THE ONLY CONSTANT IS CHANGE: HOW ADAPTIVE BLACK LEADERSHIP IS CRUCIAL IN THE QUEST FOR EQUALITY

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
The requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

CONTEXTUALIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

This thesis will continue the conversation about black leadership. What that leadership means today in light of the changing political and social conditions of our time, and how God calls new forms of leadership to address the current crisis. There are examples of leadership changes based on social conditions and cultural circumstances in the Bible. Consequently, there are leadership changes based on social conditions and cultural circumstances in the black community. Those inter-related social and cultural conditions can be called contextual; that is, the interrelated conditions within which something exists or occurs.\(^1\) This thesis will examine three areas of contextual leadership from the biblical text to the black community. In its first instance, it will focus specifically on the context in which the children of Israel were enslaved in the book of Exodus and the leadership of Moses that emerged out of that context to lead the children of Israel to the Promised Land. Moses’s leadership represents moral as well as prophetic guidance to set the Israelites free. The basis of Moses’s leadership is freedom. Moses will guide our discussion and theological understanding of inspirational leadership for the Israelites and African American struggle. As Zora Neal Hurston describes, “Moses is the first Civil Rights Activists.”\(^2\) Moses confronted injustices and lead God’s people to freedom which inspired many future civil rights activists to follow in his path of civil disobedience. Bruce Feiler records C.L. Franklin as stating, “In every crisis God raises up a Moses. His name may be Joshua, or his name may be David…Abraham Lincoln or Frederick Douglas, but in every crisis, God raises up a

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Moses, especially where the destiny of his people is concerned.”³ Throughout this paper we will look at the many Moseses that arise out of the context of suffering and ultimate deliverance for God’s people.

In concert with the Israelites struggle for freedom, this paper will examine the context in which black people were enslaved in America and the leadership that emerges out of that context. Specifically, we will look at the leadership of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas in the vain of Moses as they confront slavery and lead black people to freedom. Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas although not religious leaders were guided by religious principles of justice and freedom. I will look at their sacrificial and outspoken leadership as well as their tactics to confront slavery and obtain liberty for enslaved African American people. The tactics they used were consistent with the context in which they lived. The relationship between the Israelite enslavement and African-American slavery is not a new discussion. It has been articulated by theologians, sociologists and historians for decades. I simply hope to expand upon this discussion.

*From Moses to Joshua*

As I examine the various contexts and leadership changes I will look at how Moses’s leadership ended at Mt. Neboh and how new leadership emerged with Joshua. The change in leadership from Moses to Joshua was a contextual shift that required new leadership based on changing cultural and social circumstances. Richard N. Osborne, et.al. states, “leadership and its effectiveness, in large part, is dependent upon the context. Change the context and leadership changes as does what is sought and whether specific patterns are considered effective.”⁴ The

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children of Israel were no longer under Egyptian bondage and no longer in Egypt. Moses had led
them through the Red Sea and the wilderness; they were going into a different environment, a
new land, with new people determined to defend their land from the Israelites. The Israelites
context changed, and they sought to be included by conquest and direct confrontation in a new
land that had been promised to them. New leadership, in the vein of Moses, had emerged with
Joshua to lead the children into the Promised Land. In this paper, I will argue that Joshua’s
leadership represented inclusion for both political and theological purposes: the children of Israel
wanted “in” and it was Joshua’s job to bring them into the Promised Land and tear down
religious hegemonic structures that would be a place of worship and civic engagement based
upon the law of Moses. With the new context came new encounters and Joshua was the effective
and emergent leader for the new cultural challenges.

The push for African Americans after slavery is similar to the plight of the Israelites after
their enslavement. For African Americans in those territories that were in rebellion, the context
changed from institutional slavery to a land of liberty with the signing of the Emancipation
Proclamation of 1863. African Americans in designated territories were no longer castigated as
slaves but rather were free people in America. The Emancipation Proclamation prepared the way
for the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments which thrust all African Americans into a new context,
thus a new land of liberty, humanity, and equality. However even with the proclamation and
constitutional amendments African Americans faced familiar restrictions and hostility toward
their humanity and dignity. Like the Israelites under Joshua, African Americans wanted to be
included in the promises of a new land, with new laws and fought to be represented by direct
confrontations and civil disobedience. I will look at new leadership that emerges after slavery
and during the Civil Rights Movement, specifically that of Rosa Parks and Rev. Dr. Martin
Luther King, Jr., who challenged institutional antagonism with direct confrontation toward African-American humanity and civil liberty to bring them into the promise of equality. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. represented new leadership in a new context, in the vein of Moses, along with new tactics for the current crisis of African American freedom and equality. I will look at how his leadership along with his radical tactics were able to influence people and change the course of America.

From Joshua to Jesus

Finally, in examining God in context of oppression and deliverance, this paper will move from Joshua to Jesus and Christ’s call for liberty to set the captives free. Jesus is the continuation of the call for freedom and inclusion that began with Moses and Joshua. In doing this I will examine the context of the Jewish community under Roman rule and how Christ’s presence presents a challenge to the system of the oppressed. The continuation of freedom, equality and justice from Jesus can also be assigned to the context of today’s black community. Jesus represents moral and principled leadership. I will seek to apply three attributes of Jesus to the African American struggle for freedom: Reconciliation, Regeneration and Resistance. I will also ask: Where do African Americans stand in terms of progress and leadership? What progress has been made since slavery and the Civil Rights Movement and what areas of progress are still being hindered because of racist actions? What kind of moral leadership is needed to address injustices to the black community? This paper is also concerned about black leadership. What type of black leadership exists today and what type of leadership is needed to address those racist hindrances that still perplex and hamper black progress? In this context, there is a call for persistent leadership to address the current crisis of African-American people. Jesus represents ongoing salvation toward Black people’s freedom.
Terminology of Context

In each context, aside from the present, I will use the time frame and terminology that Cornel West uses to describe the black condition in his book, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*. The period during slavery will be termed “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Slavery.” This period lasted from the middle of the seventeenth century to 1863. The period after slavery from 1864-1969 will be termed “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Institutional Racism.” My focus will look at Civil Rights Amendments after slavery and Civil Rights legislation during the Civil Rights era from 1954-1969. The final phase will be a departure from Cornel West’s chronological terminology to one of my own entitled, “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Persistent Institutional Racism.” This period will focus on the present state of African Americans in the 21st century, from 1970 to 2016. It will examine the ongoing institution of racism and its impact on African Americans that continues to pervade America’s social, political, judicial, and economic systems and the changing aspects of black leadership from one of tradition to one of innovation.

Christian Ethics and Moral Leadership

There is an ethical and moral theme that binds context and leadership. The start of this paper will examine morality and ethics from a theological perspective and how God intervenes in social justice causes for the sake of restoring humanity to freedom and dignity. Many theologians and preachers have inserted God into the conversation of morality and sociology to give the gospel new meaning associated with love, liberty, and justice for all. This paper will examine those theological perspectives that address immoral systems and unjust institutions that lead to dehumanizing conditions. The immoral institution of slavery and the unethical system of

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discrimination that destroy human liberty and capsize black people’s progress by racist acts will be examined through the gospel.

*Salvation*

One of the major themes of the Bible is salvation: God raising up human agents out of a particular context to restore humanity to freedom and dignity. Whether it is the resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Esther, Deborah, the judges, the prophets, the priests, the kings, or Jesus Christ himself, God uses people for the purpose of restoration and salvation. Salvation “refers to delivering a person or a group of people from distress or danger, from a ‘restricted’ condition in which they are unable to help themselves…Generally the deliverance must come from somewhere outside the party oppressed.”

This paper will focus on those persons as moral and prophetic agents who aided in the Israelites’ and African Americans’ deliverance from oppression. In the Bible, salvation is both personal and social. It is concerned with the soul of humanity as well as the social conditions in which people live. As Washington Gladden emphasizes, “Whatever the order of logic may be, there can be no difference between the two kinds of work; that we are to labor as constantly and as diligently for the improvement of the social order as for the conversion of man.” Social salvation is concerned with the cultivation of the virtues of justice which are corporate virtues but which are also virtues of the soul of individuals. The justice of an individual’s soul is reflected in the justice of the city and vice versa. Social salvation is concerned with social orders of justice and liberty; they are virtues that preachers and theologians address just as importantly and passionately as the souls of people because one cannot be separated from the other. This paper will elaborate on the theme of social

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salvation for the purpose of social justice using both the Israelite and African-American situations of resurrected leadership out of the context of human suffering.

While examining issues of context and leadership, I will also raise and respond to a number of questions, including the following: How do changes in cultural context affect black church leadership? Is God calling for a new leadership style in the black community in light of a changing culture? What does this tell us about God and African-American leadership today in light of progress, diversity, and changing cultural perspectives? Are leaders only equipped for a certain time, until social and cultural dynamics change, and then God calls for new leadership styles to confront the present culture? How can we honor traditional leadership without denying current leadership?

Leadership as Contextual

In building this thesis I want to start with the premise that leadership is contextual—it is embedded within the environment and culture by which it is assigned. As Richard Osborne et al. state, “It [leadership] is socially constructed in and from a context where patterns over time must be considered and where history matters.”8 Leadership grows out of its context, emerges out of crisis—social, political, and cultural—and is able to maintain its existence with the current system or make drastic changes to the present environment. Leadership does not operate in a vacuum: “factors such as environment, organization, technology and structure operating within a traditional interpretation of a systems framework are important if we are to understand leadership.”9 I will examine leadership in various contexts specifically during slavery, the Civil Rights Era and today’s technological society.

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9Ibid.
This paper will contend that context, not leadership, is the starting point to address any crisis that exists within society, and that black religious and moral leadership has emerged and maintained its existence over time in fighting against racism and racial discrimination during slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, and today considering existing racial tension. As Joanne Grant states, “the negro has continued to assert his worth and attempt to validate his claim to human rights…the history of the black man’s protest against enslavement, subordination, cruelty, inhumanity began with his seizure in African ports and has not yet ended.”

It is context that has produced black leadership and leadership that addresses context and new leadership styles that emerge when context changes. While leadership emerges out of context, ethics is static and transcends context and inserts itself into God’s prophetic agents.

Context Defined

“By definition, context represents the interrelated conditions within which something exists or occurs.” It is environmental (culture, economic, industry setting, etc.) and organizational (strategy, size, technology, structure).

In politics, context is focused on the issues that are ingrained in the creation of the political environment. Those issues range from race to poverty to gender and are driven by power. According to Anthony P. Ammeter et al., “Power is context-specific and organizations are political settings that facilitate the exchange of power.”

In theology, context is faith, experience, and prophetic witness toward humanity. Contextual theology “points to the human person or human society, culturally and historically bound as it is, as the source of reality.” Diane Kennedy states that “Context theology is an attempt to

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context.”\textsuperscript{15} I will attempt to understand theology from a socially oppressed, marginalized, enslaved, discriminated, technological, socially frustrated people, both Israelites and African American people. African Americans have often examined theology from a black perspective based on their own experience. As James Cone states, “There is no truth for and about black people that does not emerge out of the context of their experience. Truth in this sense is black truth, a truth disclosed in the history and culture of black people.”\textsuperscript{16} Black people’s experience with God is associated with oppression, marginalization, slavery and human deliverance. Racial context includes inequities, white dominance, constraints on leaders of color (both male and female), disadvantages, and discriminatory and unfair perception and treatment of African Americans. Works on race and context stem from leaders of color challenging specific social and political contexts of inequity, being perceived as not legitimate, and facing constant challenges to their leadership that white leaders do not face.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Prophetic Witness}

African American leadership has always faced challenges regardless of the context, however the challenges have often served to validate African American leadership that has emerged out of the context. The prophetic witness becomes the greatest source of spoken justice for political and social movements. As Michael Waltzer states, “the prophets are poets of social justice, utopian visionaries…For prophesy had a political (or antipolitical) role in ancient

\textsuperscript{16}James H. Cone, \textit{God of the Oppressed}, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1975), 15
Israel.”¹⁸ The prophet’s job in ancient Israel was to speak truth to power, ascend morality and confront injustices particularly on behalf of the poor. God always has a prophet that emerges out of the community of distress, “the prophets model a pattern of leadership that finds its authority in God but its context in God’s people.”¹⁹ The prophets were part of the community of oppressed or aligned with the oppressed community. They knew the community in which they spoke for, cried for and some even died for. Prophetic witness is represented in both Israelite and the African American community.

CHAPTER ONE

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND MORAL LEADERSHIP

This section begins with the question of ethics and what ethics mean from secular and theological perspectives. It examines virtues of justice, love, and most of all freedom and what freedom means in the context of social justice. How is God’s freedom interpreted and justice formulated and put into practice to exert itself amongst secular leaders and leaders of the gospel for the transformation of any social injustices that deprive people of liberty? It looks at how Christian ethics are validated through nonviolent and violent resistance, to address inhumane conditions and how these means are not only a way to tackle oppression but are also a way for God to show his presence in human misery.

Ethics and Theology

Within every culture and context there has always been a push to bring more ethical reform to society; some societies have wrestled with unjust working environments and other have challenged human enslavement and forced labor practices. When we speak of ethics and social responsibility from a secular point of view, we speak of “norms, or standards, of right or good behavior.” In essence, for the purpose of this paper, we are speaking of virtues of justice, moderation, love and compassion to bring about liberty and human dignity. We want corporations to be employers, but we also want them to be good, fair, and just to their workers. We want them to be responsible to their neighbors and give back to the community. All of these are what many would consider to be moral responses to human actions.

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Ethical questions mean that we consider what the right or just thing to do for self and others in the world in which we live. How can we create norms to apply to the common good of all? The philosopher Socrates grappled with these questions. His most significant inquiry had to do with the meaning of one’s life and how one lives. He asked: What sort of life is worth living? If I want to be fulfilled and happy, what sort of person should I be? In an exchange between Socrates and Meno, the question of virtue is debated as follows:

Socrates: Consider this further point: you say that virtue is to be able to rule. Shall we not add to this justly and not unjustly?
Meno: I think so, Socrates, for justice is virtue.
Socrates: As with anything else. For example, if you wish, take roundness, about which I would say that it is a shape, but not simply that it is shape. I would not so speak of it because there are other shapes.
Meno: You are quite right. So I too say that not only justice is a virtue but there are many other virtues.
Socrates: What are they? Tell me, as I could mention other shapes to you if you bade me do so, so do you mention other virtues.
Meno: I think courage is a virtue, and moderation, wisdom, and munificence, and very many others.”

Socrates himself was concerned with morality which he referred to as the “good life”; living a life that did well by others and society. What is the right and responsible thing to do regardless of consequences? Socrates exhibited his understanding of the good life with a practical determination to challenge and question, without wavering, those in political positions. He felt the “state was no longer strong enough to incorporate the realms of morality and religion, as it had done in early Greece when the state was all in all.” Socrates was at odds with the modern state, he felt the state had lost its way, was full of greed and injustice and was in need of virtues of the soul. As a result, Socrates challenged the inner person to live up to their true

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virtues with a spiritual subjection to God and knowledge of the good. Not only to have knowledge but to “exhort his fellow men to practice ‘virtue’ and the care of the soul…its aim was to disquiet men and move them to do something for themselves.” Socrates wanted citizens to practice and perform the virtues of the soul. Such a protreptic mission fell at odds with the state which caused Socrates to be looked upon as a traitor rather than a prophet.

As a result of his enduring inquiry and firm stance he was placed on trial on several “trumped up” political charges. He was ultimately found guilty and put to death. Thus, Socrates shows us that ethics is not only a principle to be mentioned but an action to be taken; virtue is a lived practice. When one is willing to live their principles and challenge their government on moral grounds, there are often consequences that can be fatal (as we will see with Jesus and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.). Socrates showed courage, sacrifice, and boldness in the face of authoritarian rule and was willing to die for what he believed to be the truth.

**Christianity and Morality**

Moral thinking is not alien to Christian understanding; in fact, it is one of the primary means by which Christians operate. The difference between secular ethics and Christian ethics is Christ. When we speak of ethics and social responsibility from a theological perspective, we incorporate God into the equation. We look to the Bible for examples of God’s call for righteous behavior, human sympathy, and neighborly love. We move the old testament prophets into the new testament workings with Jesus based on moral principles and righteous living.


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23 Ibid., 91
a paradigm for moral living. In reference to Paul the Apostle and his ethical stand, Hays lays out three themes:

(A) New Creation: Eschatology and ethics which is the end of one creation (both human and cosmos) and the beginning of a new; from one of evil and suffering to one of justice and righteousness. While waiting for Jesus the community of believers are to “be engaged in active works of love as a means of serving God.” The love ethic is what keeps the community of God together and prepared for the coming savior.

(B) The Cross: Paradigm of faithfulness: The cross represents Christ’s own sacrificial love and we are to be willing to sacrifice ourselves for those who are in Christ. Jesus gave himself for us so we are to bear one another burdens (Galatians 6:2).

(C) Redeemed Community: The Body of Christ: Those who are baptized have become one in Christ so there is no need for separations and distinctions based on race, creed or color because in Christ we are “no longer divided by former distinctions of ethnicity, social status or gender because in Christ all are sons of God.”

If Moses were to be incorporated into Hay’s strand of New Testament moral vision it would show that Moses himself represented ethics of love in his defense of the Hebrews to transform their condition from one of evil and suffering to one of justice and righteousness. Moses’s self-sacrifice in his confrontation with Pharaoh and his willingness to bear his brothers and sisters burdens and Moses bringing the Israelites through the wilderness and toward the promised land for a community of believers to be representative of God’s will and purpose for their lives illustrates this moral vision.

25 Ibid., 1029
Karl Barth maintained that in placing ourselves under the obligations laid down in biblical ethics we are taking on the obligation to obey God, the divine commander: “ethics is obedience to God, and whatever norms are to be found in the Bible should be appropriated (by us) on that basis.” There<br/>fore ethics is not an option for Christians but a divine obligation for disciples of Christ; to not participate in the good of God is to sin against the will of God.

Theology seeks to answer the question of moral living and ethical behavior into righteous actions and Christian understanding of: What Would Jesus Do? In Christian ethics Christ becomes the center of our norms and good standing. As Wayne G. Bouton et al. states, “Christian ethics reinterprets what is going on here; somehow interjecting the person of Jesus Christ into the relationship between the moral agent – the person doing or feeling something, and the moral patient – the person who is the recipient of the action or feeling.” Jesus becomes the central figure, the mediator for moral communication and intercession between both agent and recipient for the purpose of moral living and righteous actions. When human suffering is present, as it was during slavery for black people, the moral agents were often times the abolitionists and clergy with Christian proclivity who spoke against the injustice of enslavement and unrighteousness of human bondage. The moral recipients were those who understood and felt their bondage to be against the will of God. Jesus was in the center of it all binding the relationship and strengthening the moral agents and recipients in the midst of their suffering to a call for righteous justice.

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Christian ethics has its grounding in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-17), Scripture, and especially the teachings of Jesus (Matt 5:1-11, 17-48). The norms from the Old to the New Testament are intertwined, as Martin Luther states:

> Although the commandments teach things that are good, the things done are not done as soon as they are taught, for the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it … Here the second part of scripture comes to our aid, namely the promise of God which declares the glory of, saying, “If you wish to fulfill the law and not covet, as the law demands, come, believe in Christ whom grace, righteousness, peace, liberty and all things are promised you.”

Martin Luther suggests that one can know what is good and communicate the good to others, but to do the good requires an additional power. Jesus becomes the power that not only gives knowledge of the good, but the power and strength to do the good. During slavery many of the slave masters knew the good, they preached the commandments of “thou shalt not murder” and “thou shalt not steal”, yet they murdered many of the enslaved and stole them from their homeland and families. The slave owners had the knowledge but not the power, for if they truly had the power they would have done the good and set the captives free. Instead many of the enslaved found the power of Christ in their own context to fight and gain their freedom. The power came through preachers and abolitionists during slavery; through preachers and civil rights activists during the Civil Rights Movement of the 50’s and 60’s and; through social justice advocates from the 70’s to today.

It is in scripture that moral guidance and ethical behavior of liberation and justice are discovered for Christians. As Richard J. Mouw states, “the Bible offers detailed moral guidance to us…the good life must be pursued with serious and sustained attention to the rich message of

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28Boulton, et al., From Christ to the World, 187.
the scriptures.”

