overall preference for vocal/sermonic work over and above written systemic theologies. Though less reputable as scholarly texts, sermons were able to leverage the prophetic functions within Black religion in a more sonically rich way then a theoretically driven theological text.

When asked directly by his 1969 biographer Hiley Ward as to whether or not he considered himself a prophet, the Rev. Cleage gave a somewhat elusive answer. Cleage used his response to explain that the prophetic, though essential, was only one aspect of religion. Religious movements, by their very nature, had "several aspects" – namely, the "priestly and ministerial," as well as their "prophetic" functions.[116] Cleage described "being prophetic" as about engaging in a process by wherein one places "something under [the] judgment of eternal values."[117] The prophet then has an eschatological function vis-à-vis their ability to levy judgments that reflect "eternal values." By bringing together judgment and eternality, the prophet uses their own voice in order to condemn the present and so authorize God's future.

Instead of more traditional prophetic examples taken from the Hebrew Bible's major and minor prophets, Cleage insisted that the Black Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, was his "favorite prophet."[118] Cleage readily admitted that his was not really a "traditional interpretation" of Jesus, but Cleage nerveless saw him as prophetic in terms of his work as "a revolutionary leader."[119] Although, according to Cleage, Jesus the Black prophet "didn't get far toward power," the importance of his example was in the fact that "his was a revolutionary movement, and we are trying to do the same basic thing."[120]

To label Jesus as, first and foremost, a prophet was to sway dangerously close to an Islamic interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth. At the same time, to say that Jesus was your "favorite prophet" was to push directly against the claims of the NOI, which would surely have favored the prophetic work of figures like the Prophet Muhammad or even W.D. Fard/Elijah Muhammad. If we take this statement on the prophetic Jesus as a reflection on Cleage's own revolutionary career, then the fact that he himself didn't get very "far toward power" in his attempt to, for instance, 1964 run for governor of Michigan can still be seen as both revolutionary and redemptive. Ultimately, Rev. Cleage classified his prophetic status as such: "My ministry is to evaluate social action in the world, to see if it is compatible with what I consider truth, justice."[121] By centering "social action in the world" and by invoking his own judgment as his guide, Cleage leaned on prophetic logic even as he assuaged the title itself.

…

To take on the role of the prophet was to live dangerously. Rev. Cleage's theological conclusions were related to the violent threats to his life that he faced during the course of his ministry at the Shrine.[122] By 1968, the presence of Beverly Williams, Cleage's personal bodyguard, was familiar to Shrine goers.[123] An ex-convict, Williams was reportedly always unarmed when guarding Cleage during Shrine events – apparently out of fear of provoking the Detroit Police and providing them with an excuse to exhibit lethal force.[124] The fear over the use of firearms was a justified concern. In March of 1969, what began as a shootout in from of New Bethel Baptist Church transformed into a police assault on Cleage's Shrine, located just down the road.[125] As the Shrine hosted a meeting for the Republic of New Africa, the pews were riddled with bullets, leaving four in the church wounded from the encounter.[126]

These incidents of direct police violence were balanced by the threat of government surveillance. Like the overall governmental response to the Detroit uprising itself, spying on Cleage was a combined law enforcement effort that brought together interference from Army Intelligence (as seen in the *Laird v. Tatum* case) as well as the FBI, as will be explored in chapter three.

In response to this violence, Cleage enacted multiple safety and security measures that we know of. Suggestively, the best security measures, Cleage alluded, were those that were keep secret and invisible from the perspective of outsiders.[127] Cleage also framed eschatological security in the metaphors of active resistance. Claiming that if those at the Shrine "decided we want the Promised Land of freedom

and equality, we have to make the sacrifice involved."[128] Like his theory of spiritual self-transformation, this was not an easy task – but, rather, one that necessitated militant struggle. Hence his claim that: "It's too easy to look at American today and see the promised land waiting for us all. But God's word to us is the same as to the Jews*: If you don't want to fight, then you'll be banished*."[129] [my emphasis] In chapter three I take up these security measures as a way of gaging just how Cleage envisioned this fight for the promised land was to be fought.

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[1] Eulogy For the Black Church, 1984, 2010025 Aa 2, box 3, Albert B. Cleage Jr. Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Cleage Papers).
[2] See Lillian Barger especially on Cone without Cleage, *The World Come of Age*, 36, 38, 40, & 224.
[3] Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).
[4] Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 237.
[5] Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 250-251.
[6] Hiley Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 35.
[7] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation,* 35, 38, & 39.
[8] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 49.
[9] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 52-53.
[10] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 53.
[11] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 54.
[12] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 56.
[13] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation,* 51.
[14] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 9.
[15] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 9.
[16] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 9.
[17] For examples of Cleage within the literature on religion and Black Power see, for instance, William Van De Burg's *New Day In Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 236-247, as well as Gayraud Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 24, & 244-245. For dedicated studies of Cleage see: Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, Dillard, *Faith in the City*.

[18] Though there is an extensive conversation about Malcolm X's work in Detroit Cleage does not show up as a meaningful figure in, for instance, DeCaro's study of Malcolm X. See Louis DeCaro, *On The Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
[19] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 99.
[20] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 179.
[21] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 5.
[22] Dillard, *Faith in the City,* 287.
[23] Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 237.
[24] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 15.
[25] Fran Jeffries's "A Land of Promise" from *African American Family*, 2006, box 1, Cleage Papers.
[26] Jeffries, "A Land of Promise," Cleage Papers.
[27] Darren A. Nichols, "Hundreds mourn Cleage's death," *The Detroit News* (Detroit, MI), Feb. 27, 2000.
[28] The Fall of Man, 3, June, 1979, box 2, Cleage Papers.
[29] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[30] Albert Cleage, "The Resurrection of the Nation" in *The Black Messiah* (Trenton: African World Press, 1989), 85.
[31] Cleage, "The Resurrection of the Nation," *Black Messiah*, 86.
[32] Cleage, "The Resurrection of the Nation," *Black Messiah*, 86.
[33] Cleage, "The Resurrection of the Nation," *Black Messiah*, 86.
[34] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 7.
[35] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 7.
[36] Cleage quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 8.
[37] Cleage quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 8.
[38] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 17.
[39] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 7.
[40] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 4.
[41] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 11.
[42] See Hiley Ward's account in *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 110-118.
[43] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation,* x.
[44] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 153.
[45] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 147.
[46] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 153.
[47] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation,* x.
[48] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[49] Albert Cleage, "New-Time Religion" in *The Black Messiah* (Trenton: African World Press, 1989), 104.
[50] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 135.
[51] Albert Cleage, "Grapes of Wrath" in *The Black Messiah*, (Trenton: African World Press, 1989), 131.
[52] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 42.

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[80] Cleage, "New-Time Religion," *Black Messiah*, 102.
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[82] See Curtis' discussion of these narratives in *Black Muslim Religion*, 77-86. Quote found on page 77.
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[122] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 107.
[123] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 114.
[124] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 115.
[125] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 116.

[126] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 116.
[127] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 122.
[128] Cleage quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, viii.
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Chapter Three: Waiting on the Black Messiah

Who are they who long for the coming of the Lord, and for what purpose? They who wait on the Lord are they who are weak; they are the poor, the helpless, the downtrodden. The powerful have no need for God's future: they are confident that their own present strength will prevail.[1]

- James Cone

Word about town during the Summer of 1968 was that the Rev. Cleage was moving house again. This time he was relocating from the home he had shared with his ex-wife into a downtown apartment near the Detroit riverfront. Curiously, his biographer of the late 1960s, Hiley Ward, ascribed Cleage's desire for new accommodations to a certain level of paranoia on behalf of the Black Power preacher.[2] On the one hand, Ward's original analysis of the move was in keeping with the Rev. Cleage's penchant for performance. He was, in this sense, very much a son of Motown and of Detroit as a center for Black artistic production. As demonstrated by his interest in film studies during his 1940s sojourn in California as well as the provocative preaching style he practiced at the Shrine, Cleage's personal history proved that he was a showman who knew how utilize a dramatic narrative in order to keep his audience captivated. Hence Ward's argument in *Prophet of the Black Nation* that it was ultimately Cleage's bravado that lay behind his need to seek Shrine funds for the 1968 relocation.[3]

Contrary to Ward's analysis, however, FBI documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act confirm that the Bureau, with the help of multiple informants, sought permission from Director Hoover's office in Washington to install

telephone surveillance equipment (so-called ‘tesurs’) throughout the Shrine of the Black Madonna. In addition to the Shrine itself, at the same time the FBI requested permission for the installation of tesurs at Cleage’s Calvert Avenue residence as well as at the headquarters of his community advocacy group the City-Wide Citizens Action Committee located on Grand River. The request from the FBI’s Detroit field office put forward as justification for these measures that “Cleage has attracted to his camp militant black nationalists including a number of violent-prone individuals.”[4]

Given that these records ultimately vindicate Cleage’s sense of impending danger from federal law enforcement, several important questions remain in regards to understanding the significance of his work as a Black theologian: what were the effects of government surveillance on Cleage’s intellectual production throughout this period of interference? In particular, did the sense of threat that he felt from his own government have any discernable effect on the way that he worked out his eschatological position? And in what ways did the pressure from government surveillance and policing differ from the historical forces that shaped Cone’s end of time conclusions?