In relating scripture to liberation and justice, Daniel L. Migliore remarks, “Scripture is the unique and irreplaceable witness to the liberating and reconciling activity of God in the history of Israel and supremely in Jesus Christ.”

The Bible in its most basic and uncritical form can justify both power and bondage. The power gives liberating and moral ascension to its adherents, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36 NIV). However, the bondage does just the opposite; it dis-empowers and dehumanizes others by biblical interpretation and justification, “slaves obey your masters” (Eph 6:5 NIV). This is the case during slavery when African slaves in North America were introduced to the Bible at a point in history when the Bible was the main support for proslavery ideology.

In the 1840’s the debate for and against slavery by clergy based on biblical and theological interpretation was fierce. Many pro-slavery clergy adamantly saw slavery as something supported by God and would not accept anti-slavery rhetoric based on morals of humanity and evil. The Bible, to pro-slavery advocates, was the commanding source and if any words be spoken against the inerrancy of the Bible, they were spoken against God and would place the opponents of slavery in a harsh light. Thomas Thompson a proslavery advocate made it clear by basing his reasoning for supporting slavery on numerous examples in scripture, “If God through divine revelation so clearly sanctioned slavery, and even the trade in “strangers,” how could genuine Christians attack modern slavery, or even the slave trade, as an evil?”

Thompson used passages from Genesis 9:25-27 which spoke of the curse of Canaan which many have

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29Ibid., 32.
31James Evans, We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 35.
32Mark A. Knoll, The Civil War as a Theological Crisis (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 33
suggested as justification for African slavery; to Colossians 3:22, 4:1 calling on servants to obey
their masters.

Many anti-slavery clergy and even abolitionists had little defense aside from moral,
principled, and even constitutional grounds. Moses Stuart an anti-slavery seminarian tried his
best to denounce slavery by pointing out its evils and abuses “like the breaking up of marriages
and the sexual predation by white masters on their female slaves” – that violated biblical
morality. He also insisted on labeling ideas of Caucasian superiority over Africans as an “anti-
biblical theory.”53 But none of it sufficed compared to the strong pro-slavery ideology based on
scripture. Only later did anti-slavery activists gain strength and support by pointing out the
general theme of the Bible which is grounded in freedom and humanity with Old Testament and

However, as the Bible was used to denigrate black people during slavery, it was also used
to empower black people during slavery, the Civil Rights Era, and the present context of
persistent racism and discrimination. Scripture became the moral compass out of an unjust
environment. Many enslaved black people were thought to be inspired to escape and rebel
against their chains by the hearing and reading of the Scripture. They thought their situation
immoral and against the will of God. As Raboteau mentions, “as early as 1774 American slaves
were declaring publicly and politically that they thought Christianity and slavery were
incompatible…Frederick Douglas claimed that slaves knew enough of the orthodox theology of
the time to consign all bad slaveholders to hell.”54 Many enslaved people developed an
understanding that Christianity was supposed to espouse a sense of neighborly love not bondage.

33 Ibid., 39
34Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South (New York:
According to Scripture, the moral responsibility of Christian Ethics is first to God and then to neighbor. One of the more central themes of moral practices has to do with love. “Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt 22:37-39 NIV). Love of neighbor gave a cogent moral command to human relationships; it brought God’s people into a community of divine authenticity, open communion, and equal association. To love meant to help, to uplift, to assist your brothers and sisters as you would do for your own life.

Martin Luther King, Jr., believed in the righteous understanding that human beings are children of God made in God’s image; and because God created all of us we should love each other and learn to live with each other as equals. However, as King notes, instead of loving each other we mistreat one another. King saw “The Beloved Community” as a place of hope of the kingdom of God with an ethical understanding of a community that equally embraces and graces all people, “There is no graded scale of essential worth; there is no divine right of one race which differs from the divine right of the another. Every human being has etched in his personality the indelible stamp of the creator”35 King knew that for America to be righteous and morally great, the country had to eliminate its racial arrogance of privileging one group over another. Racism was diametrically opposed to Christianity. Thus, King used the theological understanding of “The Beloved Community” to guide his actions during the Civil Rights Movement to fight against racism and discrimination in America.

Stanley Hauerwas argues in his book, A Community of Character, that the “biblical ethic” in regard to love is often selective and arbitrary. He states, “various strategies are used to justify

our selectivity, such as appealing to ‘central’ biblical themes or images, like love. No doubt love has a central place in the Bible and the Christian life, but when it becomes the primary locus of the biblical ethic it turns into an abstraction that cannot be biblically justified.”

Hauerwas, like King, is concerned with the selectivity without context or community when Christian ethics are applied. According to Hauerwas, in order to justify Christian ethics, it must be in concert with scripture from a theological, historical, and social context within a particular community and people. So, for example, in Egypt we see that the Israelites were a community, but one at a political, social, and economic disadvantage in an otherwise affluent nation. Likewise, African Americans as a community have suffered in America. Community helps us to recognize the theological context in which moral actions arise. As Hauerwas suggests, we must avoid separating ethics of scripture from the theological context that makes them intelligible.

When God intervenes in Israelite and black enslavement, God enters a particular context and community of suffering and oppression; therefore, the ethics of scripture demands not only individual salvation and conversion but social salvation (or what Cornel West would term social freedom) and community transformation from one of bondage to one of freedom for a larger group of people. God’s love extends beyond individual salvation into the social. To spread ethics of justice and fairness to humanity is to place Christian ethics in the context of human suffering and God in the context of human deliverance. Within the context of God’s love there is a social justice component that calls attention to immoral actions and institutions and the transformation of social conditions. As Walter Rauschenbusch has said, “the moral values of freedom, sacrificial love, compassion, justice, humility, fraternity and equality find their highest expression in the

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36Boulton, et al., From Christ to the World, 38.
37Ibid., 39.
Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel

Walter Rauschenbusch was one of the leading social gospel proponents of the nineteenth century. The Social Gospel was concerned with incorporating the love of Christ into the social and political spaces where injustice was found. As Gary Dorrien states, “The social gospel…began with the distinctly modern idea that Christianity has a social-ethical mission to transform the structures of society in the direction of social justice.” The social gospel was a radical concept at the time since many believed the gospel’s sole purpose was soul salvation. Rauschenbusch recalls in his early days of ministry how colleagues admonished him, “that pastors were supposed to save souls not waste their time on social work.” narrating a story about a young missionary who “implored me almost with tears to dismiss these social questions and give myself to ‘Christian work.’” However, Rauschenbusch never saw the difference between social questions and Christian work. Rauschenbusch was concerned with the ethical question and how Christ’s love expressed itself in the community of the underprivileged and exploited workers in America. He often argued against the spreading capitalism of America and its unchristian, immoral effects upon the lives of American laborers. In his book, *Christianizing the Social Order*, he maintained that most of America’s social order and systems were good because they were Christianized (e.g. churches, families, politics, and educational systems). He countered, however, that America’s moral demise was in its economic system and that society’s

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“moral gains were threatened by an economic system that militated against America’s democratizing Christian spirit.”

Rauschenbausch sought to challenge the unethical capitalist system for its exploitation of workers. However, to black people in America the capitalist system was not only exploitive but dehumanizing, degrading, and democratically unfair. It was indignant to black family, community, and education. To Christianize the capitalist system for African Americans meant to bring moral stands of freedom and justice to their lives and humanity and dignity to their souls. The whole system needed to be Christianized to incorporate the humanity of black people. As Washington Gladden would later state, “the purpose of God’s inbreaking kingdom was to regenerate individual and society as coordinated interests on earth.”

Regeneration to Gladden was the transformation of conditions in the soul as well as society. Enslaved black people needed a social regeneration that would transform their dehumanizing, demoralizing, and social condition. The regenerative power of justice, love, and peace for humanity as well as society as a necessity to express God’s presence on earth had to be incorporated and connected to the lives of enslaved black people in America for America to truly be transformed. America’s political structure had to be changed, policies had to be enacted in accordance with the changes and souls had to be converted with the understanding that “love thy neighbor” meant everyone of God’s human creation regardless of color. The regeneration could not stop at slavery it had to continue after slavery for America’s social ills to truly dissipate. Regeneration is a process calling for the continuous presence of God’s righteousness and moral practice to be heralded based on context. Context would change for black people in America and the contextual change had to keep up with the moral practice for God’s presence to be seen in the lives of black people through the

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41 Dorrien, Social Ethics in the Making, 111.  
42 Dorrien, The Making of American Liberal Theology 1805-1900, 312.
times. Moral practice had to be sustained regardless of the changes of the times to affect the lives of God’s people on Earth as it is in heaven from slavery to present day reality.

But the change could not come on its own, there had to be agents of change, prophets of rage, and sacrificial voices without fear of consequences. Moses initiated the challenge to unjust powers and many biblical and modern agents afterwards exemplified it. Some agents believed in violent overthrow of the system others were non-violent, some were cordial in their dealings others were confrontational in their demands; but all believed their providential calling from God to dismantle a system of oppression that was morally wrong and righteously unacceptable.

In summation, Christian resistance to institutional racism, human suffering, and injustice is instinctively challenged on moral grounds by faith leaders that believe that God calls disciples to soul as well as social salvation. Social salvation is seen in the souls of black folks to challenge the impeding system and free themselves when others are silent and even complicit in their affliction. Black leaders emerged out of their context in the spirit of Moses and Joshua to confront their oppression and empower their people toward social regeneration even if it meant sacrificing their own lives. Christian ethics as modeled by Jesus Christ, and secular ethics as modeled by Socrates, not only requires moral stands but sacrificial lambs. When God comes into the context of human suffering the ethical demands for justice and fairness and God in the context of human deliverance is seen in the actions of his moral agents.

In the next chapter, this paper aligns Christian ethics and moral agents to the unethical and unjust institution of slavery. Slavery was indeed an immoral institution that deprived its victims of both justice and freedom; it denigrated God’s human creation to subordinate and inferior status and allowed for brutal treatment, harsh labor practices and murder and rape of its sufferers. The next chapter examines the immoral actions of the institution of slavery that both
the Israelites and Africans were subjects of. However, it also looks at how out of the context of suffering and enslavement moral leaders such as Moses in Egypt and Frederick Douglas and Harriet Tubman in America emerged out of their context and challenged the system of oppression so that God’s regenerative and salvific presence could be felt and deliverance could be seen.
CHAPTER TWO
THE EMERGENCE OF MOSES AND BLACK LEADERSHIP OUT OF THE CONTEXT OF SLAVERY

Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slaver girl to get it. She opened it and saw a baby. He was crying and she felt sorry for him…And the girl went and got the baby’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son, she named him Moses, saying “I drew him out of the water.” (Exod 2:5-10)

Out of the anomaly of economic exploitation, political oppression, human degradation, segregation, humiliation, silent insurrections, and infanticide, the boy Moses is born. As Gregory of Nyssa states, “Moses is said to have been born when the tyrant’s law sought to prevent the birth of male offspring…Already appearing beautiful in swaddling clothes, he caused his parents to draw back from having such a child destroyed by death.”\(^1\) The boy Moses was put in a basket and placed in the Nile River. The same river that gave wealth to Egypt also gave escape and life to Moses. Moses lands in the hands of Pharaoh’s daughter and she adopts him. The context of Moses in the basket drifting down the Nile and landing in Pharaoh’s house is not only protection from a horrific death but the beginning of a virtuous life to combat oppression. Gregory of Nyssa describes the scene as such, “When we lay bare the hidden meaning of the history, Scripture is seen to teach that the birth which distresses the tyrant is the beginning of the virtuous life.”\(^2\) Gregory of Nyssa suggests that Moses is not only a child of salvation but a moral agent coming to dismantle the injustices of a brutal regime, both its structure and its teachings. Its structure is

\(^2\) Ibid., 33.
exploitive, its teachings are humiliating, and Moses’s life is presented as the antithesis to both systems. In essence, Moses’s birth presents a challenge to the context of oppression and it is in oppression that Moses’s leadership is formulated and ultimately advanced. His own mother is called to nurse him (Exod 2:8), as Gregory suggests it is this nursing that gives him the nourishment of the body and the consciousness of the soul.

Moses is indeed a symbol of virtue that is born and placed in the midst of tyranny and oppression but he already possesses, through his nurturing, a virtue that enables him to side with the oppressed of the land. The context that Moses finds himself in is unjust but his nurtured soul is grounded in freedom, his virtuous soul is grounded in justice, humanity, and the Israelite community. And so, with his virtuous soul, steeped in God’s provincial plans for his life, he is willing to challenge the injustices on a local, individual scale by defending an Israelite and killing an Egyptian (Exodus 2:12). This defense and killing is the beginning of dismantling a bigger system of tyranny and oppression. But for now, Moses’ nurtured soul, filled with virtue, does not allow him to comfortably sit back and do nothing, so he rises up to free his conscious, while freeing an Israelite and going against a system of oppression.

Moses thus becomes a moral agent. Even before he is called by God, he is conscious and sensitive toward the plight of the Israelite community. His moral soul and virtuous appetite for the oppressed resonated with the Israelite people which caused him to defend the Israelite: “The fight of the Egyptian against the Hebrew is like the fight of idolatry against true religion, of licentiousness against self-control, of injustice against righteousness, of arrogance against humility and of everything against what it perceived its opposite.”3 Gregory of Nyssa uses Moses’s advancement against the Egyptian as an opportunity to distinguish between good and

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3Ibid., 35.
evil, and he sees Moses’s ascension as a moral agent even before Moses is called a servant of God. As John Adams wrote of the American Revolution, “The Revolution was in the hearts and minds of the people…this radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments and affections of the people was the real American Revolution.”

It is true: Moses was a conscious revolutionary filled with virtue and moral appetite before he was called prophet and leader of the people (although both were the workings of God). He understood his moral duty before he acknowledged his divine calling.

However, when the divine calling is thrust upon Moses he inhabits a deeper revolutionary spirit from God and for the people of Israel. His actions are no longer his own but God’s. The divine indwelling of Moses’ calling gives him access to God’s will for freedom and justice for the Israelite community. Moses is no longer operating on his own moral conscious but a divine calling that takes him to another level of activism and righteous advocacy. Moses’ moral character took on one Egyptian, God’s divine indwelling moves Moses to take on a whole nation, hegemonic structure, and tyrannical leader in Pharaoh. With the divine indwelling and calling Moses is not only taking on a person but a system, Moses nurtured virtuous soul now extends to the whole Israelite community and the structure of oppression for the purpose of social salvation. Social salvation for the Israelite community is God’s promise and Moses’s responsibility. With the indwelling of the divine, Moses’ character is now more confrontational toward a system and an oppressed condition; his mission is broader for justice, freedom and salvation for a people; and his conscious is convicted by God toward deliverance and total transformation of the Israelite community. With the divine indwelling Moses’ every step and conversation is conducted by God; Moses repeats God’s words (Moses, tell Ol Pharaoh to let my

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people go), performs God’s duties (use the stick in your hand) and represents God’s will (The God of Israel says…). The difference in his character is clear, even when he is reluctant to confront Pharaoh, because of the divine indwelling and calling, he moves forward. Even when Pharaoh is harsh, threatening and unimpressed, Moses remains committed to the cause, he does not run and hide like he did after killing the Egyptian. He does not cower to the Israelites, even when the Israelites are questioning his leadership. God is interested in freeing the Israelites and Moses becomes God’s chosen agent to carry out the mission.

**Black Oppression**

The same moral persuasion based on a conscious conviction and virtuous appetite for freedom led many enslaved black people on their own movement against an unjust nation, oppressive system, and unethical and at times tyrannical leader. Many black people, like Moses, were born at a time when the nation sought to enslave and violently control the lives of black people. Many enslaved black people condemned the system on moral grounds. The context of oppression and enslavement made them speak out against its teachings. Even though slave masters used the Bible to justify and dehumanize the slaves, there were many instances where individual slaves rejected their station and escaped their teachings:

> …under the most difficult conditions, under pain of mutilation and death, throughout their two hundred years of enslavement in North America, these Afro-Americans continued to rebel…they showed their refusal to submit by running away, slowdowns, and subtle forms of resistance which asserted, if only to themselves and their brothers and sisters, their dignity as human beings.\(^5\)

These individual rebellions took place without any organized resistance. Many of them were not leaders or preachers but individual slaves that took matters into their own hands.

through insurrections against local slave masters to show their angst with their suffering. Their virtuous appetite rose up, like Moses, and spurred a conscious conviction of serenity that allowed each person to perform their own dereliction of duty. Like Moses killing the Egyptian based on a virtuous soul and moral conviction, many enslaved black people rebelled with violent insurrections against their local slave owners to show their disapproval with their station. Like Moses many of the enslaved rose up to defend their brothers and sisters that were being raped and beaten and castigated. Again, virtue verses tyranny. As moral agents, many did not go up against a system or government structure, however they did rebel against their individual slave owners and local communities.

Many white preachers, who were also slave owners, failed to see slavery as a moral issue. One of the primary reasons why slave owners would not Christianize many of their slaves is because they feared “conversion would make the slaves difficult to manage and perhaps even prompt them to rise up against their masters.” Unfortunately for the slave owners, the lack of Christianization could not stop rebellions or slave insurrections in mass numbers. Rebellions came in every direction and in various forms, from verbal abuse to outright violence. In 1862 in Mississippi a resident of the state wrote the governor that “there is greatly needed in this country a company of mounted rangers…to keep the Negroes in awe, who are getting quite imprudent. Our proximity to the enemy has had a perceptible influence on them.” The same fear occurred in Georgia resulting in a bill being introduced in the legislature ‘to punish slaves and free persons of color for abusive and insulting language to white persons.’ These laws would do little than

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give legal permission to an already abusive system that enslaved blacks readily endured. So, to the enslaved the law meant little to nothing.

One of the major, more active and radically engaging pragmatic oppositions to slavery was silent insurrections. Insurrections were visible signs of resistance that blacks were disgusted and dissatisfied with their condition as slaves and wanted out! The insurrections were continuous revolts, rebellions, and attacks by blacks to free themselves. The revolts ranged from individual conspirators to escape their chains to massive planned movements of violence to end slavery. Blacks were rising up in such indifference that in 1732 the governor and legislature of Virginia “passed new laws concerning the control of slaves.”\(^9\) In fact, every time a major insurrection occurred, there were stringent laws passed to curb the slaves: “after the Vesey conspiracy in Charleston, South Carolina adopted regulations providing for the imprisonment of Negro seamen who entered the city while their ship was in port. After the Nat Turner insurrection in Virginia, Alabama provided that attempting to teach a Negro to read, write or spell was punishable by a fine of $250 to $500.”\(^10\)

Like Moses the enslaved blacks felt a moral conviction to free themselves and their families through hostile and violent means for their own conscious and dignity.

*The Call of Moses, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass*

The Lord said “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptian and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey – the home of the Canaanities, Hittities, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are


oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” (Exod 3:7-10)

When God officially calls Moses to duty, he is not only a conscious agent but prophetic leader. The combination of conscious agent and prophetic leader fuels the divine operative that was already in him from birth to pursue justice with moral urgency and direct calling from God to liberate a people and dismantle a system of oppression. Moses is a prophet sent to do God’s will and speak God’s word: “The prophet proclaimed God’s word to and within the community, calling Israel to fidelity to that relationship.” Indeed Moses was a prophet of truth and social justice and was called to the community of Israelites to proclaim God’s will upon a merciless empire. Again, leadership emerges out of the context of suffering.

Moses as Prophet

Moses’ role as a prophet is to order Pharaoh to free the Israelites, to speak to the children of Israel about their pending freedom, and to lead them to a promise of tranquility, “a land flowing with milk and honey.” To do this, Moses must align himself with the strength of God and the power of his anointing to speak truth to power, for a prophet speaks unapologetically to his foes. As prophet, Moses must speak God’s word not only to God’s people, but also to their enemies. The entire regime of Pharaoh is antithetical to the freedom of God’s people. As such, God challenges Pharaoh and the entire political establishment under Pharaoh’s authority.