In comparing the apocalyptic theologies of Cone and Cleage, I explore how their differing institutional contexts and relationships to state violence shaped their eschatological positions. In doing so, I argue that the clear-cut divide between vertical and horizontal eschatologies has been, at times, overstated by scholars of apocalyptic religion.[5] On the one hand, it can be maintained that the vertical/horizontal binary forms a useful distinction when analyzing the effects of radicalism and/or quietism on

the eschatologically inclined. On the other hand, I contend that such an understanding overstates the degree to which the ultimate timely destiny of one's soul vis-à-vis death and the ultimate timely destiny of one's soul vis-à-vis the end of time are separated in Cone and Cleage's religious experience. As the scholar Gerhard Sauter argued in regards to Protestantism in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, when it comes to the end of time death always has a "double meaning."[6] On one level it denotes God's ultimate eschatological judgement and another level it suggests the "final decision" in regards to an individual's soul.[7] In the case of Rev. Cleage, protecting himself (individually) from the threat of government hostility and fostering a movement toward Black Christian Nationalism (congregationally) were linked theological projects – each related, in its own way, back to his eschatological expectations concerning the coming of the Black Messiah.

For Dr. Cone, though he lacked the immediate pressure of direct government interference in his work, the threat of death by white supremacist violence formed the existential background of many of his theological musings. From his earliest theological publications to his latest, death was an important intellectual issue for Cone. My exploration of him in this chapter ultimately circles back around to his analysis of death as a part of the work Black theology. In drawing out Cone's eschatological elements, I link his systematic theology to Cleage's example as an organizer and social movement leader. In lieu of an exhaustive review of Cleage's efforts as a religious leader, which were extensive and formed in response to a number of pressures, I focus this chapter first on the security measures that Cleage

undertook in response to incidents of state violence. In particular, as a part of this study I examine primary sources associated with the development of the "Maccabees" self-defense unit within the Shrine movement. While related to the Nation of Islam's own use of religiously based self-defense organizations (the Fruit of Islam) I argued that the Maccabees reflected Cleage's differing politics in regards to issues such as gender.

Apocalyptic discourses often involve the use of nonhuman figures/agents in playing out their end time logics. For both Cone and Cleage's Black theologies this included the use of demonological symbolism to support their end of time politics. These demonologies were highly racially charged, often using the language of the devil, demonic, and/or the antichrist as a way of labeling institutions like the white church. Given the racial nature of this language, I use this section of the chapter to examine how Cone and Cleage's writings/sermonic work on the demonic reflected their respective racial ontologies.

Finally, I end by directly comparing Cone and Cleage's theological comments on eschatology. In doing so, I bring this discussion of broad eschatological themes back to a focus on the meaning of death within Black theological tradition developed by Cone and Cleage. This comparison between the eschatologies of Cone and Cleage helps to demonstrate the historical tensions that formed Black theology as a field. It also helps to unpack, in detail, their understandings of race, justice, and futurity. I treat them as linked to one another in an untimely conversation – each working as theorists of the Black eschatological imagination in their own right. Ultimately, I

argue that both Cone and Cleage used their eschatologies in an attempt to unpack the problem of white supremacy.

…

Cleage's desired relocation to the riverfront apartment complex was only one small part of the broader security measures undertaken by the Shrine of the Black Madonna during the 1960s and 70s. In particular, following the turmoil around the Twelfth Street uprising, the Shrine sustained a serious dialogue among its congregational leaders about the need to secure the safety of their religious movement. Most prominent among the congregations' stated priorities were a) securing for themselves the freedom to regularly assemble and b) protecting the life and wellbeing of their minister. This was in response to, on the one hand, state violence vis-à-vis the Detroit City Police, Army Intelligence, and FBI. While on the other hand, Cleage was candid about what he saw as threats from white supremacist vigilantes – at times declining speaking engagements in the Detroit suburbs for fear of inciting a racial disturbance.[8]

In pursuit of these goals, a committee appointed by Rev. Cleage at the December 19, 1967 Shrine Executive Board meeting recommended the adoption of a reformed safety and security plan.[9] Specifically, the proposed reforms suggested that a permanent committee at the Shrine be established in order to "administer, direct, recruit and train young men of The Nation as security guards" as well as to "purchase any necessary equipment and supplies, and be responsible for safety and protection

for [the] Minister" in addition to "any members present at Church services, meetings, rallies, demonstrations, parades, picket lines, social affairs, group meetings or anything connected with the welfare and promotion of the Nation."[10] The very fact that the ad-hoc committee recommending this to the Shrine's Board listed not only church services but also meetings, picket lines, rallies and the like demonstrates the degree to which the Shrine built a politically active community outside of Sunday worship services. The sheer breadth of Nation-related events at once displays both the wide ranging activities of the congregation and the extensive sense of threat these activities brought on for Shrine leadership.

Principal among the demands of the December 1967 ad-hoc security committee was ensuring the physical safety of Rev. Cleage. The committee noted explicitly in their appeal to the Shrine's Executive Board how their new security recruits "shall be required to protect the Minister from any harm, in the performing of his duties during Church services, meetings, rallies, picket lines, etc.." especially by preventing "unauthorized persons from entering restricted areas of the Church building…Sunday School, meetings and social affairs held at the Church or in the Fellowship Hall."[11] The degree to which the committee emphasized the safety of their minister, as a movement leader both inside and outside of the church itself, makes sense given that they were all living in the aftermath of Martin and Malcolm's assassinations – one of whom was assassinated by a white supremacist, and one by a rival faction within the Black community, and both with possible U.S. government support at some level.

In order to be able to effectively protect Rev. Cleage from potential threats to his safety, this group of volunteers was to “be taught to use communication equipment, operate signal and alarm systems,” as well as the “use of firearms, (if necessary), Karate and Judo, (optional)” – partaking in all of these “duties with all due courtesy and respect."[12] This call from Shrine leadership for the creation of trained security forces was the groundwork for what would eventually become the group known as the Maccabees. Modeled in many respects on Elijah Muhammad’s Fruit of Islam, Cleage’s Maccabees evolved a few distinctive features. One being that Cleage used the metaphor of the Holy Order to describe membership within the Maccabees, publishing literature which stated that the “Holy Order of the Maccabees” was a “religious order of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church” that was “consecrated and sanctified by the divine authority of the church to serve as its *defenders, protectors,* and *utilitarian servants*.”[13] [original emphasis] This description of the Maccabee Holy Order included explicit refences to mix gender service and to African traditions: “The Holy Order of the Maccabees have resurrected the mystical warrior tradition of Africa to develop men and women who serve the needs of the Community in the modern world.”[14]

The late-1960s and early-1970s push for enhanced security measures at the Shrine was related to the congregation’s direct involvement in a handful of incidents of police brutality. One notable example of Rev. Cleage’s growing concerns over police brutality throughout the Black Power era predated the outbreak of an uprising on Twelfth Street. In early hours of July of 1964, the Detroit City Police engaged an

altercation with a well-known middle-aged Black sex worker named Cynthia Scott. Scott, known locally as "Saint Cynthia" was a staple of Detroit's Twelfth Street neighborhood.[15] Shortly after the Detroit City Police officers engaged Scott on the street, an altercation occurred that ended up with Scott having two bullets shot into her by the officers (one in her stomach and one in her back).[16] Scott died as a result of her wounds, and Rev. Cleage, alongside activists James Boggs and the Henry brothers, organized and led precinct protests over her death at DCP's hands.[17] As this example shows, Cleage was at a level of deep integration with the Twelfth Street neighborhood and its politics prior to the 67 uprising and his rise to fame, as well as demonstrating the regularity with which Twelfth Street residents had to deal with DCP presence in their community.

In their effort to rationalize the adoption of security forces of their own, the committee members wrote at length about how, while the Shrine completely deplored "the terms law and order and its enforcement as defined by our enemy."[18] But they recognized that the building of their Black Christian Nationalism required that they "have some semblance of discipline in the Nation."[19] Crucially, however, "whereas the law and order obtained by our enemy" were ultimately "based on intimidation, brutality and murder – we believe discipline should be based on brotherly love and respect for the rights of each other, therefore, the security force should set the example for the entire Nation."[20] For Cleage, the Maccabees became something of a metonym for whole Nation. Exile was the punishment for both communities: "anyone who does not wish to abide by the rules of brotherly love and self-respect should be

penalized as was the doers of evil in the days of our African forefathers," that is, "they were banished from the Nation which in itself meant death."[21]

As demonstrated by the logic of this document, for Rev. Cleage's congregation displacement from one's community was designed to be the most serious form of punishment. For Cleage's Black Christian Nationalists, preventing one from taking part in Shrine activities was not just a form of alienation from any old community, but rather it was a dismissal from a singular community: God's chosen community. Accordingly, the consequences of this kind of dislocation were severe.

So far as Cleage was concerned, to become alienated and/or displaced from God's chosen community in this type of way made one monstrous. During the course of his sermons, Cleage took the time to define for his congregants what monsters were: persons who prey on others precisely because they have no sense of social connection or human identity.[22] In giving this definition, Cleage tied monstrosity to predacious violence – and this represents one of the ways in which the question of evil/violence has been opened up by Black theology beyond simply William Jones's problem of theodicy. Unlike the political theologies put forward by white power advocates, however, I argue that Black theology has not historically been used as a vehicle for authoritarian violence. Whereas white power theologies have tended to put forward an apologetics for (racial) violence as a divine good in and of itself, Black theology's position in relationship to violence has been one based upon self-reflection as a broader part of liberatory praxis. Or, it has been taken up as a pragmatic matter of

self-defense with clear limitations imposed. Hence, the worst punishment meted out by Cleage's Maccabees wasn't a flogging or some form of physical punishment, but exile from the community.

Another very important form of "monstrosity" according to Cleage was a way of behaving already familiar to us from Chapter Two: so-called "Tomishness." In keeping with a longer Christian tradition, Cleage did not insist that simply being black made one divine but rather he insisted that all people are sinners – but in as much as sin was for him always a racialized concept, Black men sinned by acting as Toms.[23] This Tomishness represented a form of internalized violence. His own life, including things like the symbolism surrounding his name change from Cleage to Ageyman, was a protest against this form of self-violence. This placed Cleage/Ageyman in a particularly interesting relationship to the demonology of the NOI with its controversial tradition of describing white people, and particularly white men, as "devils."

Interestingly, the NOI's demonological messages of racial reform and uplift were very often mapped onto the bodies of Black women and then subsequently interpreted as a form of demonic possession. As Nation of Islam member Dorothy Wedad put it in the pages of the newspaper *Muhammad Speaks*:

> "most Black Women don't know what is good for them. The devil has so destroyed her with his hand-me downs of freedom… If you try to enforce your will on her, she may call the devil police on you. If she goes to the devil's courts, nine and a half out of ten times she will win."[24]

Further still, NOI members often associated the so-called “artificial dress” of Black women living in urban spaces with the “decline of black civilization and the coming of the apocalypse.”[25] By contrast, the strictly enforced dress code of Elijah Muhammad’s group “was a sign of their salvation, and sure protection against the apocalyptic punishment that non-Muslims would face at the end of times.”[26]According to Edward Curtis, historian of the NOI, all of this is endemic to the fact that Black women within Elijah Muhammad’s religious movement were predominately imagined as the ground upon which the Nation would take root, and thus Black women’s bodies were portrayed as uniquely susceptible to the influences of satanic whiteness.[27]

Cleage insisted that the world of 1980s of America was a fundamentally satanic world – one in which, if you are going to do the will of God, you have to somehow find a way to break free of.[28] During an August 1984 sermon Cleage went so far as to assert that it was better to vote for Satan if he were running on the democratic ticket rather than Ronald Reagan, who Cleage believed would use the Supreme Court to obliterate the constitutional advances of the Civil Rights era.[29] In ways to echoed the NOI he did elude to problems of gender stemming from the break down of structures like the Black family – a condition that lead to consumerism and individual passivity among Black people (in particular, Black women who would become better friends with the characters in their favorite TV program than their family or community).[30]

One of Cleage's major sermonic expositions of the demonological roots of whiteness made use of a text called *The Iceman Inheritance: Prehistoric Sources of Western Man's Racism, Sexism and Aggression* by Michael Bradley. Cleage conveyed Bradley's thesis to his congregation during his 1979 "The Fall of Man" sermon:

> It says there was an Ice Age for white folks, where they were off, everything was ice, it just got so cold that even the genetic structure of the white man was changed. You know what genetic structure is? That means their babies were all changed on down. The genetic structure was changed. And, he said that's when he became the violent demon that he turned out to be, during the Ice Age. Violent. The Ice Age did it. So, it was from the Ice Age that they came that all of the white folks who ran around the world and conquered the world – came from the Ice Age, genetically contaminated people. I know you don't believe that. You read the book. That white folks – genetically damaged. Now, they're ran around talking about Black folks were genetically damaged, genetically inferior. Remember all the big debates and arguments about the genetic inferiority of Black people? Now, white folks have proven that they themselves are genetically inferior, genetically contaminated by the ice and cold.[31]

Cleage said that he recognized the reality and truth of this "genetic" relationship to ice and cold every winter in Detroit, claiming that the snowy environment was "enough to contaminate anybody."[32] For Rev. Cleage Bradley's arguments in regards to genetically violent whiteness were a powerful counter discourse to the scientific racism that had been so prevalent throughout Jim Crow American culture.

Whereas Cleage as well as Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam tended to use the language of demonization and/or monstrosity in their theological writings, Cone used the figure of the antichrist more often in his own demonology. Throughout his theology Cone figured the white church, and the suburbs which housed it, as the

domain of the antichrist. In particular, he did so by using the white church's historical consent to the enslavement of Black people as evidence for its collusion in the work of the antichrist. The antichrist, as a theological figure, is a literal negation of Christ. For Cone, this inversion of Christ (this antichrist) was exemplified in the white church's refusal to reckon with the implications of God's love of the oppressed as illustrated (and eschatologically assured) by the Christ-event. This is why, in a systematic fashion, Cone's critique of the white church as the antichrist was not so much a glib epithet as it was a concrete analysis of the future fate of the white church from the perspective of Black theology.

Though less demonological in its symbolism, gender was a source of conflict in Cone's seminary classroom as well as an cause of tension in his early theological writings. In Cone's earliest writings dating from his 1969 publication of *Black Theology and Black Power*, Black women tended to show up in the text almost exclusively as examples of devastated "ghetto mothers" who mourned over their black sons.[33] By portraying Black women as passive sites of mourning in which the face of the oppressed was disclosed, Cone seemed to suggest that Black women were not predisposed toward liberatory struggle (and therefore they were not the liberatory agents of his eschatology).

While not necessarily as demonological, in doing so he implicitly replicated the NOI's view of Black women as divine receptacles – largely devoid of their own sense of agency. It was only later in his career, around the time when he authored *God of the Oppressed* (published in 1975), that Cone began to express a somewhat

more critical perspective on the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and God. Indeed, in a passage that seems to push back against examples like the NOI's puritanical sexual and gender ethics, Cone first insisted in his systematic theological writings that "the black manifestation of truth" as found "in the rhythm of black life…may be revealed when a deacon lines a hymn" but it is also on display whenever a "beautiful sister struts down the aisle of the church, knowing that God was in a good mood when she was created."[34] In the context of revitalizing Black religion, Cone's invocation of God's truth and joy in the "beautiful sister strutting" seemed to gesture toward a slightly more agential view of Black women, as well as a more liberated understanding of their sexuality.