Moses as Prophet and Political Leader

The empirical challenge causes Moses to be seen as both prophetic and political leader. Aaron Wildavsky, in Moses as Political Leader, seeks to argue that the Hebrew Bible like other political theories should be “treated as ‘political philosophy.’” After all, it seems to be

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11Rose M. Beal, Mystery of the Church, People of God: Yves Congar’s Total Ecclesiology as Path to Vatican II (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2014), 91.
preoccupied with precisely those matters that are of concern to political theorists: War and peace, justice and injustice, rulers and ruled, obedience and disobedience, individual and state, empire and anarchy.”

Wildavsky argues Moses is a political revolutionary precisely because he is interested in overthrowing a regime: “Most of us are born into regimes that we may modify but do not often change drastically. When we do change regimes as Moses did, that is called a revolution; and its leaders like Moses in his struggle against Pharaoh are called revolutionaries.”

Wildavsky’s argument challenges the historical and conventional criticism of dichotomizing religion and politics, where some have found the relationship damaging to the faith. But as Daniel Migliore states, “for most Christians it has become increasingly clear that the real issue is not whether there is an inseparable link between faith and political practice but how this link is to be understood.” The link of political practice is understood with freedom from monarchal oppression and is intertwined with issues of God’s truth and justice on earth as it is in heaven as Moses has shown.

John T. McNeill quotes John Calvin’s argument in *Institutes* that politics can support religion and the kingdom of God on earth. In summarizing Calvin, he states, “The political state has, indeed, functions directly connected with religion. It protects and supports the worship of God, promotes justice and peace, and is necessary in our earthly pilgrimage toward heaven.” According to Calvin, God used the piety of politics to promote the ascension of religion in the positive for the lives of his adherents and if done correctly rulers can be the greatest source of

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13 Ibid., 22.
God’s witness on earth. Calvin saw the connection between the spiritual and the political and how the two merged into governments in the lives of people to direct their devotion toward God and civil duties toward others. As Calvin states, “Man is under two kinds of government – one spiritual, by which the conscious is formed to piety and the service of God; the other political by which a man is instructed in the duties of humanity and civility, which are to be observed in an intercourse with mankind.”\(^\text{16}\) Calvin is in accordance with political and religious teachings of Jesus when he encourages the Jews to pay taxes and “Give unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God that which is God.” (Mark 12:17).

But what, for Calvin, should happen when the government acts unjustly toward its people? Calvin encourages the people to respect the authority in the midst of imploring help from God, “for God does intervene to lay tyrants low, sometimes raising up leaders who are appointed instruments of revolution even when they know it not.”\(^\text{17}\) Moses was indeed one of those revolutionary leaders who emerged out of the context of oppression to challenge the tyrannical rule of Pharaoh. Moses is a revolutionary because he is charged with overthrowing an oppressive hegemonic structure and leading a despondent people. Moses thus becomes the quintessential prophet fashioned by God to confront a political empire, not because he is perfect, but because he is flawed: “[Moses] is far from being beyond us, [he] was full of human faults, from passivity to impatience to idolatry.”\(^\text{18}\) However God still uses Moses for leadership and confrontation of an unjust system.

*Justice and Righteousness Equally Combined*

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 40  
\(^{17}\) Ibid., xvii  
Moses’s task is one of justice and righteousness to set the captives free. “The prophets often single out justice and righteousness as especially defining of covenant claims on Israel in light of the oppression and exploitation of the weak and vulnerable.”\textsuperscript{19} Moses is given this commission of justice and, as Birch writes, “justice is often a major part of the prophet’s preaching and practice in ancient Israel.”\textsuperscript{20}

God initiates a covenant relationship with the Israelites, which establishes a call for justice and moral obligation. The covenant relationship is one built on God’s divine character of holiness, love, faithfulness, and compassion, but it is justice that stands out as the knot that binds the moral obligation. Justice and righteousness are seen aligning with God’s will for the Israelite people. “It is clear that Israel understood justice and righteousness as closely associated; they appear together often throughout the cannon. Both are aspects of the character of God. ‘But the Lord of Hosts is exalted by justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness’ (Isa 5:16).”\textsuperscript{21}

Moses is the quintessential conscious, towering prophet, and divine revolutionary to carry out the mission of justice.

\textit{A New Social Reality}

God assigns Moses the task of liberating the Israelites. The call is clear: Moses is to confront Pharaoh, escape the bondage, and lead the people to the Promised Land. It is a radical call to confront the present context of oppression and exploitation. Walter Brueggemann looks at the life of Moses’s calling as a prophet emerging to release a new social reality:

Israel can only be understood in terms of the new call of God and his assertion of an alternate social reality. The present social reality is injunctive; fraught with unjust bearings and burdens of immorality that cannot stand in the face of God’s freedom. Prophesy is born precisely in that moment when the emergence of social

\textsuperscript{20}\textsuperscript{Ibid., 12.}
\textsuperscript{21}\textsuperscript{Ibid., 13.}
political reality is so radical and explicable that it has nothing less than a theological cause.\textsuperscript{22} Brueggemann describes the scene of injustice as not only detrimental to the Israelites but disgusting to the sight of God for His human creation. Moses becomes a radical prophet that aims to dismantle an injunctive unjust social human dysfunction. The theological cause for Moses was to confront an evil, immoral, oppressive regime and liberate a miserably enslaved people to bring about a new social reality. Brueggemann goes further to suggest that there were two purposes to Moses’s prophetic call that presented itself as the opposite to the present regime: (1) dismantling Egypt’s religious gods of triumphalism; and (2) dismantling the politics of oppression and exploitation by countering it with a politics of justice and compassion.

The gods of Egypt served to justify their legal, political, and social claims. In the context of Egypt, these gods discerned law and order. The Egyptians gods were an imperial order of hegemonic dominance that determined the political and economic arrangements to provide the natural order of Pharaoh. “The gods of Egypt are the immovable lords of order. They call for, sanction, and legitimate a society order, which is precisely what Egypt had.”\textsuperscript{23} Egypt had sanctions ordering slavery and a society built on slave labor. The natural order was defined by Pharaoh.

\textit{White Christian Slave Owners Justify Slavery}

Such religious gods of triumphalism are represented in the biblical interpretation by many white Christians and clergy to justify slavery and the social order of black people. As Katie Geneva Cannon points out:

To elicit white Christians’ consent and approval of racial chattel slavery, which theologically contradicted liberation reading of the Christian gospel, some of the leading antebellum churchmen –

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 7.
Robert Lewis Dabney, a Presbyterian theologian, Augustine Verot, the Catholic Bishop of Georgia and East Florida, and John Leadley Dagg, Baptist layman who served as president of Mercer University – presented slavery as conforming to the divine principles revealed in the Bible. White clergy were trained to use the Bible to give credence to the legitimacy of racial chattelhood.  

Many of the clergy and theologians justified their interpretation as “normative biblical ethical teachings” to continue its practice and clear their conscience. This was a continuous practice but also an empirical sanction of religious triumphalism to justify oppression nationally and politically for the continuation of slavery. The interpretation of biblical justification of slavery made God the enforcer of slavery rather than liberator of freedom.

Enslavement of Israelites was the political decree that followed the religious order and enabled the dictates of Pharaoh as god. Moses emerges out of a different theological context to bring a genuine alternative to the present existence to show the pre-eminence and dominance of Israel’s God over both the imperial religion of the Egyptians and the exploitation of the Israelite people. With the destruction of Pharaoh and his regime, Moses shows the God of liberation and justice as an alternative to the present reality:

Moses introduced not just the new free God and not just a message of social liberation. Rather, his work came precisely at the engagement of the religion of God’s freedom with the politics of human justice. Derivative from Marx, we can learn from these traditions that finally we will not have a politics of justice and compassion unless we have a religion of God’s freedom.

A religion of God’s freedom conquers the manipulation of scripture, the imperial religious triumphalism that favors oppression and brings about a new social order for enslaved people. Moses becomes the agent that emerges out of injustice and enslavement to set the captives free.

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25 Ibid., 44.
26 Ibid., 8.
and, through divine order, confronts a ruthless regime built on religious propaganda, hegemonic subordination, human exploitation, and political oppression.

The alternative community or new social reality of God to the present regime of Pharaoh becomes the aim of Moses’s mission. Moses seeks to overthrow Pharaoh’s unethical, evil empire and to provide a new social reality built on God’s freedom that diametrically opposes the present assault on God’s human creation. God’s freedom is concerned with humanity and human personality that cannot be expressed under caged circumstances. New leadership by Moses would bring about an alternative community by God to confront and dismantle the present regime. “Israel emerged not by Moses hand- although not without Moses’ hand- as a genuine alternative community.”27 The alternative community seeks to dismantle the present institution of enslavement and the social and religious context of human enslavement. “Yahweh makes possible and requires an alternative theology and an alternative sociology.”28 Moses becomes a prophetic freedom fighter for a new social reality.

Bruce Birch concludes that many in the church have made prophetic witness and justice marginal matters in the church, when in fact it should be a central theme in the life of the church community: “The role of the prophet and the place of justice within the prophetic message are not marginal matters for God’s people but central to the life and leadership of the community.”29 The black church and black people during and after slavery had no choice but to make prophetic witness and justice central to the life and leadership of their community, for it was the centrality of justice that helped them to obtain freedom.

_African-American Prophetic Thought of Liberation_

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27 Brueggemann, _Prophetic Imagination_, 4.
28Brueggemann, _Prophetic Imagination_, 4.
Out of the loins of African-American enslavement came the richness of black prophetic liberation leadership concerned with justice and freedom for all. When God intercedes in the lives of black leadership the mission of black people’s freedom becomes more expansive, no longer is it just individual insurrections and local rebellions. African American leaders, in the vein of Moses the prophet, are now looking to take on the system of oppression for the freedom of the oppressed. Many African American leaders used Moses as their inspiration to address black people’s suffering and confront and dismantle a racist, immoral institution. “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Slavery,” as Cornel West ably defines, was a period during slavery that was critical of the institution of enslavement. Many insurrections were the result of restless black people disturbed by shackles, who wanted out of their condition.

However, there is another component to black leadership that gives face and more sacredness and allegiance to the African-American Christian ethics and cause for freedom; this is the prophetic call. According to Cornel West, Prophetic Christian thought for Afro-American critical thinking is twofold: First, “It confronts candidly the tragic character of human history…it takes more seriously the existential anxiety, political oppression, economic exploitation, and social degradation of actual human beings.” The human tragedy of slavery is considered in Christian prophetic thought when one speaks of justice and righteousness. Slavery encompassed social degradation and economic exploitation as well as all other political and human oppression.

Secondly, “Prophetic Afro American Christian thought elevates the notion of struggle (against all odds)” To be prophetic is to go against the grain of what is unacceptable to human conditions and to seek to transform that reality to something better and more sacred and

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31 Cornel West, Prophesy Deliverance, 19.
acceptable to God’s freedom for his human creation. In essence, taken together, Afro American Prophetic Christian thought sought to identify history’s horror of slavery and struggle whole heartedly to dismantle its existence with the righteous fervor of God’s favor, in pursuit of God’s freedom for the love of human creation.

Existential and Social Freedom

While Walter Rauschenbaur spoke of soul salvation and social salvation, Prophetic Christianity according to Cornel West had two inseparable dimensions of freedom: existential freedom and social freedom. “Existential freedom is an effect of the divine gift of grace which promises to sustain persons through and finally deliver them from the bondage to death, disease and despair.”32 Sermons by African Americans during and after slavery often grasped the eschatological nature of preaching which was grounded in the understanding that heaven would deliver them from the present evil environment and give them a mansion in heaven. This disposition often afflicted some of the early African-American preachers who preached a pie-in-the-sky theology that was considered useless to their present dehumanizing conditions. This was the preaching of soul conversion over societal dysfunction. The preaching was subjective and inward, always looking heavenly for a heavenly home where there are no more tears, no more heartache, no more pain and no more dying days – soon and very soon we are going to see the king.

Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, educator and liberal theologian in the early 1900s, criticized and rejected such discourse of heavenly preaching. He felt it was irrational and unconstructive for practical living. Mays referred to this black preaching as “otherworldly salvation.” As he explained, “The negro churchgoer has been consistently reminded of the otherworldly aspect of

32Ibid., 18.
According to Mays, the majority of the sermons preached in the Black Church ended on the idea of heaven, which he found to be absurd and insulting to black intelligence. The rejection for Mays was more than an insult to intelligence; it was static, inactive, and settling for inhumane conditions. The idea of going to heaven to escape poverty, indignity, and inhumanity, which black preachers espoused, was, according to Mays, debilitating.

The second dimension of freedom for West is that of social freedom. “Social freedom is the aim of Christian political practice, a practice that flows from the divine gift of grace; social freedom results from the promotion and actualization of the norms of individuality and democracy…social freedom is thoroughly a matter of this worldly human liberation.”

“This worldly” human liberation is often at odds with “other worldly or heavenly” liberation. However, as West points out, in prophetic Christianity existential freedom is intertwined with social freedom to empower people toward liberation: “Existential freedom empowers people to fight for social freedom.” As stated earlier, one is not separated from the other, both are of God. Thus, existential freedom becomes more than just eschatological; it becomes actual and practical when segmented to social justice causes. It is the divine power behind the human struggle for social justice. When existential freedom and social freedom are placed in proximity it becomes the ethical and actual response to human injustice, political exploitation, and economic oppression that prevents the full expression of human personality. The two combined seeks a new social reality for the oppressed.

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35 Ibid., 18.
African-American prophetic thought during slavery was interested in reversing the course of bondage with the norms of freedom and human expression and transitioning a new social reality built on God’s freedom through God’s called agents. Like Egyptian slavery, American slavery was evil; it was wrong. The call of African-American Moral Liberation Leadership was clear: To escape the inhumane bondage and confront the moral evil of slavery that castigated and humiliated God’s people.

**Harriet Tubman: African-American Moral Liberation Leadership**

When existential and social freedom take place in the individual it now becomes a divine calling beyond just individual missions but social salvation to transform, regenerate, and dismantle the system of oppression by using God’s called agents to deliver the oppressed. Like Moses, God places his called agents in the context of oppression so that they might be a virtue to the tyrant of justice and liberation. There were many African Americans during slavery that sought to bring an alternative social reality to their condition and use the existential freedom in conjunction with social freedom to bring about God’s liberation for God’s human creation. It must be noted that prophetic leadership is not determined by those who have conferred upon themselves the title of black clergy nor by those who simply speak of God in the struggle. Moses did not speak of God nor was he considered a divine ruler when he killed the Egyptian; he was a moral agent concerned with affliction upon the Israelite community. However, his workings whether moral agent or prophet were still of God. Prophetic leaders are those who recognize God, whose actions speak for God’s justice, and who are willing, like Jesus, to sacrifice their lives, peace, and comfort for others. Prophetic leaders are those who mimic the actions of Moses and the philosophy of Christ. “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of
God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness [justice] for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:9-10).

I will now turn to discuss two prophetic leaders who, though they were not clergy, certainly had knowledge of and interaction with God. In the spirit of Moses, they gave their lives and led their people from a context of bondage to a context of freedom. They were led by God to act and speak boldly of God’s freedom to an enslaved people. Like Moses, one used an escape route to lead enslaved black people to freedom and the other confronted government oppression to demand an end to slavery. In this case I speak of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass who emerged out of slavery to give their lives for the struggle of freedom.

Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman was born in the slave state of Maryland around 1820 and given the name Araminta Ross. From a young age, Harriet had visions of freedom. She recalls later in her life that “I seemed to see a line, and on the other side of that line were green fields, and lovely flowers, and beautiful white ladies, who stretched out their arms to me over the line, but I couldn’t reach them nohow. I always fell before I got to the line.”36 Little did Harriet know that her existential vision would be turned into social reality and she would eventually reach the line of freedom. Harriet Tubman had what could be called a liberation spirit of escapism and she ultimately used this spirit for her journey toward freedom. As Maggie Fisher recounts, “Illiterate but brilliant and passionate, Araminta Ross escaped to freedom on a solitary journey in 1849 guided by a star, her brothers William and Robert having turned back in fear.”37 Using what is referred to as the Underground Railroad as an escape route, she made it from slavery to freedom.

37 Ibid.
However, she was not satisfied because her visions of freedom expanded beyond herself. As such, she risked her life and went back to slave territory to get others so that they too would share in God’s freedom. Thus, showing divine moral obligation is not only to oneself but to the whole of God’s human creation. Like Moses she wanted all her people to be free. The Underground Railroad became a shuttle, a secret passage, an open Red Sea that allowed for enslaved blacks to pass from the South to North. As Bruce Feiler notes, “Though the Underground Railroad was neither unified nor centralized, it was the most comprehensive attempt to undermine the behemoth and the greatest movement of civil disobedience since the Revolution.”38 Using this form of civil disobedience, Harriet Tubman became the Moses of her people. She even adopted the name Moses as an alias to keep her real name anonymous from those who pursued her to take her life. In 1886, a book entitled Harriet, the Moses of Her People was printed by Sarah Bradford. Bradford admitted that the name was a bit confusing considering Harriet was a woman, “But I only give her here the name by which she was familiarly known, both at the North and at the South, during the years of terror of the Fugitive Slave Law, and during our last Civil War…her cry to the slave-holders, was ever like his to Pharaoh, ‘Let my people go!’”39

Tubman’s actions place her in the context of the “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Slavery” period as an African-American Moral Liberation Leader, along with those who were interested in freeing God’s people from religious imperialism and institutional racism. Using the Underground Railroad, Tubman made a way for her and others to escape from the slave state of Maryland to the free states of Pennsylvania and Ohio. Feiler notes that, “For

38 Bruce Feiler, America’s Prophet: Moses and the American Story (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 112.
39 Ibid., 137.
millions of Africans enslaved in the South, Ohio was the Promised Land. And the Ohio River was the Jordan.”\footnote{Ibid., 116} In her use of biblical imagery in relationship to the Israelites’ journey from Egypt, she stated she was led by an “invisible pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night.”\footnote{Ibid., 134.}

The liberation of Israel in the book of Exodus and the emancipation of enslaved African Americans can be interpreted and remembered alongside one another. As Eddie Glaude notes in his book, \textit{Exodus! Religion, Race and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America}, using the biblical story of the Exodus became “the predominate political language of African Americans…Exodus was no longer the story of Israel but an account of African-American slavery and deliverance.”\footnote{Ibid., 129.} Moses and the Exodus story became the story of black people and ultimately black freedom. Harriet Tubman became Moses and a pillar of black prophetic leadership and, as Fisher states, “She was to return to ‘Pharaoh’s Land’ nineteen times in the next twelve years and to bring out at least 300 enslaved including her parents ‘Old Rit’ and ‘Old Ben’ Ross”\footnote{Angie O’Gorman, \textit{The Universe Bends Toward Justice: A Reading on Christian Nonviolence in the U.S.} (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), 80.} who had taught Harriet how to navigate through the woods and trees at night. Each time she made her way from the cage of slavery to the winds of freedom, she gave God the credit, “‘twasn’t me, twas the Lord.” \footnote{Angie O’Gorman, \textit{The Universe Bends Toward Justice}, 81.}

Tubman chose a method of freedom that did not include petitioning the government but rather escaping the institution through secret routes. She organized enslaved persons and baffled slave masters with fury. Her life was constantly threatened, and many hunted her but could not capture her or her disciples. Frederick Douglass applauded her efforts and stated that “I know of
no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people.”

Douglass, like Moses, used the liberationist method of petitioning and confronting the government for absolute freedom – “Let my people go.”

*Frederick Douglass: African-American Moral Liberation Leader*

Frederick Douglass was another African-American Moral Liberation Leader during the “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Slavery” period. Through his prophetic use of language, Douglass urged the democracy of enslaved black people. Like Moses, Douglass’s leadership emerged out of slavery. He taught himself to read and write and used his oratory skills and knowledge of the American constitution to become one of the greatest militant abolitionists to confront injustices associated with the moral wrong of slavery. As West contends, “Prophetic Afro American Christian thought elevates the notion of struggle (against all odds).”

Douglass agitated the notion of struggle in many of his speeches to arouse the people toward action. As Douglass stated in one of his famous speeches given in Canandaiga, New York, “The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without demand.”

Douglass wanted black people out of slavery by any means necessary. He was not willing to compromise, but rather his prophetic anger with the system and injustice to black people made him courageously suited to take on the struggle of freedom. In his book, *Black Prophetic Fire*, West refers to Douglass as a prophet on fire for justice. He says of Douglass, “In the black prophetic tradition Frederick courageously raised their voices in order to bear witness to people’s suffering and used collective

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efforts to overcome injustice and make the world a better place for everyone.”

Frederick Douglass was that type of agent. He was willing to speak and encouraged others to show the same courage to address the demoralizing system. Douglass's rebuke was both political and constitutional which urged freedom for all Americans.

In an anti-slavery speech given at a gathering in Boston in 1860 after many African Americans in the audience were attacked and viciously beaten by white agitators, Douglass gave a speech entitled “A Plea For Free Speech.” In it, he assailed the mob that had invaded the meeting as well as the politicians who had allowed it to happen by not providing protection for those who had gathered. He argued:

…the leaders of the mob were gentlemen. They were men who pride themselves upon their respect for law and order. These gentlemen brought their respect for the law with them and proclaimed it loudly while in the very act of breaking the law. Theirs was the law of slavery. The law of free speech and the law for the protection of public meetings they trampled underfoot, while they greatly magnified the law of slavery.

Douglass goes on to reference the Constitution and the importance of free speech and public gathering to the founding fathers: “No right was deemed by the fathers of the government more sacred than the right of speech. It was in their eyes, as in the eyes of all thoughtful men, the great moral renovator of society and government.” Although the founding fathers had excluded blacks in that privilege, Douglass saw it as a moral obligation of the nation to allow freedom to reign on every God-given soul in America, including the enslaved.

Douglass’s popularity was not restricted to the black enslaved community. Rather, unlike any black leader before him, he was called on constantly by freedom fighters as well as then-

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49 Foner and Branham, *Lift Every Voice*, 356.
50 Ibid.
President Abraham Lincoln on matters of race. In July 1862, President Lincoln drafted the Emancipation Proclamation. In his draft, he pronounced that “all slaves within states still in rebellion against the Union would be declared free, ‘thenceforward and forever.’”\textsuperscript{51} The proclamation, if signed, would affect legislation that had guided policy in eleven states for nearly three quarters of a century and free three and a half million black people who had been enslaved for generations.

Before signing, Lincoln conferred with a group of black delegates which included Douglass. He had wanted to convince them that separation of the races was the best method after the slaves were free and that they would be better in another land. In his words, Lincoln reasoned to the delegates that slavery was:

\begin{quote}
…the greatest wrong inflicted on any people…when you cease to be slaves you are yet far removed from being placed on an equality with the white race. The aspiration of men is to enjoy equality with the best when free, but on this broad continent, not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours…Far better for us both, therefore, to be separated.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

Lincoln stated that “a sum of money had been appropriated to Congress, and placed at his disposition to aid in establishing a colony somewhere in Central America.”\textsuperscript{53} Lincoln needed a contingent of “intelligent, educated blacks, such as the men present, to promote the opportunity among their own people.”\textsuperscript{54} Douglass and other delegates immediately rebuked and repudiated Lincoln’s remarks, calling it “ridiculous.” Douglass was the most vocal, stating that the president showed “contempt for the negroes” and that the president “ought to know … that negro hatred

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52]Ibid., 469.
\item[53]Ibid., 469.
\item[54]Ibid., 469.
\end{footnotes}
and prejudice of color are neither original nor invincible vices, but merely the offshoots of that root of all evils – slavery.”

John Hope Franklyn calls Lincoln’s proposal to settle emancipated African Americans outside of the country an ungrateful proposition. Moreover, as Franklyn points out, this plan was quickly dropped once it gained no traction in congress or with black delegates:

> It seems clear that the President had abandoned hope of gaining support for his scheme of persuading Negroes to leave the only home they knew. Surely, moreover, it would have been a most incongruous policy as well as an ungracious act to have asked Negroes to perform one of the highest acts of citizenship- fighting for their country- and then invite them to leave.

Franklyn goes on to state how inclusion in the country’s armed forces rather than exclusion from the country’s territory was a way “that Negroes would enjoy a status that went beyond mere freedom. They were to be free persons, fighting for their own country, a country in which they were to be permitted to remain.”

Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, at 2:00pm. Waiting for the electric wire with the news to come through was no other than Frederick Douglass along with three thousand anti-slavery proponents who gathered at the Tremont Temple in Boston. Across the street at the nearby Music Hall were authors: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. All awaited the great news:

> Finally, at roughly 10pm, when the anxiety at Tremont Temple “was becoming agony,” a man raced through the crowd. “It is coming! It is on the wires!!” Douglas would long remember the “wild and grand” reaction, the shouts of “joy and gladness,” the

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55Ibid., 470.
57Ibid., 128.
audible sobs and visible tears. The happy crowd celebrated with music and song, dispersing at dawn.\textsuperscript{58}

The spiritual songs played a pivotal role in slavery as well as in freedom, particularly the old spiritual “Go Down, Moses.” Although most of the song is about Moses going to Pharaoh and telling him to “Let my people go.” The last verse captures the awesomeness of liberation:

\begin{quote}
What a beautiful morning that will be!  
O let my people go!  
When time breaks up in eternity,  
O let my people go!
\end{quote}

Such a scene is reminiscent of the Israelites rejoicing after they had crossed the Red Sea to freedom and the Egyptians soldiers had chased them drowned in the Red Sea. In Exod 15, they sing their song of Praise to God:

\begin{quote}
Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:  
“I will sing to the Lord,  
For his is highly exalted.  
The horse and its rider  
He has hurled into the sea.  
The Lord is my strength and my song;  
He has become my salvation.” (Exod 15:1-2)
\end{quote}

In summary, both Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass are the Moses of African-American Moral Liberation Leadership during the “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Slavery” period. Their lives represented God’s called agents that emerged out of the context of slavery for the purpose of tackling a dehumanizing structure that was sanctioned by tyrannical leadership. Harriet Tubman, like Moses, used her moral conscious and virtuous appetite to lead the enslaved to freedom. She was Moses as a moral leader, willing to defend her brothers and sisters lives by leading them to freedom while sacrificing her own life and going up against a
repulsive system. Frederick Douglas was Moses as prophet and political leader willing to confront government leadership for the purpose of dismantling a system of oppression that castigated black lives and humanity and denied them freedom of community. The tactics of both Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas were necessary to usher in a new social reality for African American people from a context of bondage to one of liberty.

Next, I explore African Americans struggle to obtain Civil Rights in America in connection with the Israelites struggle to obtain the promised land in Canaan and how new leadership emerged out of the context of Israel and African American struggle for inclusion. Although there had been progress after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, African Americans continued to suffer horrifically under the guise of racial segregation and inhumane treatment. Political oppression, economic exploitation, and human denigration through judicial means had not ceased, but instead had increased in various forms. African-American lives were totally disrupted by unequal treatment and civil rights violations. The new context of the Civil Rights Era required a different type of leadership. Black people were no longer fighting to be free: they were fighting to be equal and to be included in America’s commitment to each individual’s right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For African Americans to succeed, they needed to confront immoral civil rights laws that hindered black progress and humanity. Moses led the children of Israel out of slavery; however, Joshua leads the children of Israel into the Promised Land to fight to obtain to obtain the promises of God. After slavery, black people wanted to share in the prosperity, civil rights, voting rights, and equal rights under the law as permitted by the constitution of the United States of America. To do this, they needed a Joshua who would take on the current context and avail them the privileges as promised by God to the Israelites.
CHAPTER THREE

THE EMERGENCE OF JOSHUA AND BLACK LEADERSHIP OUT OF THE CONTEXT OF CIVIL RIGHTS

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide: ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River to the land I am about to give them – to the Israelites...As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” (Josh 1:1-2, 3)

In the opening verses of the book of Joshua, God replaces Moses, the leader who brought the children of Israel out of slavery and through the wilderness, with Joshua, an aide who had accompanied him in Egypt and through the wilderness experience. Numbers 27 announces the anointing and preparation of Joshua and the eventual completion of Moses’s leadership. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells of his own departure and inability to further lead the people, “I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you. The LORD has said to me, ‘You shall not cross the Jordan’” (Deut 31:2). Moses had reached his end with the Children of Israel and knew that his mission to bring the people out of Egypt and through the wilderness had concluded. Moses’s relevance as a leader is no longer apparent. When Moses climbs Mount Nebo, and looks out over the Promised Land, God says to him, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it” (Deut 34:4). God shows Moses the Promised Land as a visible sign of the promise, but prevents him from entering. The showing sets the stage for a new chapter in the Israelites’ life that brings them to a new context toward the promise. The children of Israel will enter a new land, with new people, new challenges, and a new leader to obtain the promise. The new context requires new strength, new skills, new tactics, but the same foundational moral and righteous leadership.
New context shows us that leadership is transitional, it moves in accordance with its requirements for new stages of operations. Moses was too old and ill-equipped to deal with the pending operation; to lead the Israelites to the next level. He admitted it and God confirmed his transition to someone who was not only younger but more equipped to deal with the forthcoming challenges. Context shows us that there comes a time when not only new or younger leaders are needed but better equipped leaders are needed to deal with the current hostile climate and that older leaders must be willing to step aside. Although Moses was moved aside by God he was also obedient and willing to step aside and allow Joshua to take the lead.

_African American Older Leaders_

For African Americans after slavery there was no need for the Underground Railroad; the context had changed. Although black people faced racism and violence, legally they were free to travel. Prior to the end of slavery, Harriet Tubman had already ended her trips bringing enslaved peoples through the wilderness to freedom and instead began assisting government officials and union troops as a scout, spy and nurse. When the war ended in 1865, “Harriet returned to Auburn, New York, where she had a small home. She was ill, exhausted, penniless and wounded in body and spirit.”⁵⁹ Like Moses, Harriet could go no further. She had performed a vital role during slavery. However, after slavery, her relevancy and popularity had dissipated, and her body had deteriorated.

Although Tubman would live some forty years after slavery ended, she would live mostly in seclusion and without financial means. Like Moses, she could go no further. The new context would not value her worth. Though many tried to gain her a pension, including Secretary of State William Seward, “she was never given the pension she earned through her work for the

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Union.” The new context had not been kind to her, yet she was still remembered for the important work that she accomplished. When Tubman died in 1913, Booker T. Washington praised her impact in a memorial service in her honor, stating that “she had brought the two races closer together and made it possible for the white race to place a higher estimate upon the black race.” Harriet Tubman gave black people value and gave many slave masters and white people in general a moral conscious of black worth. However, she did not get the reward for her service to the nation which showed that her black life was still not as valuable as the white lives who served the country.

Frederick Douglass, as mentioned, was a tough agent for freedom, a strong abolitionist, a statesman for massive change, even risking his life for the emancipation of black people in America. However, after slavery, Douglass sung a different song. Although he was still in a hostile, racist land, his temperament changed, becoming more subtle and submissive. His voice became one of full cooperation and participation with the government, as if the end of slavery had resolved all ills with white and black people. His fierce opposition to America’s policies had been calmed; he became receptive and even accommodating although there was still vicious racism and obvious violence against black lives.

Prior to the end of slavery, Douglass forcefully came up against the government, separating himself from American ideals and actions, calling America on its contradictions, and organizing with abolitionists who felt the shame of America. However, after slavery, he conceded and politely worked with the government. At this point, he was no longer seen as a voice for black suffering. Cornel West contextualizes Douglass well when he says, “I think that his freedom fighting is very much tied to the ugly and vicious institution of white supremacist

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
slavery…and we learn from Douglass’s courage, his vision, his willingness to stand up, the unbelievable genius of his oratory and his language. And yet there is a sense in which with the ending of slavery, there was a certain ending of his high moment.”\textsuperscript{62} Like Moses, Frederick Douglass tenure as a leader was limited to slavery. His peak rested in slavery; his voice rested in slavery; his connection with abolitionists and black suffering rested in slavery. However, after slavery, his voice and temperance rested with the party of Lincoln that had ended slavery. Douglass lived another thirty years after slavery and he became a great patriot and advocate for the Republican Party. He was appointed U.S. Marshall by President Rutherford B. Hayes and got caught up in the political system which opened the door to concessions and compromises and caused him to leave behind his prior radicalism against the government. West goes on to say:

\begin{quote}
\ldots you can also see the way in which the political system could seize on the towering Black freedom fighter of the nineteenth century, absorb him, incorporate him, diffuse his fire, and make him a part of the establishment, so that the next generation that comes along would have memories of the fiery freedom fighter of the 1830s, 1840s, 1850s and 1860s. But during those last thirty years he is an incorporated elite within a Republican Party, which itself is shot through with forms of white supremacy, and imperial sensibility.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

According to West, Douglass gets incorporated into the very regime, the very same hegemonic racist system, that he fought against for decades. Douglass described himself as a self-made man as if he had succeeded on his own. In making this claim, he fails to recognize how the black church, other abolitionists, and black people who had supported him were all instrumental in his formation and success.

\textsuperscript{63}Ibid., 15.
However, in his defense, maybe he was ahead of his time. Being integrated into the system is something many freedom fighters and civil rights activists would ultimately fight for in the twentieth century. One could argue that, in the post-slavery context, the struggle had changed to a fight for inclusion from a fight for liberation and that the best route was for black people to integrate themselves into the system in order to make the necessary changes for equal and civil rights. After slavery there was still a need for protection and rights for black people in America. The struggle for inclusion, civil rights, and voting rights was the next step for black people. Black leadership would have to emerge out of a context of legal freedom but unequal treatment and take on a system of racial segregation and immoral actions.

*Joshua*

Joshua becomes the new anointed leader for the new context and challenge toward the Promised Land. "Joshua", which is rendered in Greek "Jesus", means *He shall save*. Justin Martyr, one of the early converts to Christ in A.D. 165 who was willing to give his life for the Christian faith, stated, “Joshua saves God’s people from the Canaanites; our Lord saves people from their sins. Christ, as Joshua is the captain of our salvation, a leader and commander of the people, to tread Satan under their feet, to put them in possession of the heavenly Canaan and to give them rest.” William Garden Blaikie points out a similar theme between Joshua and Jesus:

The one point of resemblance on which we seem to be warranted to lay much stress is, that Joshua gave the people REST. Again and again we read—“The land rested from war” (xi. 23), “The land had rest from war” (xiv. 15), “The Lord gave them rest round about” (xxi. 44), “The Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren” (xxii. 4), “The Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about” (xxiii. 1). That was Joshua’s great achievement, as the instrument of God's purpose.

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However, he notes Jesus as the ultimate rest: “come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt 11:28)

But before there is rest for the Israelites there is struggle to access the land of Canaan from a dispossessed people as part of a divine plan and promise by God. Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness, Joshua is the immediate successor to Moses and must lead the Israelites into the promise land. Moses had to fight with his own people in the wilderness but Joshua’s fight is with people in the land that is determined to protect and defend their territory and tradition from outsiders. Joshua’s mission is to obtain the promise God made to the Israelites.

However, like Moses, Joshua has a divine calling upon his life. As Blaikie states:

> If, then, Joshua’s work was a continuation of the work of Moses, and his book of the books of Moses, both must be regarded from the same point of view. You cannot explain either of them reasonably in a merely rationalistic sense. Joshua could no more have settled the people in Canaan by merely natural means than Moses could have delivered them from Pharaoh and maintained them for years in the wilderness. In the history of both you see a Divine arm, and in the books of both you find a chapter of Divine revelation.

Blaikie argues that Joshua’s calling was just as divine as Moses’s and that Joshua had God’s approval and backing to continue the pursuit of the promise with a divine and militaristic taking of the land. The divine arm is the fulfillment of the divine purpose of justice and freedom for the Israelites. Joshua’s mission is a continuation of Moses’ mission to get the people settled in the Promised Land.

However, Joshua’s context is different from Moses’. Canaan is a structured land, with traditional cultures, beliefs and practices that have been part of the culture for centuries, filled with people that are powerful and determined to defend their territory. The context of the

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66Ibid., 13.
Promised Land known as Canaan is much different than the context of Egypt. This is evident forty years prior when the report is given to Moses in Numbers 13 after appointed leaders explore the land. At first, they tell of the good fruit, fortified city, and the land flowing with milk and honey: “We went into the land to which you sent us and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit” (Num 13:28 NIV). But then the reporters demur in fear at the great size and strength of the people in the land: “But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large…We can’t attack those people they are stronger than we are” (Num 13:28, 31NIV). The Israelites’ fear of the giants in the land and the strongholds on the territory lead them to disengage rather than trust God and go forward. The majority of them were not willing to fight and tear down the structures and gain access to the promise that God had already established for them. Only Caleb and Joshua, two of those who had explored the land, were willing to move forward and take possession despite the giant stronghold and vast territory:

Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us.” (Num 14:6-8)

Unfortunately, after the inspection of the land and the lack of faith by the people, the Israelites were prevented from entering the Promised Land and a whole generation would die in the wilderness. Forty years later, Joshua becomes the new leader to lead the children of Israel into the land promised decades before. Joshua does not hesitate, but humbly and enthusiastically accepts the calling to lead the children, as Blaikie states, “On Joshua's part there is none of that hesitation in accepting his work which was shown even by Moses himself when he got his commission at the burning bush. He seems to have accepted the appointment with humble faith
and spirited enthusiasm and prepared at once for the perilous enterprise.”67 Joshua is ready possibly because he had been preparing forty years prior and his energy and faith had never dissipated so when it came time for him to lead, he lead with faith, strength and vigilance. He also had a role model in Moses as a freedom fighter in which he was able to guide the people with God’s authority, anointing, and divine presence. Moses’ presence is still felt even though Moses is absent. Joshua respects and represents the tradition of Moses and all that he did, while advancing a new call from God to take the children of Israel to the next level of freedom which is inclusion.

It becomes absolutely important for the new generation of contextual black leaders to respect and represent the older leaders who brought them over past hurdles of racism, discrimination and dangers. Although Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas lived and worked during slavery their importance cannot be diminished, downplayed, or forgotten because of a new context. Their moral and spiritual leadership obtained, for a new generation, the opportunity to enter into a new context so that the divine call for justice can be realized. Moses and Joshua are a continuation of God’s plan, each generation ought to see themselves as a continuation of a divine plan not an independent agent of a new start.

Joshua’s style is different from Moses’s: he is more militaristic. We see his first qualifications of military instinct and leadership when the Amalekites attack the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses tells Joshua to “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites” (Exod 17:9). Joshua leads the charge to defeat the Amalekites. This is the type of leadership and style needed forty years later, when the Israelites seek to possess the land by challenging the

67Ibid., 24.
giants including the Amalekites that are determined to keep their traditions, possessions, and people in power, and to prevent any change to their institution or replacement of their people.

However, God has different plans and, despite the stronghold on the land, God has new leadership emerging in Joshua that is prepared and qualified to take on the current context. In order for the land to be taken there will need to be strategic military operations, armed military insurgents and direct military confrontations with the giant opposition in the land. Joshua possesses the skills and leadership needed for the pending operation to get Israelites into the community that God has promised them.

Joshua leads the children into the Promised Land with spiritual authority and military experience, and they make great strides to overcome their enemies and tear down a system that was determined to keep them out. For Moses, it was about freedom from institutional slavery. For Joshua, it is about inclusion into promised territory and receiving all rights and privileges of the land as promised by God. However, as a point of departure I must be clear, Joshua’s assignment from God was not integration but elimination of the people, not to ask for a place in the land but to take total possession of the land. As God instructs: “However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them – The Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites – as the Lord your God has commanded you.” (Deuteronomy 20:16-17, NIV). In his book *The God Delusion*, atheist Richard Dawkins asserts that Israel participated in ethnic cleansing suggesting the Israelites to be “bloodthirsty massacres carried out with xenophobic relic.”68 Dawkins is uttering what many, including Christians, see as an outrageous, racist and perplexing response from God to a people who possessed the land. The Canaanites and others

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were already in the land when God told Joshua to take it and kill everything in it. Joshua solemnly follows God’s orders. However, contrary to Dawkins, God was not seeking to destroy a race of people based on fear and prejudice, so much as a perceived unclean religion that would corrupt the Israelites moral standing and devotion to God. Paul Copan backs up this notion by stating that:

Canaanite idolatry wasn’t simply an abstract theology or personal interest carried out in the privacy of one’s home. It was a worldview that profoundly influenced Canaanite society. Given the setting, it’s no wonder God didn’t want the Israelites to associate with Canaanites and be led astray from obedience to the one true God. He wanted to have Israel morally and theologically separate from the peoples around them.  