Eschatology and demonology intersect on the ground of agential figures. It is not only Jesus who returns at the end of time, but manifold figures: the antichrist, the 'whore of Babylon,' angels and demons, not to mention all of the newly resurrected dead. As a form of critical consciousness this may seen like a weakness within eschatological politics – on the surface, it looks like precisely the magical thinking that leads dangerously toward false hope. Both Cone and Cleage, as we shall see, viewed a Black theological apocalyptic tradition differently. In their works, they pushed toward an understanding of liberation that made use of such "magical thinking" for immanent and deeply material ends.

…

One of Cone's relatively few direct statements during the late 1960s in which he commented on Cleage's racial theology insisted that "certainly Cleage is right in emphasizing Christ as nonwhite."[35] However, Cone countered that "the blackness of Christ is a theological concept."[36] As Cone saw it, Christianity was "primarily a religion for and of the oppressed" and that God's revelation in Christ means that concern for "the oppressed is not limited to the oppression of the house of Israel," in this case black people, but, rather, "all oppressed people become people of God."[37] What is more, Cone connected this theological argument back to imperialism and the specific racial politics that derive from its uneven and historically contingent application, insisting that if he were in Vietnam instead of America Cone "would regard him [Christ] as identified with the Viet Cong."[38] By these claims we can note that Cone saw Cleage's Black Power theology as forming a more narrow racial ontology than his own system of liberatory god-talk. Cone's reading of Cleage seems here to rest more on the Reverend's position vis-à-vis whiteness and other non-black people of color rather than his relationship to blackness, per say.

For both Cone and Cleage, blackness was considered primary (they were, after all, Black theologians), but what of their views on other forms of racialization such as whiteness? When asked directly during the late-1960s as to whether or not white people could join his movement at the Shrine of the Black Madonna, Rev. Cleage insisted that there was certainly "no rule against it,"[39] but, he continued…

> our basic fight is against white oppression, and for a white person to come in and join would be peculiar. When black folk join white churches, this is natural, for he has tried to join white man's society all his life. We are not

> preaching integration. If one overcomes his whiteness and feels alienated enough, maybe. Frank Joyce [head of the group People Against Racism] is the closest that I can think of, yet he knows it wouldn't be sensible; he'd see the incongruity of it and that he could do more as a white working with whites.[40]

This late-1960s statement by Cleage represents some of his most intriguing commentary on what sort of strategy would be necessary for one to 'overcome' their own sense of whiteness in an eschatological sense. The way in which Cleage centered alienation as the fulcrum upon which this change in consciousness would ultimately turn echoed, in a sense, Moltmann's desire to estrange himself (as well as his fellow white Europeans) from their own sense of whiteness – thus becoming Black in Christ. Likewise, Cleage's claim that it would be more important for a white person who became sufficiently alienated from their whiteness to turn their attention to other white people anticipated Moltmann's interest in writing Black theology expressly "for whites."

This statement about the potential to alienate oneself from whiteness, of course, existed in tension with some of Cleage's other theological assertions. In particular, his racialization of Ancient Israel with his insistence that the biblical patriarch Abraham was Black (and so too with the entire Mosaic line of Jews) by virtue of their long sojourn in Egypt.[41] Even more controversially, Cleage argued that the Hebrew Bible was at its essence a Black Power document.[42] Likewise, many of his statements regarding the origins of white people reflect theological influences drawn from the Nation of Islam, which tend to portray white people as inherently chaotic, dirty, and disorderly. As he put it from the pulpit during his 1979 sermon

“The Theology of the Group Experience”: "there's really no reasonable explanation white people can give for trying to paint Jesus, his disciples and the Nation Israel white, because there weren't any white people there. White people were in Europe, living in caves, in trees, eating raw meat, drinking blood."[43]

Though his rhetoric was sometime harsh, Cleage’s position to race was more complicated than Cone had made it out to be when he invocated the comparison of Christ and the Viet Cong. I argue that Cone brought up this example as a means of refuting what he saw as Cleage’s racial particularism vis-à-vis his claims in *The Black Messiah*. Though there is no evidence that Cleage ever responded directly to Cone’s comments, on the question of Cleage’s racial particularism I would argue that during the 1960s and 70s, Cleage often expressed a kind of ‘ecumenical blackness’ in his preaching that tended to equate any form of non-whiteness with blackness.[44] Blackness was, from his perspective, at least in part a social artifact of white supremacy – and hence anyone with any color what so ever disrupted the purity of whiteness and was, for Cleage’s purposes, Black. Perhaps this view was shaped by a) his own physiological characteristics as a light-skinned Black man and, b) his early childhood experiences of racial conflict over his father’s prominent position in the Detroit Mayor’s administration.[45] His comments on race were not systematic – he was not a systematic theologian. Instead, they reflected influences from Black Power politics but also his own personal experiences of race as it evolved over time.

Likewise, as the conflict in Vietnam raged on under the Johnson Administration’s watch, Rev. Cleage spearheaded efforts to designate the Shrine of

the Black Madonna as an official conscientious objector to the war. With the help of cosigners like the activist James Boggs, Cleage would argue on the application forms that the Shrine qualified for CO status in regards to the Vietnam War because it forced its congregants to kill their “Brothers and Sisters in Vietnam.”[46] As we see, to articular this claim Cleage used language of kinship in expressing anti-imperialist solidarity. This was a part of a broader Shrine effort to counsel potential conscientious objectors to the war in Vietnam.[47] Such moves demonstrated the depths to which Cleage’s sense of racial solidarity coincided with his religiously infused anti-imperialism. Imperialist crises like the Vietnam War – which posed an imminent threat of bodily harm to both vulnerable African American draftees and the Vietnamese people – guided Cleage’s sense of which conflicts mattered. What is more, I argue that these imperialist dilemmas guided his thinking in a particularly temporal sense: it helped to supply his political worldview with agents of action and webs of solidarity. It also served to clarify his own sense of what was evil in that it reflected an overall deepening divide between Cleage and the American government. The sense of threat from government violence was embodied in fears for his own life and also concern over the loss of life of the congregation through the draft.

The fact that Cleage took steps to keep a number his Shrine congregants out of Vietnam also demonstrates another level of Black liberationist praxis that would be lost to view if one restricted their inquiry solely to Dr. Cone’s foundational work in the field. As rich and prolific as Cone was, he focused his attention primarily on producing traditional theological texts and the training of seminarians. By way of

contrast, Rev. Cleage's applications for CO status highlights avenues in the liberationist tradition that have been both under written, from a scholarly perspective, and underutilized, from the perspective of anti-imperialist social movements. Houses of worship wield constitutional powers in American-style secularism that other collectives do not – as places of legal refuge, in their ability to generate sacramental rituals that protect vulnerable communities, etc. Though these powers clearly had limits, as with Justice Rehnquist's ruling against Cleage in the *Laird v. Tatum* case, Rev. Cleage demonstrated a beneficial knowledge of the contours of secular constitutional politics through his use of conscientious objection against the Vietnam War.

If for Cleage one Black theological form of theological self-defense was CO status and yet another was the Maccabees – what of Cone? Given Cleage's example, one might justifiably ask of Cone's theology: what exactly were the eschatological weapons of the weak? Theology in and of itself was for Cone framed as a weapon in that it could help the oppressed to transform their consciousness. Like many of his fellow liberationist theologians, he argued that the distinction between theology and action was only manifest in churches that lacked a connection to the living God of the oppressed. As he put it in his 1975 book *God of the Oppressed*: "liberation is not a theoretical proposition to be debated in a philosophy or theology seminar."[48] Rather liberation represented "a historical reality," formed in concrete conflicts over the meaning of freedom "in which an oppressed people" come to "recognize that they were not created to be seized, bartered, deeded, and auctioned."[49] When the oppressed

are able to successfully break out of the shackles of consciousness placed upon within an oppressive society, they successful begin their engagement with the struggle for liberation. Cone argued that Black theology engaged in this struggle via its ability to revalue blackness (Black Messiah, Black Madonna, Black Jesus, becoming Black in God, etc.), in addition to its prophetic function in judging white Christianity's deeply antichristian behavior.