The Canaanites were deep in their religious practices and God wanted to bring the Israelites into the land for both moral and theological purposes.

One of the pivotal and essential requirements of Israel entering the Promised Land was to “be careful to obey all the laws my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:7NIV). Keeping the law kept God’s protection around the Israelites and the success of their journey. The absence of following the law would result in their judgment. One significant law commanded that the Israelites shall “not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” (Exodus 34:14 NIV). The submission to any other god would arouse God’s anger and cease God’s protection, resulting in the Israelites destruction.

God abhorred ethnic cleansing or racism, in fact racism was unjust and unrighteous in the sight of God and God had instituted several provisions in the law to allow strangers and aliens to

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be well accepted and respected. In the Exodus of Egypt, a mixed multitude of people left along with the Israelites (Exodus 12:38). Additionally, God constantly commands the Israelites to be just to non-Israelites, immigrants and sojourners in their presence because they too had been immigrants in Egypt land. Immigrants and sojourners were part of the covenant agreement which protected them from harsh and cruel treatment.

As stated earlier, the imperialistic hegemonic religion of Pharaoh was used to enslave and degrade the Israelite people based on ethnicity. Just as the American slave system was used to denigrate black people because of their color. In Egypt, God was not aiming to destroy a people so much as he was desiring to destroy a system that enslaved and denigrated a certain group of people. God was seeking freedom and salvation for the enslaved, so why would God turn around and make the Israelites commit the same atrocities to the Canaanites based on ethnicity? Egypt as a nation, under Pharaoh, was demolished so that God could destroy a structure of dehumanization, infanticide, harsh labor, victimization and misery and free the Israelite people.

The multiple religions in Canaan would have corrupted the Israelites morally and theologically and put them under the same detestable bondage that debased their humanity and demoralized their standing with God. As the Israelites had shown after coming out of the wilderness they were susceptible to the influence of other religions when they began to build the Golden Calf (Exodus 32) for worship. Religion was ingrained in the hegemonic structure of Canaan and would have been antithetical to the goal of God for the Israelites. The goal of God was to bring the people to a land where they would worship God and God only and incorporate the laws that Moses had received from God (Joshua 1). The Canaanites gods engaged in all kinds of deviant and sexual acts including incest and bestiality; perversions and actions that had

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70 Ibid., 163
destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). God wanted the Israelites to move into the Promised Land unperverted and unhindered by other religions, “otherwise they [Canaanites] will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God. (Deuteronomy 20:18). In order for the settling to take place, religious structures had to be destroyed. The Israelites would tear down one structure of religious operation in favor of a more moral and just system of governance in covenant with God.

Religious structures in Canaan were not only antithetical theologically but socially and politically. Israel had its own ideological claims of republic and monarchy, as Michael Waltzer states, “Canaanite ideology had to be mediated by a new version of Israelite ideology; the high theory of monarchy had to be naturalized into the covenantal tradition, a process that set limits on the full development of a Canaanite royalism in Israel.” That limit came with expulsion of Canaanite religion to pave the way for the legal and political development of Israel. The Israelites along with the Law of Moses would establish a moral republic in the land, as Daniel J. Elazar states, “the Book of Joshua is concerned with matters far more significant than merely recounting the history of the conquest of the land of Canaan by the Israelites, or even the reconstruction of that conquest within the moral framework of the Prophetic thought. It goes beyond both purposes to become the embodiment of a particular conception of what a good constitution and a good regime must be, in light of the moral framework of Prophetic Thought.” According to Elazar, Joshua sought to establish a political republic that would bring moral authority, in an organized society with laws of justice based on the Torah and covenant with God. The Torah has within its writings ideological/constitutional implications that would

direct the people’s affairs and powers toward justice and righteousness on God’s behalf. The
divine covenant based its political morality and consequences on several notions:

1. The idea of societies collapsing from within, out of moral weakness (Joshua 2:9-10)
2. Honesty in maintaining the historic record is presented as a virtue (4:6-8)
3. Collective national responsibility is the key to political survival and limitations on
   waging war (Joshua 7:1)
4. Government by covenant under the law (Joshua 7 and 8)\textsuperscript{73}

These theological virtues would add to the submissive actions of the Israelites and help in their
governance in a new land that God had given them as promised. The covenant would keep the
Israelites in accordance with their past journey with God and how the Lord had lead them to the
Promised Land. The political structures of Canaan would do just the opposite by desecrating the
covenant relationship with God and the establishment of a unified nation.

Under Joshua, the Israelites are successful in their campaign to take the land and remove
the structures of opposition. Access to Canaan and inclusion into the territory would not come
easily. The Israelites would have to fight for their rights to live in the land. And fight they did.
With the leadership of Joshua, they succeed in breaking down the walls of Jericho which was
their first encounter with national opposition and structured leadership. God orders them to
march around the walls seven times and at the seventh time they are to shout, and the walls
would fall down. The second encounter is taking the city of Ai, which is more militarily
engaging. Forthwith they would conquer the southern cities and the northern territories until they
are able to gain access to the land, divide the community, and rest comfortably in the territory.
God had given them the land.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.,
African-American Inclusion

The transition from slavery to freedom for the Israelites is like that of African Americans after slavery. After slavery, the context, conversation and moral direction changed from one of freedom to one of inclusion in a hostile territory. Cornel West calls this period, “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Institutional Racism.” He states:

This stage, which occupied a little over a century (1864-1969), found Black prophetic Christians principally focusing attention on the racist institutional structures in the United States which rendered the vast majority of black people politically powerless (deprived of the right to vote or participate in government affairs), economically exploited (in dependent positions as sharecroppers or in unskilled jobs) and socially degraded (separated, segregated, and unequal eating and recreational facilities, housing, education, transportation and police protection.)  

This period called for African Americans to challenge the status quo and to insist on social, political, and economic inclusion and equal rights. Although slavery had legally ended, the immoral acts associated with slavery persisted. There was still violence, separation, and humiliation of black lives. Christian ethics and theological persuasion played a role in advancing African American dignity into the territory. Black churches and clergy played a major role in challenging the current system, tearing down the theological understanding that had justified slavery and black inferiority biblically and integrating African Americans into society. Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer state that “The established sects or mainstream denominations in the Black community are committed, at least in theory, to a reformed strategy of social activism that will enable African Americans to become better integrated into the political, economic and social institutions of the larger society.”  

These mainstream denominations to which Baer and Singer


refer are 1) free blacks who separated from predominantly white congregations prior to the Civil War and 2) former slaves who separated from the White Baptists after the Civil War. The separation was the beginning of a movement for both independence and inclusion based upon their newfound freedom. Black preaching began to focus on integration and political empowerment to confront institutional racism. The black church became a powerful weapon to comfort its people and confront racial injustice.

Although Cornel West makes a great point in asserting that institutional racism was a giant force beginning in 1864 that prevented black social, economic, and political progress, it must be noted that after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed and after the Civil War had ended in 1865, laws were passed that greatly enhanced African-American life in America. The fruits of the Emancipation Proclamation paved the way for changes to the Constitution that benefited African Americans’ standing in the country and status as Americans. As Bruce J. Dierenfield states, “For a few short years after the Civil War ended in 1865, it looked as if 4 million blacks would enter the mainstream of society. In what amounted to a revolution in black status, the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution ended slavery, promised ‘equal protection of the laws’ to both races, and granted suffrage to black males.”

In a short period of time, the Constitution, which allowed black people to subjected to an inferior status as less than human had been amended to allow for privileges and civil rights under the law. The 13th Amendment was passed by Congress on January 31, 1865. It ended slavery and any form of involuntary servitude. It stated, “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the

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United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” The 14th Amendment was passed by congress on June 13, 1866. It promised citizenship and equal protection of the law to all races, it stated, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or prosperity, without due process of law; nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” The 15th Amendment was passed by congress on February 26, 1869. It promised the right to vote and stated, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude.”

The fruits of the promise seemed to be good and wholesome for African Americans with the passing of the amendments by Congress. Dierenfield stated that “Congress used this authority to enact the nation’s first civil rights laws, recognizing blacks as citizens with inviolable rights, prohibiting racial violence, and opening public accommodations and conveyances to all.”

In a short period of time between 1865 and 1875, black people made great strides, succeeding politically and educationally as well as ecclesiastically. Like the Israelites going into Jericho, African Americans began to assert their independence, win their freedom, tear down walls of separation that prevented their progress, and show their worth and dignity as humans and capable agents of their own destiny. African-American political and electoral power was immediately realized after the Civil War, and many political leaders emerged from the black population.

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78 Ibid., 59.
79 Ibid., 59.
80 Dierenfield, Civil Rights Movement, 7.
clergy. There was no rival between politics and faith in this era of the black community. African Americans not only fought against the establishment, but they involved themselves in the political system by running for office and winning to represent their constituents. Howard Zinn notes that after slavery “Negroes were elected to southern states legislatures, although in all these they were a minority except in the lower house of the South Carolina legislature.” African Americans were being elected throughout the South in grand numbers because of their increased population. Slavery had paved the way for African Americans to grow in great numbers in certain states, similar to the Israelites in Egypt. This growth worked in African Americans’ favor politically, and blacks were able to transform their lives and communities.

However, black people still faced a hard battle for political inclusion. In 1868, twenty-seven African Americans were elected as state legislatures to the Georgia house, but were denied their seats because of their color. The resistance went on for months, however, “almost a year later, when the state Supreme Court declared them eligible, [they] were they able to regain their seats.” One of those elected was the Rev. Henry McNeal Turner, a former slave who escaped, taught himself to read and write, and studied law and medical books while working as a messenger and handy man in Baltimore. He served as a chaplain for a Negro regiment. He became a pastor in Washington, DC, where he emerged like Joshua as a

…leader of the black community and an outstanding and militant fighter for racial justice in the capital. He moved to Georgia where he was elected to the first postwar legislature in Georgia. When the Georgia legislature voted to expel all its Negro members, Rev. Turner spoke up, giving God and the constitutional amendment power to stand upon to speak out against the decision to remove black representation, “But, Mr. Speaker, I do not regard this movement as a thrust at me. It is a thrust in the Bible – a thrust at

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the God of the Universe, for making a man and not finishing him; it is simply calling the Great Jehovah a fool. Why, sir, though we are not white, we have accomplished much. We have pioneered civilization here, we have built up your country, we have worked in your fields and garnered your harvest for two hundred and fifty years! And what do we ask of you in return? Do we ask you for compensation for the sweat our fathers bore for you – for the tears you have caused, and the hearts you have broken, and the lives you have curtailed, and the blood you have spilled? Do we ask retaliation? We ask it not. We are willing to let the dead past bury the dead; but we ask you, now for our rights.\(^\text{83}\)

Rev. Turner challenged the rejection on both biblical and moral grounds to tear down the walls of racial exclusion based on political bias.

African Americans wanted in and inclusion is what they fought for, and denial of rights and privileges is what they fought against. Exclusion from civil rights and political representation was just as ethically wrong and immoral as slavery. They wanted to represent their own interests and communities and to gain their civil rights in a land that had previously denied their humanity. By 1875, thousands of African-American students were going to public school and, by 1869, two black men had been elected to the United States Senate, both from Mississippi, and one, Rev. Hiram R. Revels, was of the clergy. Rev. Revels was born a freeman, migrated to North Carolina, and became an ordained minister in the African American Episcopal Church. He joined the army as a chaplain of a black regiment in Mississippi. After the war, he became prominent in state politics and, in 1869, he was elected to the United States Senate to fill the seat previously held by Jefferson Davis. Twenty African-American congressmen had been elected, “including eight from South Carolina, four from North Carolina, three from Alabama, and one each from the former Confederate states.”\(^\text{84}\)

African-American clergy were not only


\(^{84}\)Zinn, *People’s History of the United States*, 200.
preaching but taking political action to represent their former enslaved constituents interest in America.

**Inclusion Short Lived**

However, the prospects of inclusion were short lived, and amendments were challenged by laws that placed African Americans back in their familiar, disenfranchised status and inhumane condition. The immoral angst of the times had risen to curtail black freedom and civil rights. Although African Americans were legally free as prescribed by the amendment to the Constitution and were citizens with voting rights and other privileges, local, state, and federal governments and white citizens took measures to restrict and violently prevent black inclusion and to oppress black advancement, particularly in political and social areas.

By 1876, civil rights and political advancement began to dwindle for African Americans. The number of black people elected to office diminished; the last black congressperson, George White of North Carolina left Congress in 1901 (another would not be elected in the North until 1945 Adam Clayton Powell and in the south until 1972 with Andrew Young in Georgia and Barbara Jordan in Texas). Laws and impediments were put in place all over the South to keep African Americans from the polls. Southern states imposed poll taxes. In states like Louisiana, the legislature effectively eliminated blacks from the political process by restricting the process to male descendants of grandfathers who could vote right after the civil war. Polls were moved away from majority black communities so African American would have to walk ten or even twenty miles to vote. “In addition, the voting rolls were kept lily white by testing a black person’s literacy, tossing out improperly completed forms, and, ultimately just closing the registrar’s office for days.”

As a result, voting participation diminished significantly. Governor

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85Dierenfield, Civil Rights Movement, 8.
Ben Tillman of South Carolina boasted, “We have done our best. We have scratched our heads to find out how we could eliminate the last one of them. We stuffed ballot boxes. We shot them. We are not ashamed of it.”  

The context was vicious toward African-American inclusion and the environment was violent toward civil rights. Jim Crow laws, so named after a ministerial caricature of the 1830s, were instituted in the South. These laws increased tension and division amongst blacks and whites and guaranteed a separation of the races built on superiority and inferiority. The Supreme Court in 1883 outlawed the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and blacks were banned from public and private places. Blacks and whites went to separate schools and used separate bathrooms; marriage between the races was prohibited (although whites could rape and impregnate black girls); and blacks were not allowed to testify in court, carry a gun, or own property. Signs were placed in certain public institutions (libraries, bathrooms, restaurants, drinking fountains, telephone booths, and bus stations) that said “white” and “colored.” Races were separated from birth to burial. Each had their own prison and hospital. The violence against black lives was particularly atrocious. The Ku Klux Klan was famous for their lynching of black people. A record from 1867-1871 lists at least 106 violent acts against blacks, most of them by lynching:

Sam Davis hung by a mob in Harrodsburg, May 28, 1868

Wm. Pierce hung by a mob in Christian July 12, 1868

Geo. Roger hung by a mob in Bradsfordville Martin County July 11, 1868.

In 1896, the case of Plessy v. Ferguson sealed the fate of the separation of races. The 14th Amendment was undermined, and the courts uplifted the “separate but equal” doctrine that

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86Ibid.
87Zinn, People’s History of the United States, 204.
sanctioned segregated public facilities. There were many who fought against the systematic exclusion of African Americans at the time. Dierenfield notes that “Twenty-five southern cities experienced boycotts of the newly segregated street cars, the leasing of black prisoners, and the exclusion of blacks from juries.”

However, the forces were too strong, the political giants too racist, and the environment too hellish to exact change, so African-American suffering continued, and it would take decades before a Joshua would rise to tear down the system.

*The Presence of God Questioned*

The context of black suffering raises the question of where is God when all these drastic and harmful actions are destroying black bodies and depleting black progress? For every step forward there are two steps backward away from black advancement. The horrific episodes of history cause black people to question God in our journey. There is a time where the theological context of “a present God” must be questioned in the face of violence and aggression against black lives. In an exchange between Cornel West and James Forbes, Forbes raises what he calls the “problem of the presence of God.”

His basic premise is that there has been an absence of God when it comes to black advancement. As he says, “And one could say that in African American history, especially within the religious community, one of the things that you see – if you begin to raise the question – is that God is a problem. God has a lot to account for.” Forbes raises the question considering the race problems in America and says that, since slavery, the context of black people has been filled with pain and strife, making any advancement more of a mirage than a reality. Forbes asks the question: if God is present, where has he been? As evidence for his perspective, Forbes relates the story of Daniel Paine, a free black man who was

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89 Cornel West, *Restoring Hope*, 95.
kicked out of school in 1829 after a law was passed to prevent free blacks from attending or teaching in schools. After this law was passed, Paine justifiably disgruntled, looks to the source of black people’s strength and ask “God, where are you?” 91 The progress and lack of progress after slavery would prompt unknown and known leaders, religious and nonreligious leaders to ask the same question, “God where are you?”

It is a question filled with pain and anger and even resentment toward a powerful God that seems to neglect the affairs of the oppressed, specifically black people. James Baldwin questions the color of God and the love of God when he states, “But God…is white. And if His love was so great, and if He loved all his children, why were we, the blacks, cast down so far? Why?” 92 It is the same absence Israel must have felt while they were trapped in bondage in Egypt land for centuries until God appears and says “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering” (Exodus 3:7). James Cone would argue that God is a God of the Oppressed and God’s liberating presence far outweighs God as a theological concept on behalf of black and poor people in their fight for dignity and worth. 93 If God is for the oppressed where is God during oppression and why does it take so long for God to show up and when God shows up why does the oppressed go from one level of oppression and exclusion to another?

The answer may be in Black people’s faith in God. Black people have kept their faith in God through generations of suffering and oppression. Regardless of the context, the faith has remained. James Evans reminds us that, “The historical context of the faith of black Christians includes a shared legacy of slavery, the struggle to adapt to legal manumission, and the ongoing

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91 Ibid.
93 James Cone, God of the Oppressed (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), xiii
battle to be recognized as full human beings…[There has been] a relationship between faith and freedom.”

There is no doubt that from slavery to the Civil Rights movement faith has been a continuous string that binds black people’s belief in an able God that will eventually rise up in all contexts of black oppression and free them. Black people never gave up hope even in the midst of despair, Evans goes on to say:

The Civil Rights movement was based on the notion that the equality of black people was a function of their legal status in American society. Equality had been denied by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, the Dred Scott Decision (1857) and the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision of the Supreme Court (1896). These legal conscriptions were subsequently reversed…by people and groups directly or indirectly related to the African-American church. They were visible evidence of the reawakening of the black church militant that had slumbered for decades.

It would be almost a century before a militant leader would emerge and break downs walls in the vein of Joshua and bring African Americans into a structure that had forbidden their entrance and denied them rights. Like the Israelites, God would show up to address their misery and produce a prophetic voice and radical agent to challenge the segregated system which would ultimately tear down the walls of inequality and indignity, advance inclusion and restore the hopes and re-ignite the faith of a downtrodden people.

*Brown v. Board of Education*

The first sign of chipping away at segregation came with the Brown v. Board of Education case. The case exposed the vast educational inequity between black and white schools. Black children had to cross dangerous railroads and walk miles to school, while white children were bused to their nearby schools. In one county in South Carolina, “three quarters of the...
students were black, but the all-white school board spent 60 percent of its budget on whites. “\textsuperscript{96}” Black children were receiving a far inferior education, which resulted in the recycling of inferior thinking and living conditions. Thurgood Marshall, an African-American lawyer who worked for the NAACP, had emerged and challenged the courts to strike down segregation on the grounds that school segregation, and by implication all Jim Crow laws, was responsible for the substandard conditions. It was a bold move. However, on May 17, 1954, the unanimous decision came down from the Supreme Court to end segregated public schools. Chief Justice Earl Warren “declared that legally enforced ‘separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.’”\textsuperscript{97} This decision tore at the “separate but equal” doctrine in the case of Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896 and opened the door to more challenges to segregation. Like the Israelites this was the first walk around the wall of Jericho which caused the wall to tremble and segregationists to fear their grip on the system.

\textit{Rosa Parks}

Although Brown v. Board of Education challenged and won the decision to eliminate segregation in public schools, it was slow at implementing the changes. In 1963, nine years after the ruling, the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights reported that less than half of one percent of southern black students were attending integrated schools.\textsuperscript{98} However, in between that time the Brown v. Board of Education decision gave much needed energy to challenge other forms of segregation. In 1955, a case against a young woman on a bus spurred another challenge to segregation and sparked the Civil Rights Movement and the emergence of a prophetic leader out of the context of systemic exclusion, dehumanization and discrimination.

\textsuperscript{96}Dierenfield, \textit{Civil Rights Movement}, 21.
\textsuperscript{97}Ibid., 22.
In Montgomery, Alabama, the separation of races was felt in bathrooms and on buses. African Americans were relegated to the back of the bus as prescribed by the law. In Montgomery, Alabama, their policy demanded that the first ten seats be reserved for whites only and that blacks and whites could not sit next to each other on the bus. Mrs. Rosa Parks, tired from a day’s work, decided that she was going to sit in one of the aisle seats, with a black man on her right next to the window and two black women in the parallel seat across the way. When the bus began to get full, all the black people were required to get up so that one white person could sit down. All the others got up, both the man seated next to Mrs. Parks and the two women across the way. Mrs. Parks, however, slid over next to the window and sat there, breaking the policy that no blacks could sit next to a white person. The bus driver demanded the seat, but Mrs. Parks remained silent and refused to get up. The bus driver threatened to have her arrested if she did not get up, but Mrs. Parks just sat there as the bus driver pulled the bus over, went to a pay phone, and called the police. Other passengers began leaving the bus. The police came, questioned her, and then arrested her. In her own testimony, Mrs. Parks points out that she was neither frightened nor angry: “I was thinking that the only way to let them know I felt I was being mistreated was to do what I did – resist the order.” Mrs. Parks was arrested, but she would emerge as one of the premier agents that sparked the Civil Rights Movement during the era of segregation and discrimination in the 1950s and 1960s. With such a resistance, it was Rosa Parks in the spirit of Moses’s mother who rejected the context of racial discrimination and paved the way for a young civil rights activist who would emerge out of this context and challenge the system of segregation. Rosa Parks’ actions would lead to breaking down racial barriers with acts of civil disobedience for the purpose of integration and social transformation for African-

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American people. If we think figuratively in relation to Moses and his mother, Rosa “birthed” Martin Luther King, Jr., to address the racial context and give way to a new social reality for African Americans. Martin Luther King, Jr., would become the Joshua of the people.

*Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., emerged immediately following the arrest of Rosa Parks. He had been a pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, no more than fifteen months when he was recruited to be president of the newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). This organization would be the vehicle used by preachers and social justice advocates to organize and challenge the unfair treatment of Montgomery’s black residents when riding on buses. King emerged with an unprecedented amalgamation of educational, traditional, and social dynamism that would aid in the struggle for integration and appeal to an alliance of different racial, cultural, and ethnic groups to join in the battle. When it was time to consider a president for the newly formed MIA to defend Rosa Parks and challenge the bus segregation laws, King’s name was mentioned as president because of his education, articulation, and black church experience. As David Garrow notes:

…he [King] was extremely well educated and an articulate speaker. Those qualities would appeal strongly to the wealthier, professional segment of the black community, people who otherwise might be ambivalent about conditions on public buses that they rarely patronized. Likewise, the fact that King was a minister, and a Baptist minister, should help to draw the more conservative clergy into what had begun as a secularly led effort. Additionally, King’s ministerial status also would appeal to the many regular churchgoers in the black community.\(^\text{100}\)

King’s education, eloquence, and ministerial background had within it the making of prophet for *such a time as this* to confront racial inequalities and unite different qualities of people to

\(^{100}\)Ibid., 20.
challenge the system. King thus becomes the Moses when Moses receives the call from God to take on the system of oppression and Joshua to take on the walls of segregation.

The black church was strong, producing prophetic leaders since slavery. King was formed in that tradition and was able to use both educational obtainment and sermonic selection to capture an array of people and challenge racism. As Cornel West states:

> Upon the strength of the black prophetic church and liberal white allies, he mobilized and organized black and white people against blatant institutional racism and waged a successful struggle for black civil rights—integrated transportation, eating and recreational facilities, and, most important, the right to vote.¹⁰¹

King’s interrelated educational and transcendental appeal would bring various races to the table to confront racial discrimination.

*The Radical King*

The context that King had been thrown into was harsh and ultraconservative seeking to preserve a tradition of segregation and White Supremacy with acts of violence and death against its opponents. Like Canaan, the land had giants willing to hold on to their tradition and fight against opposition to the status quo. The context called for a radical prophetic leader from God that would appeal to the radical spirit of black people that wanted to confront with boldness the white power structure. Many often dismiss King’s militancy but King was very confrontational and radical in his dealing with racial injustice. King’s black church background gave him an undeterred militant spirit in the likes of Joshua to address with radical assurance and spiritual boldness the white power structure. Cornel West refers to Martin Luther King as the “Radical

¹⁰¹West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, 103.
King[^102] who was willing to challenge government officials for social change. He states although King has been a:

> sanitized, sterilized Martin, the deodorized Martin, the Martin that has been Santaclausified, so that the Santa Claus that he now becomes, jolly old man with a smile giving out toys to everybody from right wing Republicans to centrists to progressives, is opposed to the King who took a stand on the side of a class war and of an imperial battle, which is actually closer to the truth. He really did take a fundamental stand: “I choose to identify with the underprivileged, I choose to identify with the poor.”[^103]

West notes how King has been half presented and not fully exposed for the radical, vigilant and confrontational character that he was in coming up against a wall of racial rejection. King’s full ministry and sermons have been minimized to socially acceptable language and actions that elected officials and even pastors mimic and admire. King was indeed radical in his approach in dealing with segregation and White Supremacy. Through his leadership he was unwilling to compromise and willing to confront the opposition face to face like Moses and tear down the walls of segregation like Joshua, even if it meant sacrificing his own life.

Dr. King showed his most radical opposition to oppression of black people in his writings of 1963 in a book entitled “Why We Can’t Wait”. In the book King explains why 1963 was so important to the black struggle, the war against white supremacy and government authority and why blacks could no longer wait for others to free them; that blacks in fact had to free themselves even if it meant the most violent opposition. He states that 1963 was important because it was the centennial of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and while presidents and governors and other heads of states were celebrating, blacks did not feel the freedom of the proclamation signed in 1863. King writes, “All the talk and publicity

[^102]: West, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 75
[^103]: West, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 76.
accompanying the centennial only served to remind the Negro that he still wasn’t free, that he still lived a form of slavery disguised by certain niceties of complexity.”

Dr. King’s words were harsh and his tone impatient with a nation that had deprived black people of their rightful place in life for over a century. King goes on to describe how African Americans lived in poverty in a nation of wealth and prosperity just as they had done during slavery; that African Americans were deprived of adequate education and economic opportunities just as they had been during slavery; how African Americans were payed much less than whites for the same job. With this disparity King became more confrontational, more castigating with a nation that had not advanced black progress since slavery. The demand from King was that the nation had to act to make up for a century of undue progress and no better conditions than blacks lived during slavery. King was willing through nonviolent means yet a fighting spirit to take on a government that was bent on protecting its traditions and practices of African American denigration. On a larger scale King was not afraid to call America a sick country because of its build up and inability to challenge the escalation of: militarism, materialism, racism and poverty.

In an article written in the New York Times in 2017, Jason Sokol wonders how America went from loathing to loving Dr. King. Sokol states how Dr. King was hated in his life by many white conservatives from Strom Thurmond to Ronald Reagan but loved in his death by centrists and conservatives. Many have redefined King to be the playbook for modern protest over guns and violence and have carved out his speech “I have a Dream” to the be the centerpiece of his philosophical perspective “that molded him into a gentle champion of colorblindness.” Sokol states, “The Dr. King we remember today is particularly at odds with his radical turn in his last

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104 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can’t Wait* (New York: Signet Classics, 2000), 12.
years. In 1967 he denounced the Vietnam War and warned that America was courting “spiritual death.”

King’s Theology

It was not only King’s radical prophetic calling and black church experience that enabled him to appeal to different groups of people. It was also his moral philosophy, which he had gained from educational institutions, that gave him a basis for his theological perspective.

King’s moral philosophy played a big role in his organizing, preaching, and tackling of injustices. At Crozer Theological seminary, King studied and admired theologians such as Walter Rauschenbusch who pushed the “social gospel.” He was influenced by a philosophy that amalgamated the social issues with theological understanding and urged the church to be involved in real world problems. King embraced Rauschenbusch’s love ethic and his understanding of God as thoroughly involved in human affairs. In examining King’s theology, Luther D. Ivory remarks that, “King conceived of God as a proactive, Divine Personality working ceaselessly within the drama of human experience to create a beloved community where the virtues of love, justice and peace became normative for every conceivable relationship.”

Ivory suggests that, in order for God’s divine personality to unfold, love had to be accompanied by action. Thus, we get the terminology “Love-in-Action.” Love-in-Action provided not only a theological concept of God’s spiritual love, but a practical involvement of God’s love working with human agents to transform unjust conditions. Love-in-Action became a marriage between word and deed. In a sermon entitled “Love-in-Action,” King contends:

A persistent schizophrenia leaves so many of us tragically divided against ourselves. On the one hand, we proudly profess certain sublime and noble principles, but on the other hand, we sadly

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106 Ibid.
107 Luther D. Ivory, Toward a Theology of Radical Involvement: The Theological Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Nashville: Abington Press, 1997), 46.
practice the very antithesis of those principles…We talk eloquently about our commitment to the principles of Christianity, and yet our lives are saturated with the practices of paganism. We proclaim devotion to democracy, but we sadly practice the opposite of the democratic creed.  

The bible confirms King's notion by stating that “Just as the spirit is dead without the body, so faith without works is dead.” (James 2:

Love became a socially active movement on behalf of human suffering and the responsibility of God’s prophetic voices to not only speak but get involved in overturning dehumanizing conditions. King understood as Paul understood that we are co-laborers with God (1 Cor 3:9). For King there had to be this “Divine-human co-responsibility—the infinite and finite working together in history to effect that transformation of de-humanizing laws, institutional structures, policies and acts.” This type of love is not submissive or weak amid hate, but instead acts as a divine personality to rebut evil responses with evil actions. As King states in an interview with Kenneth Clark, “I don’t think of it [love] as a weak force, but I think of love as something strong and that organizes itself into powerful direct action.” King explained that there was a difference between non-resistance to evil and non-violent resistance: “Nonresistance leaves you in a state of stagnant passivity…however non-violent resistance means that you do resist in a very strong and determined manner.” King’s measure to resist violence would come by means of defiant marches, demonstrations and protests in spite of the violence inflicted upon him and those who marched with him. His leadership would put him on the front lines of verbal and physical abuse, jail and contempt and make him a constant target of

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109 Ibid., 47.
111 Ibid., 41.
death for white segregationists who abhorred his leadership and defiance. King would lead others to perform the same tasks of non-violent resistance to the segregated system that denigrated the oppressed black community.

However, King’s non-violent resistance philosophy did not come without ridicule. Like Moses in the wilderness fighting against his own people, King had to, at times, fight with his own people to defend his tactics to the nation. Many did not believe or agree with his philosophy of non-violent resistance and his goal to integrate black people into the system. Malcolm X declared King delusional and twisted, by insinuating that King’s middle-class movement was guilty of deceiving black people into believing that Christian nonviolent protest would improve their lives for the better. He accused King’s philosophy of attempting to love the white man into submission which Malcolm believed to be “delusional and dangerous.”

Tension over King’s civil rights tactics and philosophy was also felt within his own Baptist denomination. Joseph A. Jackson, president of the National Baptist Convention USA (hereafter NBCUSA) from 1953 to 1982, also denounced King’s tactics and long drawn protest movements as insufficient. The NBCUSA was the largest African-American denomination at the time, coalescing a host of black churches from around the nation to form one body of independently operated churches to address critical national and ecclesiastical issues. As Eric Lincoln argues, when the NBCUSA emerged in 1895, it “was timely because African Americans had entered into an era of intensified repression.”

However, Jackson was not as interested in civil rights activism; instead, he focused on the spiritual mission of the church and, in the spirit of Rev. John S. Rock, Booker T. Washington,
Marcus Garvey, and Elijah Muhammad, he advocated a philosophy of self-help as a means for African Americans to seek their own betterment without depending on laws from white people.

In a speech given in 1961, after Martin Luther King and other insurgents led approximately half a million members to break away from the NBCUSA to form the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Jackson urged that:

> The next forward step in racial development and progress will not be made by our white friends for their Negro neighbors, but will be made by Negroes for themselves. And this step depends not on what Negroes can force others to give or do for them, but what Negroes in the light of new opportunities will do for themselves and for the social order in which they live.\(^\text{114}\)

Jackson goes on to condemn civil rights activists’ limited understanding and describes an economic plan for African Americans that would move them from protest to production:

> Any Negro leader who shapes his philosophy, his theory, and his practice as if the end of our economic struggle has been attained when we win the right to be hired in a factory owned by another, is a traitor to the highest potentials of his race and dangerous enemy to social progress and a stumbling block to mankind…We must learn to organize our capital, harness our earnings, and set them to work for us so that we may produce more and finally develop independent factories and companies of our own.”\(^\text{115}\)

Jackson pushed for more independence from the government and more self-proclaimed programs, attained from the brows of black people that will free black people from the hands of the government and white people in general.

However, King was not deterred. He would continue to embrace and employ the method of non-violent resistance to challenge the racist and discriminatory practices of America; even as the President and his own people dismissed him. “LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson] was calling him


\(^{115}\)Ibid., 515.
a nigger preacher he wished would go away. Even among the Black intelligentsia, Black
leadership, and the Black community as a whole, many were talking about Martin like a dog.”116
However, King continued, as Moses and Joshua, head unbowed with tactics he had studied from
Mohandas K. Ghandhi in India seeing how Ghandhi was successful with his non-violent resistant
protests. King used this love ethic and method to motivate him and others toward civil
disobedience to gain access to the promise of political and social inclusion and human
acceptance. The love of God would be the guide toward civil disobedience and policy changes.

*Love-in-Action*

Like Joshua’s direct aim at Jericho, King had a direct target against the unethical laws of
segregation and human degradation in Montgomery, Alabama. King sought to put love in action
to challenge the system. In December 1955, King, along with members of the MIA and residents
of the black community, moved to boycott the segregated bus laws of Montgomery by not riding
on any of the buses until black people received fair treatment in accordance with the law of
segregation. King was clear in his demands to the bus company: “He detailed the request for a
first-come, first-served seating policy, and stressed, ‘We are not asking for an end to segregation.
That’s a matter for the legislature and the courts…All we are seeking is justice and fair treatment
in riding the buses. We don’t like the idea of Negroes having to stand while there are vacant
seats.’”117 At this point in King’s life and philosophy he was not trying to end segregation or tear
down the walls of Jericho, he was simply trying to reposition the system to respect black people
and give preference to those who sat down first.

At a church gathering, King rallied the people with his speech of militancy accompanied
by moderation, racial dignity and non-violent philosophy, he stated “First and foremost we are

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American citizens…We are not here advocating violence. We have overcome that…the only weapon we have is the weapon of protest…and the great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right.” The constitutional requirement of the United States was not the only mandate that demanded African-American rights, King invoked God into the conversation, “We must keep God in the forefront. Let us be Christians in all our action…Love is one of the pinnacle parts of the Christian faith. There is another side called justice. And justice is really love in calculation.” King urged the people to protest with courage but also with dignity and love so that the walls of segregation, like the walls of Jericho would fall down. King ended his speech with a biblical scripture from the prophet Amos, “And we are determined here in Montgomery - to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream!”

The speech was followed by boycotts of the buses. Black people began walking and setting up car pools to get to and fro. Like the Israelites they would walk, not patronize the bus system. The boycotts would receive harsh responses from antagonists. Bodily assaults, false arrests and attacks on family and friends including the firebombing on the home of Martin Luther King, Jr. However, the movement would continue and the stance from King would ultimately change from one of accepting polite segregation to one of seeing segregation as an evil that must be destroyed, “Frankly, I am for immediate integration. Segregation is evil, and I cannot, as a minister, condone evil.” The radical King spoke up defiantly against segregation and moved to end its existence. The move for integration and inclusion was now necessary for King to see the glory of God and tear down the walls of Jericho.

What started as a local movement to gain fair treatment of African Americans under the segregated laws in Montgomery resulted in a case before the Supreme Court to end segregated

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118 Dierenfield, Civil Rights Movement, 20.
119 Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 54.
buses all over the country. On December 17, 1956, approximately one year after Rosa Parks took her stand by sitting down, the Supreme Court came down with their ruling rejecting the City’s last appeal and demanding that integration of buses be instituted immediately. “The actual order arrived in the city on Thursday, December 20 and U.S. Marshals served the writs on the white officials shortly before noon.”120 The MIA under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had won a major victory for racial identity, human dignity and constitutional justice and liberty for all by integrating the buses. The walls of Jericho had come down.

_Martin Luther King as Leader_

We can easily describe King as an articulate, philosophical leader, but King was a determined and vigilant leader. His leadership was marked by resilience, urgency and compassion. King was confrontational, willing to work with and against government to get the job done but always attracting a concerted group of followers regardless of detractors. His style was calm, but his soul was unrelenting. He was unbowed and unhindered by threats and attacks. He wouldn’t allow anyone to turn him away from the pursuit of justice whether black or white. He was truly a leader with a target and vision for socially transformed conditions in America. He was willing to and ultimately did risk his life for justice and will always be remembered for it.

The movement would lead Dr. Martin Luther King and others to form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) that would be responsible for challenging civil rights violations and transforming social conditions all over the south. Like Joshua and the Israelites Martin Luther King would move through different territories to tear down strongholds and take possession of the promise land. Martin Luther King and SCLC marched and demonstrated and demanded fair employment opportunities and desegregation of public facilities. On July 2, 1964

120Ibid., 82.
The Civil Rights Act was signed into law ending segregation in public accommodations; including schools, housing and employment.

This was a big victory for civil rights advocates. As John Hope Franklyn states, “The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the most far reaching and comprehensive law in support of racial equality ever enacted by Congress. It gave the attorney general additional power to protect citizens against discrimination and segregation in voting, education, and the use of public facilities.” Like Joshua tearing down the strongholds of Ai in Canaan, King had torn down the barriers of segregation for integration.

However, the Civil Rights Movement was not complete without the right to vote which had been hampered by past discriminatory actions. Despite civil rights laws and advancement in public accommodations black people continued to face difficulty in voting. Southern whites were harsh and bitter toward black people voting, especially in areas where black people had a large population. Like the southern and northern borders taken over by Joshua, the context of voter discrimination was ripe for change. King knew that without a voting rights act blacks in the South would never be able to change their communities. King went to President Johnson immediately following the Civil Rights Act and asked that a Voting Rights Act be implemented. However, according to reports, “Johnson said he had cashed in all his “chits” with the southern senators to get the civil rights law passed and that he had no political capital left.” Johnson refused suggesting it would be five or ten years before a voting rights act would be politically possible. Johnson told the civil rights activist that black people would have to wait. But King

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121 Franklyn and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 2:539.
being a prophetic leader, with a militant spirit and determined Civil Rights activists could not wait.

King, along with SCLC and others, began to march for a Voting Rights Act in a little known town called Selma, Alabama. In the first march many were beaten almost to death and many others were injured and jailed. However, the forces of change and the prophet of God would not give up. Another march took place two weeks later. As Jim Wallis reports:

The whole nation was watching. The eyes of America were focused on Selma, as they had been on Birmingham before the civil rights law was passed. And after the historic Selma to Montgomery march for freedom, it took only five months, not five years or ten, to pass a new voting rights act: The Voting Rights Act of 1965. King had changed the wind.\textsuperscript{123}

African Americans had gotten their civil rights and voting rights less than one year apart. The march was successful resulting in a changed America for black people and a changed course for America to live up to its Constitutional creed of inclusion and Rights for every citizen. The right to vote was a major step in America’s advancement. The power structures knew how important and powerful the vote was; its impact on policy and influence to determine critical decisions and persons in leadership would be decided not only by white Americans but black America also. King was a moral leader and at the center of this significant moment in history Jim Wallis calls King a “wind changer”:

People who are motivated by spiritual values that give a real vision for change are not like those with their finger in the air. They already know the direction to head in, and they lead by example. Their commitment, skills, sacrifices, creativity, and, ultimately, moral authority are what make all the difference and change the wind.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{123}Wallis, \textit{God’s Politics}, 23. 
\textsuperscript{124}Wallis, \textit{God’s Politics}, 24.
Indeed, King was a “wind changer.” But he was also a prognosticator who envisioned a better America in years to come. In his speech “I have a Dream” King prophesied:

that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

King’s Legacy

King’s prophetic pronouncement became evident in monumental ways decades later. With his many accomplishments, Rev. Dr. King became the quintessential Joshua figure by tearing down walls of inequality, systemic racism, and discrimination. Unlike many of King’s critics such as Malcolm X and Rev. Joseph Jackson, King actually achieved significant changes to the structure of racism and discrimination and for the advancement of black people in America. Although Malcolm X was a great prolific speaker and advocate for black dignity and independence his words never resulted in one change to the power structure of racism. Not one brick fell from the establishment and he never broke down one wall with his words. Malcolm X was good at identifying inequality, arousing black people’s anger to fight against a ruthless system that devalued their humanity. But even with his many words not one political or even economic change was made for all black people in America. No new social reality emerged.