For Cone, liberatory language was not neutral. Liberation meant certain decisions had to be made, certain solidarities maintained, and particular theological/political paths followed. Cone often attempt to demonstrate the proper theological liberationist path through the language of negation. He wrote about how "liberation is the opposite of the policeman, the judge, and that system which may be loosely described as 'white folks' and in the New Testament is called the principalities and powers."[50] 'White folks' here was a being used metonymically for Cone to stand in for Jim Crow racial oppression. Whiteness was not genetically or essentially demonic from this perspective, but was indeed satanic in the sense that it represented precisely those 'principalities and powers' that are opposed to God (hence, their relationship to the antichrist).

Investigating theological liberation as a form of consciousness or a 'weapon of the weak' quickly turned eschatological for Cone. He argued that the story of Jesus demonstrated an immanent apocalyptic lesson that "God is making plain that God's kingdom is not simply a heavenly reality; it is an earthly reality as well."[51] This eschatological fact freed the oppressed to recognize that they themselves as "human

beings were not created to work in somebody else's fields, to pick somebody else's cotton, and to live in ghettos among rats and filth."[52] Indeed, as human beings they "were created for liberation – for fellowship with God and the projection of self into the future, grounded in historical possibilities."[53] One's ontological status as liberated was, for Cone, tied to one's ability to think of themselves futuristically. Liberation meant having a viable horizon upon which to gaze that was grounded not in some naïve sense of individual optimism but in ones' ability to work concretely with the "historical possibilities" that one has been given.

If liberation theology in Cone's hands gave ground for the oppressed to seize their temporal agency – and so licensed its adherents to act critically with hope – what of the oppressor? What were the temporal consequences of a Black liberation theology from the perspective of, for instance, those demonically possessed of white supremacy? In terms of his temporal relationship to whiteness, Cone spent much less time than figures like Cleage or Elijah Muhammad speculating about the demonological origins of whiteness as such. Instead, he focused more concertedly on whiteness as it was embodied in the white churches and theologies of his time.

In his 1970 work *A Black Theology of Liberation* Cone wrote about how many people, both religious and secular alike, misperceived the fundamental nature of the church in modern American society. For many, according to Dr. Cone, "to think of the church in this society" was "to visualize buildings with crosses and signs designating Sunday morning worship" where "pious white oppressors" gathered together on Sundays, "singing hymns and praying to God."[54] All the while being led

by preachers that spoke "endlessly about some white cat who died on a cross."[55] Cone's repeated use of sonic metaphors that are meant to denote theological falsehood resonate with the broader Black theological concern with sonic authenticity noted in chapter two's study of Cleage. Though this figurative church that Cone weaves into his argument sounds pious when it sings hymns, prays, etc. it remained essentially bankrupt of divine substance.

In contrast to the problematic soundscape of the white church, the Black church had manifold divine resources to pull upon in pursuit of liberation. Cone noted some of these important sonic themes throughout his work. For example, in his 1975 text *God of the Oppressed,* he described how "rhythm and dance point to the experience of liberation as ecstasy" and "the ability of the people to step outside of their assigned place and to affirm their right to be other than what is now possible in history."[56] Reminiscent of Rev. Cleage's comments on the value of the shout in the down-home Black church tradition, Cone argued that "to be able to dance to the rhythm of black life means that the people are moving with a sense of direction and artistry derived from the depths of the 'not yet.'"[57] By tying rhythm, dance, and the artistry of Black religion to themes of historical agency and the idea of the 'not yet' Cone connected them to eschatology. Moving toward a Black theological eschatology was literally a movement – one that involved gathering collectively to sing, dance, and move one's body in-time with others. This was a learned process that required others to teach you how to move your body – the time and space to absorb the lessons, as well as skilled creators to help generate the basic structure of the

experience: minister, choir, church regulars familiar with the particular rhythms of the preacher, etc.

By way of contrast, the white church engaged in some basic theological errors that had temporal/eschatological consequences. It was peculiar to Cone that it never seemed to enter "the minds of these murderers that" though they claim to gather as Christians "Jesus Christ does not approve of their behavior."[58] His tense here is presentist in terms of its theological orientation: Christ doe*s* not approve, rather than he would not have approved. To mistake these white churches for the dwelling place of god was to mistake the nature of the divine from a Black theological perspective as always already present with the oppressed. Channeling a tradition of Black prophetic judgment, Cone wrote how Christ died not to 'save' these white churches "but to destroy them so as to recreate them, to dissolve their whiteness in the fire of judgement, for it is only through the destruction of whiteness that the wholeness of humanity may be realized."[59] Hence, confronting the churchly racism of white people across America was work that had profoundly eschatological dimensions. It brought together themes of judgment, the realization of humanity's "wholeness," etc. with notions of historical agency and political activism.

If churches were to fulfill this role Cone had set for them as cites of prophetic judgement and transformation, what must be done in order to hasten this process? What kind of normative demands did Cone place upon a church in pursuit of its eschatological realization? For one, according to Dr. Cone's theology, "the church must be a revolutionary community, breaking laws that destroy persons."[60] In order to

liberate the church from itself it must learn how to oppose the state's ability to implement laws that "destroy persons." Cleage's spirit of confrontation and non-cooperation with US government violence both at home and abroad fulfilled this criteria in many ways. Evidence for this stretches back to Rev. Cleage refusal to enter Twelfth Street as one of the peacemaking attempts at the request of Mayor Cavanaugh and the Detroit City Police as they attempted to clear the street of protestors during the early stages of the uprising.[61] Likewise there were Cleage's emphatic refusals to engage in any prayers for racial peace that had been solicited by the Johnson Administration. So too, with his attempts at gaining CO status for the Shrine from the Vietnam War.

White theologians and their churches made a fundamentally heretical error, according to Cone, not because of their chaotic racial origins, but inasmuch as they tended to identify "the rise of nationalism with Christianity, capitalism with the gospel, or exploration of outer space with the advancement of the kingdom of God" and hence have served "only to enhance the oppression of the weak."[62] This is quite a litany – one that weaved together critiques of nationalism, capitalism, and Cold War space exploration as common threads within a misguided eschatology.

Another type of Christian based end time politics was possible. Drawing upon Moltmann's theology of hope, Cone argued that "while the meaning of liberation includes the historical determination of freedom in this world, it is not limited to what is possible in history."[63] This claim echoed Moltmann's views on scripture as containing a promise – that is, something which is by its very nature yet to be

completed. For both thinkers liberation always included a potent sense of the "not yet." For Cone, this "not yet" was expressed predominantly eschatologically: through realizing a "vision of a new heaven and a new earth."[64] It was this principled openness to an undetermined futurity that was so important to Cone. He interpreted Jesus' death and resurrection as a liberatory moment in which "God has freed us to fight against social and political structures while not being determined by them."[65] Racially, for Cone, this meant that he tended to leave open a greater degree of possible transformation on behalf of individual white people than Cleage did in his theological system.

If Cone was critical of the white church as an inauthentic or heretical expression of Christianity, Cleage was much more pointed in his critiques. In his work Cone forged a path that Moltmann would ultimately follow to its logical conclusion in terms of becoming "Black with God" – and so opened the door for an integrated Black theology. Put simply, Cleage often critiqued the desirability of an integrated racial world – and he was especially critical of multiracial churches. He found it difficult to get too excited about theological movements that were formative for Cone. Movements like neo-orthodoxy, which became popular when Cleage was a seminary student in the 1930s and 40s, and fascinated the likes of Cone, were only of marginal interest to Cleage. 30 years after having studied neo-orthodoxy in seminary Cleage described the influence of this theological movement in much more muted terms than Cone: "I paid a lot of attention to this [movement], and still think its valid."[66] To think a theological movement was valid and to dedicate significant

amounts of time and intellectual energy to engaging with it in your published works demonstrates two very different levels of influence. Cleage was more likely to draw sermonic inspiration from the *Iceman Inheritance* then he was Moltmann's writings.