Rev. Joseph Jackson was a great leader for the National Baptist Convention but he too never produced one change for African American people. He never transformed the system of racism in America with his following. And although it is good for the black community to have different leaders with different philosophies which Rev. Jackson had, the philosophy should result in strategies that will effectuate change for the whole of the black community. Rev. Jackson never had a real strategy to advance black people politically or even economically, even though he had a great following. Rev. Jackson could have aligned with Dr. King and brought the
non-violent resistant philosophy for governmental change together with the Production philosophy for black economic progress for better results in the black community. But instead Rev. Jackson chose to criticize Rev. King. The criticism of Rev. Jackson upon Rev. King resulted in further separation in the Baptist Denomination which resulted in a split and Rev. Dr. King and others formed the Progressive Baptist Convention where they could live out their civil rights agenda with religious fervor.

Rev. Dr. King took on political structures, economic inequality, education, segregation, and discrimination with great success for the future of black advancement. As a result of Rev. Dr. King’s work conditions changed for the betterment of black people as they did for the Israelites when Joshua went into Canaan. King’s impact was not just felt on denominational lines as Malcolm X with the Nation of Islam or Rev. Joseph Jackson with the National Baptist Convention. King’s work and radical activism transcended religious affiliation and impacted black people all over America regardless of religion. King’s impact ushered in a new social reality for black people in America. Biblical history shows us that when God calls his divine agents to a particular context of oppression that those structures must be confronted not only for the purpose of prophetic talk but for the purpose of social change. Malcolm X and Joseph Jackson had prophetic talk but it was King that mixed talk with action, like Moses and Joshua, for social salvation to tear down walls that would enable the future of black progress.

In summary, God calls newer, younger, and more well-equipped leaders to tackle the current context as he did from Moses to Joshua. Moses knew his time had ended and God had already prepared someone to succeed him because of the coming hostile climate. Moses had taken the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness and Joshua would take them into the Promise Land. Joshua was not separate from Moses but a continuation of God’s call to social
salvation for the Israelite community. Rosa Parks and Rev. Martin Luther King were a continuation of God’s divine providence for humanity and equal rights and inclusion for black people in America. They were not separate from Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas but a continuation of God’s justice for the current context. Rosa Parks was well-equipped to confront segregation because of her virtuous spirit. She had the tenacity necessary to sit down and spark a civil rights movement. Her boldness ushered in the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Rev. King was well equipped for the current context. Along with his prophetic calling, righteous audacity, and moral spirit, he had the black church experience, traditional education and oration which allowed him to appeal to the soul of America whether black or white. In his fierce approach he was unapologetic and radical in his mission to transform black people’s condition, thus America’s ideals of its Constitution that all men are created equal and endowed with such inalienable rights as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It was this powerful divine understanding that ushered in his non-violent resistant philosophy that allowed him to proceed and succeed in tearing down the walls of segregation, bypassing his critics and advancing the black community in ways that are unprecedented in history.

The walls had fallen, the cities had been taken and the doors had opened to three critical areas that had been shut and hostile to African-American progress in America. Now with the wind changing in favor of black people in America, progress would be made possible in formerly segregated areas in education, economics, voting and political ascendance.

From 1970 to 2016, a new context would thrust African Americans into never before imagined places in the United States. African Americans would see the fruits of their struggle from slavery to the Civil Rights Movement and would reap the benefits in education, economics, and politics. However, one evil still remains - the sin of racism.
In the final chapter, I will look at how Jesus becomes the paradigm for new leadership the antidote to salvation for the oppressed. I will look at how Jesus’s ministry is both radical and relevant to the cause of justice and liberation for the past, present and future of black progress. I look at Jesus in connection with the Jewish community in Israel and the black community in America and what it means today in light of the changing social context, the persistent evil of racism and how Jesus becomes the prescription for a new context to address racism and further liberate black people from the racial ills of America. We look at new leadership (secular and religious), and new tactics that arise out of today’s new context to address both racial and social issues. And just as Jesus had to fight against the tradition of his own culture and background to exert change to his current context, so too do African Americans. As traditional advocates of social justice are at odds with the innovative social justice activists of today. How can we bring traditional and innovative activists together to continue the fight against racism and social denigration of black lives in America?
CHAPTER FOUR

The Emergence of Jesus and Black Leadership out of the Context of Today

After entering the Promised Land also known as Canaan, the People of Israel maintained several centuries of independence and freedom. They had torn down walls, ravaged cities and took control of territories promised by God. They settled in the land, built temples and were able to worship their God freely. God had set them apart from other nations and established a covenant which provided the contents of the Torah, “Israel was to worship the Lord God only; to refrain from making any images of the divine; to keep the Sabbath holy; to maintain moral purity; and to act toward one another in ways that were just and compassionate.” The Torah would be their guide for a just and socio-political life with God and others.

In the land of Canaan their leadership would ultimately be guided by Judges which was eventually upended by a monarchy. The People of Israel demanded a King, “The people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Samuel 8:6 NIV). God grants the people of Israel a King which would lead them politically and militarily. One of the greatest Kings and leader was David who would bring the people of Judah and Israel together under the covenant and give them success after success against their enemies in battle. As Irvine states, “The height of Israel’s political influence came in the reign of King David and his son Solomon, whose rule stretched from the Philistine cities on the Mediterranean seacoast to the city of Dan in the north and the Negev desert in the south. It was under Solomon that the first Temple of Israel was built in Jerusalem as well.”

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126 Ibid., 10
The Israelites succeeded in making strides toward freedom, they ruled their own land, gained victory over their enemies and established a united kingdom with a capital city in Jerusalem. They were now seeing the promises of God with concrete changes to their condition.

African American Progress

African Americans contextual advancement is again analogous to Israeliite contextual progress in many areas. After the passing of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, African Americans began to witness political and social reform. A decade after the passing of the acts a new social reality of transformed conditions began to manifest itself in certain areas that had been heavily discriminatory. Particularly in education, employment and voting.

According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Education between the years 1975 and 1996 there had been tremendous improvement in educational attainment for African Americans since the Civil Rights laws were passed in 1964 and subsequent legislations:

- Dropout rates for African American students declined from 20.5 percent in 1976 to 13 percent in 1996. High School graduation rates among African Americans have increased substantially in the past 20 years and drawn much closer to the high school graduation rates of whites. Total minority enrollment at colleges and universities increased 61 percent between fall 1986 and fall 1996. Along with 60 percent of African American high school graduates (class of 1997) enrolled in college (two-year and four-year colleges) immediately after their high school graduation. A decade earlier only 52 percent of African American high school graduates went on to college without a break in their education. 10.5 percent of all college students (undergraduate, graduate, and professional education) were African American in fall 1996. Four years earlier, only 9.6 percent of all college students were African American. The percentage of African Americans age 25 and over who held bachelor's degrees increased from 11.3 percent in 1990 to 13.3 percent in 1997. African American students were awarded 1,563 doctorates in 1996. This represents a 48 percent increase since
Ten years after the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts educational opportunities and educational resources began to improve educational outcomes of African American students immensely. Tearing down discriminatory barriers in education would improve job opportunities, as Gavin Wright states, “there was indeed an economic dimension to the Civil Rights legislation which many civil rights activists fought to prevent discrimination in the work place.”\textsuperscript{128} The Textile industry began to see an increase in employment from less than 5 percent in 1963 to more than 20 percent in 1970 and to more than a third by 1980. The Civil Rights legislation also impacted white collar jobs with the advent of Affirmative Action to place skilled African Americans in the work place. Tearing down barriers in voting would increase the number of African American elected officials. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 had an immediate impact on black-voter registration, and the number of black elected officials increased gradually over the next 30 years. By this measure, too, gains in the South far exceeded those in other parts of the country, even allowing for regional differences in racial demography. Political representation translated into real economic gains for black Southerners, indicated by the distribution of public services, access to public-sector employment and racial equity in the allocation of government contracts.\textsuperscript{129}

Since 1965 the number of elected officials of color has grown tremendously. African Americans went from holding fewer than 1,000 elected offices nationwide to over 10,000 as of

\textsuperscript{127} U.S. Department of Education: Impact of Civil Rights Laws, https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/imSince pact.html
2015, fifty years after the Voting Rights Law was passed. This impact gives tremendous influence to local as well as national representation for black people who were formerly highly discriminated in elections and elected office. Voter Registration has led to black voters out numbering white voters in the South in both the 2008 and 2012 elections. “Since 1965, the black/white racial gap in voter turnout has decreased dramatically in presidential elections. Turnout among black Southerners exceeded that of their white counterparts in four of the twelve presidential elections since 1965 (1992 with Bill Clinton and 2000 with Al Gore), and nationwide black turnout clearly exceeded white turnout in presidential elections in 2012 and perhaps in 2008.”

Clearly the 2008 and 2012 elections marked a grand turn around for African Americans involvement in elections. Barack Obama, a black senator from Illinois who had taken the nation by storm to enter the Presidential election and won the primary against a white woman, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and then went on to beat a white male, Senator John McCain, a republican in 2008 and then defeated a former Governor from Massachusetts, Mitt Romney in 2012. The election marked the height of Black political achievement as well as Black pride and dignity in America. It had been like the People of Israel when David became King and united the nations and defeated their enemies. The election of Barack Obama broke down racial barriers, defeated the enemies of racial progress and united the nation both black and white around a progressive black candidate. Like the Israelites with David, God had raised up a leader of transformed reality for the political and social unity of a nation.

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130 Khalilah Brown - Dean, PhD Zoltan Hajnal, PhD Christina Rivers, PhD Ismail White, PhD, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies: 50 Years of The Voting Rights Act The State of Race in Politics, 2015, 4.
131 Ibid., 3
Barack Obama the Face of New Black Leadership

Barack Obama’s election gave a new generation of black people a sense of “somebodiness” and an old generation a feeling of justice realized. Martin Luther King’s “I Have A Dream” speech had been actualized. The feeling of pride that had been brewing and sought since the black power and black theology movement of the 1970’s was now affirmed in the election of President Obama. With the election of Barack Obama black people felt a sense of liberation and reconciliation with a nation that had for centuries deemed them subhuman and insignificant.

Barack Obama becomes the face of new black leadership in the 21st century. His leadership was different from those who preceded him in the black community. Frederick Douglas and Harriet Tubman fought for freedom in the context of slavery and was successful at breaking shackles that limited black humanity and denigrated black liberty and dignity. Their goal was consistent with their times of denigration and violence of black bodies and corruption of black minds. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks fought for inclusion in the context of segregation and was successful in breaking down walls of discrimination with laws and legislation. Their method was consistent with their context of denial of basic human and civil rights for black people. The preceding moral stands led to the current movement of electing a black president of the United States of America. Obama emerged in the context of black despair and low expectations. His election heightened the aspirations and hope of Black (and white) Americans for further freedom in America. Just as the Israelites had saw Jesus not only as their heavenly savior but their earthly activist. They wanted to make Jesus king, “Jesus knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself”
(John 6:15). The desire for a king represented opposition to the current political establishment that kept the Israelites in poverty.

President Obama had emerged because of opposition to slavery and the fighting spirit of the civil rights movement to proceed with the fight for freedom and justice at a higher level in government, and those who had succeeded in making him President were now looking to get their share of America’s prosperity of educational equity, economic equality, legislative liberty and judicial fairness.

The election of Barack Obama led many Americans to believe that America had succeeded in overcoming its racist past and horrific treatment of black bodies and was now living in a post racial society. An article in DiverseEducation.com records:

> that with Barack Obama ensconced as the nation’s first Black president, plenty of voices in the national conversation are trumpeting America as a post-racial society — that race matters much less than it used to, that the boundaries of race have been overcome, that racism is no longer a big problem. “It’s smack down to think America is still all about racism,” says Dr. John McWhorter, a Manhattan Institute senior fellow. “Racism is not Black people’s main problem anymore. To say that is like saying the earth is flat.”

Many were suggesting that racism was not America’s main problem anymore, calling for a post racial society because of the advancement of a black president, as if a black president had resolved all ills of past racial subjugation and discrimination. This was also the case during slavery when the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed, many acted as though the signing of the proclamation had resolved all social and racial ills.

The heightened thinking was that if America, despite its horrific past of slavery and discrimination, could elect a black president it had surely overcome its racist past and that black

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132 Diverseeducation.com/article/12238
people and white people were now in a place to look past its history of enslavement and no longer focus on policy that strictly focused on black equality and advancement.

Although there was a black president and a feeling of reconciliation, pride and dignity, the reality of the current crisis of leadership, social and economic injustice are not necessarily analogous with political ascension. As J. Deotis Roberts states, “When reconciliation is elevated to its proper ethical level and Christian understanding, it requires serious attention to liberation from social injustices.”\(^{133}\) A black man had been elevated to the highest level of government, but it still required serious attention to liberation from social injustice. It’s not a black president that resolves all ills with racism, it’s policy that elevates the standing and transform the conditions of black lives. Social injustices still lingered with a black president and it threatened black lives and interrupted black progress and caused the emergence of leadership to demand justice for the oppressed.

*Israelite Regress*

After centuries of monarchal rule and independence, the Israelites were crushed by other nations. The Babylonians captured Jerusalem and took many of the Israelites into exile. The temple was destroyed, and the people lost all independence and rule. The rise and fall of the temple at different times, under different foreign dynasties show the fate of Israel in the context of suffering and deliverance. As Irvine state, “The story of the temple’s fate at the hands of foreign powers stands as a metaphor for the experience of Israel at the hands of the ruling nations and empires that surround it.”\(^{134}\) The temple symbolizes the rise and fall, oppression and freedom of Israel as a people as well as the favorable and unfavorable treatment of foreign rulers.


\(^{134}\) Ibid., 10.
that the Israelites encounter. When rulers are in control that are sensitive to the Israelites religious and social needs then the Israelites progress. However, when rulers are in control that are insensitive and even hostile to the Israelite community then Israelite’s progress is put on hold, halted and even turned back in many instances. After the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians it was rebuilt by the Persians under King Cyrus when many of the exiles returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1). The temple was then destroyed a second time by the Romans in 70 ce.

President’s and Black Progress

This is similar to African Americans in America. When there is a president that is sensitive to the economic and social conditions of black people in America then resources and policy are established to advance the conditions of the black community. However, when there are presidents and congressional leaders in place that are insensitive and hostile to equal rights, urban development, racism and other social and economic conditions, then African American progress is put on hold, halted, ignored and even rolled back in many cases.

An article in Scholars Strategy Network concludes that black people do better economically and socially under democratic presidents, however under republican presidents the tide is not only turned back but worsened: Under Democratic presidents, black families’ incomes grew on average $895 dollars annually, but grew only by $142 dollars under Republicans. The black unemployment rate fell by a net 7.9 percentage points across the 26 years of Democratic leadership, but went up by a net of 13.7 points during 28 years of Republican presidencies. Across the years of Democratic leadership, black poverty declined by a net of 23.6 percentage points, but grew by three points when Republicans held the White House.135

The progress for

black people under democratic leadership is mostly due to policy that is put in place like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty, Bill Clinton’s expansion of the earned income tax credit and President Obama’s Affordable Care Act that helped many poor African Americans gain health insurance. However, even under a democratic black president, African Americans continued to suffer heavy social, economic and judicial inequities, when there is a republican controlled congress and an insensitive Supreme Court. In 2013, major sections of the Voting Rights Act were eliminated by the Supreme Court. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 required that the Justice Department review sixteen states that had a history of overt discrimination against African Americans in voting to get preclearance before they proposed changes to their voting laws. Disturbingly, in 2013 the Supreme Court threw out the preclearance rule basing their opinion on statistics of voting patterns of African Americans, as Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. wrote “nearly 50 years later, things have changed dramatically.” The majority of justices on the supreme court realized that there was still discrimination in voting but stated that “congress must ensure that the legislation it passes to remedy that problem speaks to the current conditions.”

The current conditions according to the majority of justices confirmed that since there was large voter turnout from the black community along with the presence of a black president in the White House, preclearance was no longer necessary. However, another study showed that many of the law suits associated with voter discrimination in recent years, even during the advent of a black president and heavy voter turnout, occurred in “jurisdictions that were required to preclear their voting changes”.

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The majority decision turns back the clock of black progress in elections and open the door to further discrimination in voting.

Israelite Further Regression

During the first Century, the Judeans (which the children of Israel were called after the exile) are under Roman authority. Rome had invaded and conquered Israel and its capital city Jerusalem. Herod is installed by Emperor Augustus as King to keep control over the Israelites. Herod control is dominant and ruthless irrespective of the Israelite’s culture. The reign of King Herod moves the Israelites back to social oppression and economic hardship. Under King Herod the temple is designed to favor Rome’s culture rather than Jewish worship. The priests are required to give a sacrifice to Rome and the emperor. King Herod imposes taxes on the Israelites which they had to pay in addition to their tithes to the temple. Richard Horsley states:

The demand for tribute to Rome and taxes to Herod in addition to the tithes and offering to the temple and priesthood dramatically escalated the economic pressures on peasant producers, whose livelihood was perennially marginal at best. After decades of multiple demands from multiple layers of rulers many village families fell increasingly into debt and were faced with loss of their family inheritance of land. The impoverishment on families led to the disintegration of village communities, the fundamental social form of such an agrarian society. These are precisely the deteriorating conditions that Jesus addresses in the Gospels: impoverishment, hunger and debt.\textsuperscript{138}

The taxing became a means to enrich the elite and oppress the poor. Richard J. Cassidy notes in addition to temple taxes there were grain tolls, taxes on produce, sales taxes,
occupational taxes, custom taxes, transit taxes and many others. This resulted in a financial burden which left many of the Israelites impoverished, hungry and unhappy in the current context which also caused a great divide between the haves and the have-nots. The Israelites are at best a “client state” without a real home for their worship and existence as a people. It is a familiar context of historical significance under political-cultural rule that dates back to the Israelites under Pharaoh’s enslavement and Babylonian exile.

Economic inequality is similar in America for African Americans. According to the 2011 census data, the net worth of the average black household in the United States is $6,314, compared with $110,500 for the average white household. The gap has worsened in 2016 and the United States now has a greater wealth gap by race than South Africa did during apartheid.* The black-white gap is roughly 40 percent greater today than it was in 1967 resulting in poverty, crime, and low expectations. The demand for leadership to address existing economic disparities becomes essential to the livelihood and progress of black people.

* Leadership Arises in Desperate Times

As in the past with both Israelite and African American oppression, it is usually in times of hardship and subjugation that leadership arises. Many of the oppressed Israelites were looking for a savior, a redeemer to lead them and fight their battles against an unfair rule and return them back to the glory days of King David. Resistance movements “found nationalistic religious

140 United States Census Data, 2011
* Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show* picked up on an interview Nicholas Kristof did with CNN and inserted a clip in its Dec. 4, 2014, program. Kristof was making a fundamental point about inequality in the United States. "The race gap for wealth in the United States right now between the median white family and the median black family is 18-fold," Kristof said. "That’s greater than the black-white wealth gap was in apartheid South Africa."
expression in the form of their expectations for an anointed (or messianic) royal leader who, like David, was expected to deliver the people from foreign oppression.”¹⁴¹ That royal leader was heightened when Jesus appeared on the scene. The Israelites looked to Jesus for a new exodus from the “oppressive weight of empire” and a new King to return them back to dominance.

The birth of Jesus has spiritual, social and political significance. Jesus being born in a manger aligns himself with the oppressed Israelite social class community of the Roman Empire. Secondly, Jesus birth is immediately a threat to the political establishment. In the Gospel of Matthew, King Herod sets out with false intentions to praise the baby Jesus, however it is revealed that King Herod’s true intent is to kill the baby Jesus. When the true intent is revealed, King Herod is outwitted by the magi and he decides to issue a decree to kill all boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were born during the time of Jesus. We also saw the government killing of boys when Moses was born.