Cleage was a confusing figure for many, even those who were sympathetic to his work. When Cleage's 1969 biographer Hiley Ward asked the Reverend explicitly regarding his Black Power perspective on the question of hope he had difficulty pinning down Cleage's eschatological position.[67] When pressed in 1968 to give some sort of answer to the question of if there was any hope for a racially reconciliated future, Cleage insisted that he did not hold out much hope for white people – focusing his attention, instead, on the future of Black people. He was staunch in his assertion that he was "not here to make you feel good" about the future and, in particular, about the potential of white people to transform themselves within a white supremacist culture.[68] Though he thought it could be potentially helpful for white people to hear the message of Black Power, he maintained that "most whites are incapable of comprehending what black militants talk about."[69] They faced epistemological hurdles that were not worth his effort in terms of organizing a social movement. Such a position led him further toward the conclusion that some form of cultural "separation" was the only politically realistic option for Black people.[70]

For Cleage, true religion, and hence true theology, was rooted in a sense of sacred community that included a (admittedly mythical) belief in racial continuity between Ancient Israelites and modern day African Americans. This was partly a belief inspired by the appearance of scholarship regarding the historical Jesus, as was

explored in chapter two, but it was also a deeply important theological claim for Cleage to make from his position at the Shrine. Cleage insisted that for African Americans "religion is something different" and that Black Christianity was "essentially based on the Old Testament concepts of the Nation Israel, God's chosen people."[71] Leading him to argue that "the problems of the Black Israelites were the same as ours."[72] For our purposes, this claim of theo-historical continuity between the Shrine and 'Black Israelites' brings up an interesting set of eschatological questions: if the problems that these two communities face are essentially the same, then are these problems 'eternal' in a certain sense? Indeed, are these types of problems ones which can only be solved by the actual arrival of the eschaton? To what extent can human agents 'solve' what seem to be, from Cleage's perspective, recurring problems of evil/injustice?

It is my sense that Cleage believed that the problem of white supremacy, and the urgency with which it marked his own life's work at the Shrine, symbolically signaled for him the oncoming of the end times. Indeed, I argued that Cleage's overall sense of his religious movement that he portrayed from the pulpit was itself deeply eschatological. As he put in *The Black Messiah*: "The black church is in the process of being reborn, and we, here, are participants in that tremendous beginning."[73] It seems clear that Rev. Cleage viewed his Black Christian Nationalist movement as forming the divinely chosen vanguard of this religious rebirth. This rebirth was an eschatological one – one that wedded together a transformation in unjust racial conditions, on the one hand, and the destruction of the world, on the other.

The times were moving under Rev. Cleage's own feet. Religion, for Rev. Cleage, was not a static thing. Rev. Cleage's stance regarding the special status of the Shrine, narrowly, and African American religion, more broadly, reflected the overall philosophy of religion that he articulated from his pulpit. Instead of something codified and static he saw the divine-human relationship as one which was itself a dynamic temporal force capable of effecting human history. For Cleage, religion "is not just something that goes on the same way from the beginning of time right on down," but rather something which is "constantly shift[ing] to meet the needs of a people."[74] This was a critical point of theological-political strategy to grasp, precisely because religion was not "the same today as it was 30 years ago, a 100 or 200 years ago" for Cleage.[75] Rendering religion as something of a changeable temporal force allowed Cleage to introduce radically new forms of ritual, symbol, and myth to his congregation precisely because it made the Shrine a part of a divinely sanctioned temporal progression. His philosophy of religion unlocked a narrative of divine election for Cleage's congregants – one that was in direct contradiction with much of the religious discourse that surrounded them.

Transforming his congregation's temporal understanding of religion was, for Cleage, a part of the crucial political work of dispelling false knowledge. Like Moltmann's use of Bloch, such as stance represents an interesting inversion of the orthodox Marxist position that religion represents the epitome of false knowledge. This effort should also be seen as in keeping with broader a Black Power/Black Consciousness ethos – including the cultural work that promoted an understanding

that Black is beautiful/reclaiming African aesthetics, etc.[76] In addition to the more secular examples of Black Power aesthetics, right understanding of oneself in relation to the Black community, Cleage suggested, helped one to become closer to God. This movement of becoming closer to God was not only a vertical one: it, likewise, helped to bring God closer to down to earth in an eschatological sense. The promised fulfilment of God's temporal plan required that the Shrine community needed to become complete in order for eschatological transformations to take place.

Cleage's philosophical emphasis on right knowledge led to a style of sermonic praxis wherein he drew his congregants into an experiential process of discomfort, discernment and, indeed, judgment. In a sermon from 1979 entitled "The Fall of Man" Cleage insisted that "knowledge is not always an unmitigated pleasure" but, rather, that understanding "brings with it certain pleasures and certain pains, and with every pleasure there is a pain."[77] Therefore, according to Rev. Cleage, "knowledge is not just something to be desired" in order to make oneself wise and to "be like God."[78] According to Cleage, right knowledge itself was powerfully transformative. Furthermore, the way in which one approached the acquisition of knowledge experientially (i.e. out of a desire for power) mattered theologically in terms of the overall value of the outcome. For Cleage, this view of knowledge was deeply shaped by a sense of self-knowledge vis-à-vis racial consciousness. Within the framework of Black theology, knowledge of one's own blackness brought with it both profound pleasures – such as the regal beauty of Dowdell's Black Madonna fresco – as well as assorted existential pains.

Knowledge as an experience that was confined to the rational mind was not the type of transformative understanding that Cleage referred to in his "The Fall of Man" sermon. Indeed, he was deeply critical of epistemological models that relied on metaphors such as computers as analogies for knowledge. He believed that the human mind was "a weird kind of little thing, you know. The brain mind. The mind that we count on so much."[79] For Cleage, when one approached the mind as a machine, one expected to be able to simply "feed information in, hit the button," and "you should retrieve the information you want," immediately there it ought be "the solution to the problem."[80] But, of course, according to Cleage "it never is."[81] The failure of the 'computer brain' to understand the nature of God formed an epistemological problem for Cleage's eschatological liberatory model, which necessarily depended on ways of knowing and, in particular, ways of marking the passage of time which are non-technological. Given that he served a congregation with few very facilities and technological resources, but with manifold cultural ones, his argument here makes contextual sense – i.e. this theology was echoed in and through the Shrine's practices.

For Cleage, the limitations of the brain were structural. There was, according to Cleage's Black Power theology, "no way God is going to feed information into your brain."[82] That would be far too passive a form of religion for Cleage's much more immanent eschatological tastes. Instead of a model which encouraged one to passively consume knowledge which had been feed into their brains by God, he tied transformative knowledge to other kinds of affective experiences. He explained to his congregants how if and when you are fortunate enough to experience real knowledge

that comes from God "you're going to feel it in some other kind of way. You're going to feel it in a service, worship, maybe you can feel something, you say, 'Maybe that was God.'"[83] But, by its very nature, "you can't utilize your brain too much to find out."[84]

What, then, could be utilized? From Cleage's Black theological perspective, true knowledge was grounded in the experience of Black religion – the Black church as correctly practiced. This necessitated a reevaluation of African symbolism, with an attention to African roots, an ecumenical stance in regards to NOI – indeed, many of the efforts reviewed in chapter two. At places like the Shrine, according to Cleage, knowledge of God was truly possible because it was a place that openly recognized the centrality of God in Black culture. Cleage insisted that, for Black people in particular, "religion is important" and therefore "black people take God seriously."[85] Indeed, according to Cleage, "even if they're not sure what God is" – as in the case with church which were for Cleage 'Tomish' – "black people take God seriously."[86] Cleage took this stance for what I would argue are eschatological reasons: precisely because "black people depend on God more than anybody else in the world" they are people who "are religious."[87] His belief in the inherent religiosity (and godliness) of Black people inspired Cleage's his eschatological vision. His activism was driven largely by the knowledge that in order to fulfill the demands of the Black Messiah he would have to live his life as an enemy of the state. Hence, he needed the Black Messiah in an ultimate sense – that is, needed him as a prophetic guide through what registered as apocalyptic-imperialist violence.

…

According to Dr. Cone in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, "to speak about eschatology" is first and foremost "to move in the direction of the future."[88] In particular, the study of eschatology forces its students to ask the question: "what can we do about death and its relationship to life?"[89] I have argued that Rev. Cleage's ministry was an exercise in practically living out his own answers to Cone's eschatological question about life and death. When Cleage labored alongside and on behalf of Detroit's Black Power movement, when he strove to keep young Black men out of the Vietnam War through the use of conscientious objection, when he confronted illegal government surveillance in the courts and from the pulpit, he worked on the cutting edge of Black theology. Futurity was Cleage's political field – and he used the story of the Black Messiah to stretch his impact beyond his own violently precarious present.

If following the Protestant Reformation the major movement within the Christianity has been to decentralize (i.e., to multiply through division), then Cone and Cleage's work pointed in the direction of what a post-World War II church must do in order to fulfill itself eschatologically: to decolonize. Like Cleage, Cone argued that there was an essentially antagonistic relationship between Christianity and the imperial state – using an imperial framework to underscore this argument for the blackness of Christ theologically. How did questions of imperial oppression intersect with eschatology/death? In one example from Cone's *God of the Oppressed* he argued that "if death is the ultimate power and life has no future beyond this world,

then the rulers of the state who control the police and the military are indeed our masters."[90] This would, indeed, be a reason for despair. But despair is not Cone's view. Rather he argued that "if the oppressed, while living in history, can nonetheless see beyond it, if they can visualize an eschatological future beyond the history of their humiliation," then it becomes possible for "'the *sigh* of the oppressed,' to use Marx's phrase, can become a cry of revolution against the established order."[91]

Eschatological questions were both personal and political, religious as well as racial, from Cone's Black theological perspective. The end of time vis-à-vis the eschaton and the end of life vis-à-vis ones individual death merged in his theology. According to Cone's analysis oppressors were able, through their oppression of others, to alienate themselves from the ultimate existential questions death forced the oppressed to face openly each and every day. It was a symbol of the oppressed, according to Dr. Cone, that they "cannot escape their future end."[92] Hence, Cone argued that Black theology "rejects as invalid the attempt of oppressors to escape the question of death."[93] Instead of oppressors grounding their sense of self-worth in a covenantal relationship with the God of the disinherited, "they pretend that their eternality is dependent on their political, social, and economic dominance over the weak and helpless."[94] Cone argued that the oppressor's dependence on political, social, and economic domination was ultimately illusory because it mistook the temporal rhythm of power, which for him was more apocalyptic in its cadence.

At the end of time, from Cone's perspective, those who have relied on domination and oppression do in fact have something to fear. Indeed, he argued

further that this gnawing fear of eternal judgment actually shaped their present concerns: “it is their confidence in their own present strength that renders them incapable of looking the future squarely in the face.”[95] Hence, by their very nature, “oppressors do not know death because they do not know themselves – their finiteness and future ends.”[96] They do not known themselves in the sense that they mistake their whiteness for what makes them valuable as human beings, and in so doing they essentialize and hierarchize the relative cognitive, moral, and social value of others.

According to Dr. Cone’s theology, real knowledge in the face of eschatological judgment came only when one was able to “face the reality of future nonexistence” within the context of an existence that is characterized by the dynamic of “oppression and liberation.”[97] This need “to face” the future was one that was contingent on human action and temporal agency. Accordingly Cone claimed that:

> *We know what the end is when we face it head-on by refusing, at the risk of death, to tolerate present injustice.* The eschatological perspective must be grounded in the historical present, thereby forcing the oppressed community to say no to unjust treatment, because its present humiliation is inconsistent with its promised future.[98] [original emphasis]

As Cone framed it in this passage from *A Black Theology of Liberation*, this sense of revolutionary inconsistency hinged on a deeply temporal logic. It brought together themes of future justice, present action, and historical oppression in an intensely immanent fashion. The logic was also one of negation: it was grounded in a refusal, and so related back to political action as protest against a status quo.

Indeed, Cone asked this question explicitly in his work: "how is eschatology related to protest against injustice and the need for revolutionary change?"[99] The context of this particular quote comes as a part of Cone's critique of German theologian Rudolf Bultmann's eschatology.[100] Cone argued that Bultmann's messianic theology did not go "far enough" in its temporal exploration of God, and so ultimately negated its revolutionary potential. Cone then used Moltmann's hope theology in order to counter Bultmann's work and relate eschatology back to protest, action, and revolutionary change.[101] In doing so, he invoked Moltmann directly: "therefore, 'to know God,' writes Moltmann, 'is to suffer God' – that is, to be called by God into the world, knowing that the present is incongruous with the expected future."[102]

While utilizing Bultmann and Moltmann to hone his own eschatological arguments, Cone also clearly attempted to stake out Black eschatology as a discrete mode of analysis. He insisted that the pie-in-the-sky view of the Black apocalyptic tradition…

> as merely compensatory is too superficial and thus reflects the use of intellectual categories not derived from the social existence of black people…But when black scholars spend too much time and energy trying to show how 'radical' and 'revolutionary' black religion was or is, they often fall into the trap of defining the content of these words in light of Marxism or some other theoretical frame that did not arise from the social existence of black people. While recognizing that possibility of overlap in human experience, I contend that black people's experience of liberation as hope for a new heaven and a new earth represents a new mode of perception.[103]

I have argued that Cleage embodied, in and through his religious praxis, this 'new mode of perception' toward which Cone pointed in his systematic theological writings, like the *God of the Oppressed* excerpt above.

From a Black theological perspective eschatological judgment meant accountability to the community of the oppressed. Cone's notion of accountability was tied to the eschaton. It shaped his claim that "Christian eschatology is bound up with the resurrection of Christ. He is the eschatological hope. He is the future of God who stands in judgement upon the world and forces us to give an account of the present."[104] This account(ability) that Cone wrote about must, it seems, include some reflection on the role of Christians in perpetuating imperialism/white supremacy. Rev. Cleage, by way of contrast, took notions of accountability more literally – implementing punishments (in particular, banishment) as a way of further committing his congregants to his Black Christian Nationalist movement and shaping his eschatological vanguard.

Any image of heaven that painted it in a hyper-individualized and judgment-free manner was misguided from a Black theological point of view precisely because it clouded one's ability to properly judge the juncture between the here/now/future. Cone argued that "heaven cannot mean accepting injustice in the present" simply because one has been assured that they "have a home over yonder."[105] Instead, for Cone "home is where we have been placed now," and thus "to believe in heaven is to refuse to accept hell on earth."[106] Such an understanding was, according to Dr. Cone, "one dimension of the future that cannot be sacrificed" in pursuit of racial justice.[107]

As his writing demonstrates, Cone's battle was fought primarily on the level of discourse, and secondarily on the level of seminary training at Union Theological Seminary. Rev. Cleage from his position at the Shrine answered this same eschatological call but with a different set of tools: food production and agricultural sovereignty, the growth of security/self-defense groups, church planting across Black metropolises, etc.

Both sought to leverage the revolutionary futurity that is always already latent within Christianity's apocalyptic and prophetic traditions. If Cleage had truly been the racial pessimist many made him out to be (that is, if he had truly had no hope for the future) then I argue that given the intensity of the threats facing him, he would have either fled they city or despaired of politics altogether. Hence the fact that he persisted in his work at the Shine demonstrates that he must have endorsed Cone's belief that "without a meaningful analysis of the future, all is despair. The guns, atomic power, police departments, and every conceivable weapon of destruction are in the hands of the enemy. By these standards, all seems lost."[108] "But" as Cone insisted, "there is another way of evaluating history."[109]

Cone argued that all this talk of the end times must be balanced by other needs within the Black religious imagination:

> The future is still the future. This means that black theology rejects elaborate speculations about the end. It is just this kind of speculation that led blacks to stake their whole existence on heaven – the scene of the whole company of the faithful with their long white robes. Too much of this talk is not good for the revolution… Our past knowledge and present encounter with God ground our confidence that the future will be both like and unlike the present – like

> the present in the encounter with God, and unlike it in the fullness of liberations as a reality.[110]

His eschatology was an untimely exercise. One that gave rise to the hope that the future will be, as Cone phrased it, "both like and unlike the present." So even while "too much" end time talk was not "good for the revolution," it formed the horizon against which political judgments in the present were to be assessed and made.

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Last Things First

Those who gathered to honor Cleage at the 2003 dedication of Albert B. Cleage Jr. Boulevard in Detroit noted the importance of names and the act of naming to the late Holy Patriarch. A poem read aloud by Cleage's friend Naomi Long Madgett demonstrated the importance of how his name evolved over the decades:

> Names are more than labels. They are indicators / of character and content, spirit and substance. / They are the soul of who we are, main artery of truth. / With the increase of knowledge…comes the need for change of name. / So St. Mark's Congregational Church became / Central Congregational Church, became / The Shrine of the Black Madonna / and the Congregational denomination became / The Black Nationalist Christian Church, became / The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church. / So Albert Cleage, rebel, founder and organizer, / visionary, liberator, apostle of the Black Messiah, / became Jaramogi Abebe Ageyman / and a street called Linwood becomes / Albert B. Cleage Jr. Boulevard because / a name is not a label but a measure of a great man's life.[111]

One name was clearly not enough to capture the enormous and visionary character of Cleage/Ageyman's life. Like the religious movement he lead – which was itself a force that changed in dynamic tension with the needs of a people – Cleage/Ageyman did not permit himself to be narrowed down to one name or even one religious

tradition. Hence, in order to meet the demands of the moment, he drew on the Nation of Islam and the stories of Ancient Israel in order to shape his Black theology.

After studying them for the past several years, I tend to doubt that either Cone or Cleage imagined the future of their work would include appearing in a doctoral dissertation such as this one. This is perhaps more true of Cleage then of Cone, who has enjoyed a prominent status in the field of religious studies. However, even being placed in such a concrete conversation with one another may have surprised them – given that they only ever even spoke about one another's work glancingly. In spite of their common theological interests and shared historical context, the connects between the two Black theological figures are still easier to place in conversation with one another retrospectively – that is, from the position of the future that their works pointed toward.

My interest in the eschatologies of Cone and Cleage will undoubtedly strike some as curious. But when the nature of one's oppression is such that the specter of death-by-hate crime becomes an existential condition of one's being-in-the-world, the urgency (indeed, the temporality) of one's work changes. The living of life itself becomes a question about what it is that is worth dying for. Like Cone and Cleage/Ageyman, in order to become myself I had to in a certain sense learn how to die.

In many ways, teaching and writing about religion as a transman in the America of the 2020s has helped me to understand Cone more deeply. I found that, in

spite of the distance that separates us, I could relate to the constant and exhausting work of overturning others people's expectations that he described in his reflections on his life as a Black scholar of religion. On the other hand, remaining active in the work of congregational life as an out transman has helped me to understand Cleage more deeply. I found relatable both the sense of danger that comes with a life of publicly preaching and organizing around structural inequalities, as well as the spirit of defiance that he so readily expressed in the face of such threats. To be out and trans under present political conditions means to face the question of death on at least two existential levels. It makes real the question: is being who you are worth dying for? While also leading to the related question: what parts of me need to die so that I can continue to live as myself in a good way? However painful, these questions are the root of a profound kind of wisdom. They point to the promise of transformation through the acquisition of self-knowledge.

So, even while the experience of gender non-conformity was something that was disturbing to Cleage (at least as evidenced by his treat of androgyny during his sermons throughout the 1980s) and trans theology remained a largely unstudied form of liberatory discourse for Cone – despite his engagements on sexuality – in the untimeliest of manners the three of us connected upon these grounds. There is a lesson in the sheer unexpectedness of this encounter inasmuch as we historians ought to remember that the meaning of our present work is not entirely determined by the historical conditions that currently shape the context of our writing. As Moltmann noted, there is always the need to remain principally open to that which our present

conceptions of justice cannot account for. There is, in this sense, something ungovernable hidden in every text. Both Cone and Cleage sought to unleash something of that ungovernability through their theologies. However glancing their exchanges may have been they helped to realized the prophetic fire in one another. [112]

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[1] James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1970), 147.
[2] Hiley Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 200-201.
[3] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 200-201.
[4] Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Detroit SAC to FBI Director*, 14, March, 1968. Document obtained through a Freedom of Information Act Request.
[5] See for example Bart Ehrman's introduction in *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).
[6] Gerhard Sauter, "Protestant Theology" in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 248.
[7] Sauter, "Protestant Theology," *Oxford Handbook*, 248.
[8] Telegram from Cleage to Ward, 28, April, 1968, 2010025 Aa 2, box 1, Albert B. Cleage Jr. Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Cleage Papers). This telegram from Cleage to Ward noted his inability to travel to the Detroit suburbs for a scheduled meeting that night due to a tip off about the threat of racial violence.
[9] Security and Safety for The Nation, 16, January, 1968, box 8, Cleage Papers.
[10] Security and Safety for The Nation, Cleage Papers.
[11]Security and Safety for The Nation, Cleage Papers.
[12] Security and Safety for The Nation, Cleage Papers.
[13] Holy Order of the Maccabees, box 8, Cleage Papers.
[14] Holy Order of the Maccabees, Cleage Papers.
[15] Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 267.

[16] Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 267.
[17] Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 267.
[18] Security and Safety for The Nation, Cleage Papers.
[19] Security and Safety for The Nation, Cleage Papers.
[20] Security and Safety for The Nation, Cleage Papers.
[21] Security and Safety for The Nation, Cleage Papers.
[22] Quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 73.
[23] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation,* 101.
[24] Edward Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam: 1960-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 113.
[25] Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion*, 112.
[26] Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion*, 117-118.
[27] Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion*, 123.
[28] An Intro to BCN: First in Series, 5, July, 1984, box 2, Cleage Papers.
[29] The Black Man's Inner Conflicts, 19, August, 1984, box 2, Cleage Papers.
[30] Christianity and the Consciousness Revolution, 19, November, 1978, box 2, Cleage Papers.
[31] The Fall of Man, 3, June, 1979, box 2, Cleage Papers.
[32] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[33] See for example James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 28.
[34] James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1975), 196.
[35] Quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation,* 138.
[36] Quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation,* 138.
[37] Quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation,* 138.
[38] Quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation,* 138.
[39] Quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 2.
[40] Quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 2.
[41] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 128.
[42] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 129.
[43] A Theology of the Group Experience, 24, September, 1978, box 1, Cleage Papers.
[44] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 34.
[45] Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 239-242.
[46] James Henry Smith CO application, 1, May, 1969, box 10, Cleage Papers.
[47] James Henry Smith CO application, Cleage Papers.
[48] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 142.
[49] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 142.
[50] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 143.
[51] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 144.
[52] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 144.
[53] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 144.
[54] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 142.
[55] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 142.
[56] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 146.

[57] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 146.
[58] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 142.
[59] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 142.
[60] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 138.
[61] Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 184-185.
[62] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 141-142.
[63] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 145.
[64] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 145.
[65] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 145.
[66] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 102.
[67] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 91-92.
[68] Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 94.
[69] Quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 96.
[70] Quoted in Ward, *Prophet of the Black Nation*, 96.
[71] Albert Cleage, "New-Time Religion" in *The Black Messiah* (Trenton: African World Press, 1989), 111.
[72] Cleage, "New-Time Religion," *Black Messiah*, 111.
[73] Cleage, "New-Time Religion," *Black Messiah*, 113.
[74] Cleage, "New-Time Religion," *Black Messiah*, 105.
[75] Cleage, "New-Time Religion," *Black Messiah*, 105.
[76] William Van De Burg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 170-171.
[77] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[78] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[79] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[80] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[81] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[82] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[83] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[84] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[85] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[86] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[87] The Fall of Man, Cleage Papers.
[88] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 144.
[89] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 144.
[90] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 147.
[91] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 147.
[92] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 145.
[93] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 144.
[94] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 144-145.
[95] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 144-145.

[96] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 144-145.
[97] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 145.
[98] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 145.
[99] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 147.
[100] Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957).
[101] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 147.
[102] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 148.
[103] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 146.
[104] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 149.
[105] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 149.
[106] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 149.
[107] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 149.
[108] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 150.
[109] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 150.
[110] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 150-151.
[111] Naomi Long Madgett "Transformation," 24, July, 2003, box 1, Cleage Papers.
[112] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 142. In which Cone referred to Cleage as a "rare prophetic figure."

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