*Killing of Young Black Men*

Another issue that torments the progress of black people today is the killing of young black men. The killing of young boys by King Herod is similar to the killings of young black males in America in 2016. Although not since slavery has the killings been sanctioned by the government, there has been killings by those who work for government particularly law enforcement agencies in local black communities. Even under a black president the killings have been numerous and cause for heightened tension and social unrest to bring attention to the atrocities. In the time since Obama’s election there has been visible cases of police misconduct that has been brought to the public’s attention starting with the killing of a 17 years old African American young man by the name of Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012, then heightened by

¹⁴¹ Irvine, 15.

One of the reasons many of these cases have been brought to the public’s attention is technology. The advent of the internet, social media and cell phones with cameras has allowed information to be disseminated on a large scale and get to the public in seconds which has heightened the ability of social activists to organize and coalesce around issues of racism. This was the case on April 2015, in South Carolina when a police officer was caught on camera fatally shooting a black man by the name of Walter Scott in the back while he was fleeing from the police. The video was used to organize demonstrators through social media to protest the shooting and the police department. Similarly, in the case of Tamir Rice and Eric Garner. Both were caught on camera and Michael Brown’s body was caught on camera lying on the ground for hours after the shooting.

If technology had been available in the past (like during slavery, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights era) the way it is accessible now, more black killings and police misconduct would have been caught on camera and brought to the public’s attention, like in the case of Emmitt Till in 1955. A 15 years old black male who was brutally beaten by a mob of whites after being accused of whistling at a white woman. His body was thrown in the river and was later retrieved and pictured in Jet Magazine for the world to see. The photo brought chills to the nation and depicted the horrific display of racism, violence and inhumaness of a nation that tolerated such brutality against its citizens.

However, even with videos, photos and social media dissemination and protesting; indictments, convictions and legislation have been few and far between, causing more social
unrest as well as local and national tension between police officers and the black community. In the case of Trayvon Martin there was an indictment but no conviction. Eric Garner’s killing was caught on camera yet no indictment. Michael Brown’s killer not indicted. Walter Scott was caught on camera yet no conviction. Freddy Gray killers indicted but no conviction. In the early 90’s the case of Rodney King being beaten mercilessly on camera brought no conviction. Legislation was proposed by President Obama and the Black Congressional Caucus to place body cameras on police officers, but never voted on by the full congress.

Social media has allowed individuals to come together in large numbers, in real time, to protest fatalities and unjust killings of young black men. New groups have emerged such as Black Lives Matter after the killing of Trayvon Martin to address police misconduct against African Americans. Also, the group Say Her Name which was created in 2015 brought attention to police misconduct against black women.

Many insurgents and rebels have taken to the streets and rebelled and burned down businesses in the black community to protest police shootings, such as after the deaths of Michael Brown and Freddy Gray. The protest marches and acts of social unrest and resistance by young people have often been compared to the protest movements of the Civil Rights era in the 1960’s. After the shooting of Michael Brown many churches opened their doors to young activists protesting the shooting. Rev. F. Willis Johnson, pastor of Wellspring United Methodist Church made his church a haven for demonstrators during the social unrest and stated that during the civil rights movement “We sent coffee to the police and poured milk in people’s eyes when they got tear gassed.”

142 The black church in the past had been the refuge for relief and protection, however most of the demonstrations today are spontaneous and not in connection

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with pastors or churches but with socially connected media activists. Rashad Robinson who founded the social media civil rights activist sight Colorofchange.org was able to launch 15 campaigns which resulted in over one million people signing petitions around Michael Brown's death and organizing protesters to demand justice against police brutality.

Robinson sees his method as a changing of the guard when it comes to civil rights tactics and leadership. He says “in some ways our [our success] is a changing of the guard. People don’t want top down organizing. People are not joining in the same way they used to be. What they want is to move in and out of campaigns that matter to them.” Many of the new organizations today are not lead by any particular leader or organizations and are initiated by social justice issues that arise in the moment. Activists Groups like Black Lives Matter do not have specific named leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King or Malcolm X. Many of today’s civil rights activists are loosely organized and communicate by cell phone and meet on social media rather than monthly meetings and conventions like the NAACP. This has often lead to conflicts between the older and newer generation of activists.

Many of the media activists are often at odds with traditional civil rights activists, pastors and churches in terms of tactics and message. In a celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 2015, the New York Times reports that a “showdown occurred between the civil rights old guard and the new, more boisterous generation of protestors, many of whom were catalyzed to action by the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner in Staten Island, both at the hands of police.” The showdown against the older and younger generation seemed to be a matter of style. Rev. Al Sharpton, who has been a civil rights activist and organizer against police misconduct even when

144 Michael Paulson, Martin Luther King’s Birthday Marked by Protests Over Deaths of Black Men, New York Times, January 19, 2015
there were no cameras with high profile cases of Abner Louima and Amodou Diallo, suggests that the recent unrest by young social media activists were good and what America needed. However, he stated that some of them were “hustling the media, they have no real following, no real intent, and they may not be around in four months.”

Rev. Al Sharpton comments raise an important point which has to do with organization, philosophy and leadership which the old guard used in their attempts and success to confront injustice in the past. As Oprah Winfrey stated, the protests are wonderful but “what I’m looking for is some kind of leadership to come out of this to say, “This is what we want. This is what has to change, and these are the steps that we need to take to make these changes, and this is what we’re willing to do to get it.”

Oprah Winfrey and others are alluding to leadership and concrete goals associated with organizing and activism. David J. Garrow suggests that tactics used by Civil Rights icons of the past had clear objectives that resulted in legislation such as the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act and the right to eat at lunch counters. It is true, the objectives of the past were clear but then again so were the issues and the context. As with slavery the context was clear which made the objective to end slavery clear. Same with the Segregated south, which made the goal of Civil Rights and Voting Rights legislation necessary. However, today the context is much more complicated. Technology has made injustice against black lives more visible and confrontational but not necessarily more focused on legislation that will transform social conditions.

Social media has made immediate protests possible, but it doesn’t necessarily result in a coalition of committed individuals determined to protest until legislation is crafted and passed or

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145 Michael Paulson, Martin Luther King’s Birthday
146 Ibid., Paulson
that judicial decisions are made into law. Nor does it result in specific action taken, nor a philosophy that binds the activists. Social media has often resulted in “pop ups” and “drop offs” until the next “pop up”. This is not necessarily bad for the moment because all movements need attention to get involvement, but involvement needs to be sustained with clear objectives and leaders that are willing and able to move beyond the moment and the media and into the courthouse, statehouse and congress to be effective and transformable.

*The issues that Need Attention Today*

There is still much work to do for all social justice activists. And the focus is clear if eyes are open to see the challenges: In addition to the assault on Voting Rights in 2013, the growing economic inequality of the races; and police misconduct there has been re-segregation in education. Although progress had been made in education a decade after the Civil Rights laws were passed, regress began to set in thereafter. As of 2015, statistics show that more than sixty years after the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, school systems are still heavily separate and unequal because of social factors such as poverty and health issues. As Lindsey Cook states, “many factors contribute to disparities in education. Lower wealth, lower health, lower parental education levels, more dealings with the justice system and other circumstances create a perfect storm that leaves blacks without the same educational opportunities as whites.”

Educational opportunities and progress plummet when other social factors are ignored leaving black people open to disparities that set them back rather than move them forward. Disparities in education lead to crime and violence in schools and recurring low-income communities.

The social connection between education, poverty and incarceration, particularly for young black men, is synonymous with racism and regress and continuous set-back for black

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people in America. From the 1970s to 2010 the number of blacks incarcerated increased tremendously over the white population. A report by the National Research Council of the Academies show that:

The increase in absolute disparities is especially striking, growing more than 3-fold from 1970 to 1986 for prison admission rates and more than doubling from 1980 to 1990 for imprisonment rates. The large increase in absolute disparities reflects the extraordinarily high rates of incarceration among African Americans that emerged with the overall growth of the incarceration rate… Because of the large disparity—which was already high in 1972—the steep increase in incarceration rates produced extremely high rates of incarceration for blacks but not whites. In 2010, the imprisonment rate for blacks was 4.6 times that for whites—the lowest disparity in imprisonment over the entire period for which race-specific incarceration rates are available.\(^{148}\)

Prison has been the new caste system for black people after slavery and Jim Crow laws according to Michelle Alexander author of the *New Jim Crow*. According to Ms. Alexander “Since the nation’s founding, African Americans repeatedly have been controlled through institutions such as slavery and Jim Crow, which appears to die, but then are reborn in new form, tailored to the needs and constraints of the time.”\(^{149}\) Indeed prison has replaced slavery and caused the majority of African American men to be its most sought-after recipients. The 13th Amendment might have abolished slavery “except as punishment for crime.” Many states turned to prison labor after slave labor was abolished which kept human labor free and production high. The penal system has broken many black families, just as slavery. It has denigrated many black bodies, just as slavery. It has resulted in the ongoing negative perception of black people as criminals, violent and inhumane, just as slavery. Today’s fight may not be against slavery or Jim

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Crow laws by name, but it is against slavery and Jim Crow by another name and system which is prison.

The racial disparity in prison statistics is startling and disturbing. As recorded by Michelle Alexander, “The United States imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid.”¹⁵⁰ Within these statistics an estimated three out of four black men in the poorest communities around the nation are likely to serve time in prison, black men have been imprisoned at rates twenty to fifty times more than white men and in many major cities where drugs are rampant as many as 80 percent of African American men have criminal records which impacts their freedom for the rest of their lives.

Jesus as social savior

Let us get back to the question of moral leadership and righteous actions for the purpose of social salvation. As we have seen with Moses, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglas during slavery and Joshua, Rosa Parks, and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during civil rights we also see with the current context (1970-2016) of the persistent presence of racism which affects the progress of African Americans of which we will call “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Persistent Institutional Racism.” After laying out the analogous relationship between African Americans and Israelites progress and regress as a result of institutional policy, the questions for the modern social justice and social salvation activist are: are the past models of leadership relevant to the present? And what leadership emerges in the modern age for African Americans to propel them to the next level of advancement?

Jesus as soul savior may not be for every social activist, but every social activist can relate to the philosophy of Jesus in Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 6
anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed”. Jesus statement represents virtues for the poor and underprivileged of society. Jesus represented a movement which gave inspiration to his adherents and fear to his opponents. Jesus tore down strong holds of hegemonic and political proportions. Jesus sought soul salvation but also social salvation for the oppressed. Jesus was before Moses and Joshua and with Moses and Joshua in their endeavor to freedom and inclusion. Jesus was the inspiration for Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglas, Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. And Jesus can be the inspiration that bring the old and new guard together to fight the crisis that exist in the context of persistent racial tension that denies African American quality education, economic stability, freedom from prison, housing and racial inequality. Jesus comes as innovator of his times with traditional ethical goals of human freedom and inclusion and fierce fight against injustice. There are three methods that Jesus uses to address the Israelites oppressive condition that can also be used for African Americans current fight for justice: Reconciliation, Regeneration and Resistance.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the ability to bring mutual understandings together. In theological terms it is the end of estrangement, between humanity and God. Jesus is the mediator that reconciles the present generation of Jewish settlers back to God without dismissing or dismantling their culture and tradition. Jesus unites the old and new but also aligns with those outside the Jewish tradition such as the gentiles and Samaritans to establish God’s will. The principle task of Jesus is to bring everyone together for the sake of soul and social salvation. Jesus does not exclude anyone but includes those who are willing to live up to the spiritual norms and moral values to
“proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind and set the oppressed free.”

Many of the older civil rights leaders in the black community were clergy who fought valiantly with a Christian theological perspective against an unjust and racist system. They were successful at protest marches, boycotts, sit-ins and face to face confrontation with elected officials and judicial decisions to promote fair and just laws on behalf of black people. Many of today’s younger leaders are not religious or inclined to apply a theological mission to their fight for social justice. This is not new. During the Black Power Movement of the 1970’s J. Deotis Roberts noted the division between the Black Power Movement and the Christian faith. “Many blacks who are not Christians are associated with “the religion of Black Power.” A black theologian who operates from the Christian faith has difficulty being heard in this company…”

However, today, as in years past, all have the same goals of confronting racism, oppression and exploitation of black lives which is seen in voting, education, employment, police misconduct, prison and poverty of African Americans. Although the different generations may not see eye to eye theologically and strategically they can agree principally and morally the desire to seek justice. Jesus as reconciler may not be able to bring the two generations of African Americans together theologically but can bring the two generations together morally to tactfully confront an unjust institution of oppression against black lives.

We are in a time that I would call “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Persistent Institutional Racism.” Which suggests that racism is ongoing, continuous, it has not lost its presence nor power in America. The context desires those that will address persistent racism with all parties involved whether black or nonblack, religious or non-religious, structured or

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unstructured, traditionally organized and tech savvy, philosophically designed and randomly disposed to unite and confront the presence of racism with the norms of freedom and justice as prescribed by Jesus. Jesus is concerned with Justice, peace and mercy. “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the Son of God.” (Matthew 5:9) In other words, both traditional and innovative seekers of justice must come together to address the institution. They must find common ground to confront a common foe. As C. Kavin Rowe states, “The future and the past belong together; tradition and innovation hand in hand. Traditioned innovation is a way of thinking and living that points toward the future in light of the past, a habit of being that requires both deep fidelity to the tradition that has borne us to the present and a radical openness to the innovations that will carry us forward.”

Mr. Rowe suggests that deep traditions of the bible give way to the present reality without severing ties from one to the other. Moses and Joshua as traditionalists paves the way for Jesus the innovator to continue the struggle for human and civil rights and Jesus as innovator gives reference and homage to Moses and Joshua as traditional leaders of the struggle. The same is true for black civil rights icons and todays innovative tech savvy activists. The traditional style and the innovative style and philosophy are not in competition but should work in cooperation to dismantle and transform conditions to bring about a new social reality. Since racism and injustice transcends generations so should moral leadership. Moral leadership is constant and generational and must open the doors to new leadership.

The problem today is that traditional leaders do not know when to end and innovative leadership do not know where to begin, so you have a clash in leadership and a clash in

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leadership puts more people at odds than in favor of fighting diligently and wholeheartedly against the system of oppression.

As with Moses to Joshua and Joshua to Jesus there must be a clear passing of the baton from one generation to the next in order that new leadership can take the helm and fight the power with the backing and support of traditional leadership. If there is no passing of the baton there will be intersection of hostility with the two generations rather than harmony from generation to generation. If there is no harmony the message of social transformation will be either lost or confused and there will not be a clear message to speak to the powers that be. The message to the oppressor should be clear. It is the same message that Moses spoke: “Let my people go.” It is a message of freedom. It is the same message that Joshua gave, one of direct inclusion. It is the same message Jesus gives for the poor and prisoners for justice. The moral acts and the mighty message of social justice activists today must be clear and consistent with the message of the past so that the continuation of moral leadership continues from generation to generation.

Regeneration

The term regeneration is a theological understanding as a spiritual renewal and transformation of heart, mind and soul to the obedience of God’s will. “Be ye not conformed but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:1). A radical thinking has entered the mind of God’s people to challenge worldly thoughts. The same term can be used to change or transform social conditions. Washington Gladden gave us a hint of this earlier when he spoke of social regeneration. Social regeneration is needed to change living conditions in America. When God lead the children of Israel out of Egypt’s land he wanted not only to change their minds but transform their conditions, from one of land workers to that of land owners. The same term of
social regeneration can be applied to the African American community. God wants to change the mind of black people to adhere toward his will of soul salvation but also social salvation which includes the transformation of social conditions.

The good, acceptable and perfect will of God is that we might change social and unjust conditions because of our transformed selves. The socio-political expression of Jesus begins to take root in Luke’s gospel when he says, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

In this narrative Jesus is very clear about his social mission, his connection to the oppressed and his goal of salvation and total transformation of conditions for the poor and socially bound. Jesus is seen as a redeemer for the oppressed and a messenger for the marginalized who are subjects of Roman rule. Rural workers, artisans and social outcasts along with women are his most ardent followers. They respond to Jesus’ message with humility yet with hope of freedom and renewed power. The Luke 4:18 Jesus becomes their leader, they are inspired by his presence. Many of his disciples see a grand return to the glory days of David and restoration of Israel. The Luke 4:18 Jesus clearly and without fear targets the exploited for his salvific purposes. The woman with the twelve years’ issue of blood (Mark 5:25-35) shows us that sickness and access to good health care was elusive for poor Israelites. Yet Jesus touches her and blesses her because of her faithfulness. He gives her something the Roman government would not or could not give her, good health care. The Roman government discriminated based on class, gender and race. She was of the lowly class. The constant reference that Jesus makes to poverty in the gospels show us that it is an imminent problem and one that must be addressed for
the dignity of the people, “So deep and so debilitating was the effect of impoverishment on the psycho-emotional health of his people that Jesus found it necessary to explicitly affirm their worth with the validation “Blessed are you who are poor” (Luke 6:20).” The poor suffered, they were excluded and polarized and often subjects of ridicule and shame. Jesus proclamation of social regeneration is to transform conditions completely.

There needs to be a social regeneration in the black community today and those who are social activists must look toward the total transformation of conditions. When we look at the injustices and lack of freedom African Americans face today they are a result of band-aid approaches to serious racial diseases. You cannot put a band-aid on cancer as it requires more serious treatment to eliminate the problem. The issues of old racism and its polarizing and debilitating effects are still heavy on the lives of black people because there’s been insufficient approaches to serious problems. Although there has been progress there has also been regress because legislation that helped move black people ahead was not sealed so they would not be undone or turned back. Leadership that fought in the past succeeded in making legislative as well as economic and education changes but the changes were not complete, the progress was not sufficient to totally transform the conditions or black people’s lives. As a result, intruders of black progress, haters of African American advancement were able to rise up and turn back and even kill the progress that had been made in elections, education, economics and other advancements of black people in America.

Regeneration as in the Christian understanding is not only a one-time transformation but is a continuous fight for salvation. The same understanding must apply to those who seek social transformation. Leaders must be diligent, vigilant and consistent in their pursuit for change. As

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soon as a victory is scored there should be a continuation and succession of fights until there is
total transformation. Similar to what the Israelites did under the leadership of Moses and Joshua.
The children of Israel did not settle in the wilderness, they kept moving to the promise land.
Under Joshua the children of Israel did not stop fighting until they possessed fully the promised
land. Unfortunately, black leadership has often settled and waited until distress and serious racial
evil occurred to react, rather than being proactive and fighting even when there is no threat. The
fight for black leadership must be continuous even in so called good times. Many African
American leaders lost their voice during the Obama administration. The calls for social
transformation, civil rights legislation, economic rejuvenation, and educational equity was lost or
muted. As a result, gains were turned back, and doors were opened for anti-progressives to walk
in and turn back the times.

There should be no long celebrations and satisfaction with status quo. There needs to be
legislation that totally transforms the system in order for black people to progress, and the
legislation needs to be enforced and sealed so that future legislation will not be able to roll back
accomplishments. Civil Rights Legislation that aided in voting rights and advancing voting for
African American involvement in elections should not have been tampered with. There needs to
be legislation that addresses: voting, health care, the prison industry, economic equality and
education that radically aids in the advancement of black people to free them from economic
bondage and social ills.

Resistance

Resistance is the ability to oppose any offense or person that hinders progress for another
people. In theological terms, it is used by James in 4:7 when he says, “Resist the devil and he
will flee from you.” Jesus in Matthew 4:18 is calling for resistance against a system that denies
the people their proper rights and humanity. Racism is an evil that must be resisted at all costs until it is done away with. Resistance will help those opposed to racism unite and organize against a common foe which is evil. Today’s activists must be revolutionary regardless of age. Revolutionaries like Moses seek to transform the system. Revolutionaries “are concerned with how to create mass organizations to seize power and give it to the people; to realize the democratic dream of equality, justice, peace, cooperation, equal and full opportunities for education, full useful employment, health and the chance to live by values that give meaning to life.”

Revolutionaries with moral visions of the future must come together with Moral Persistent Leadership. All parties whether young or old, male or female, religious or non-religious can understand the language of racism and its evil impact upon the lives of people because it is not only a religious connotation but a moral philosophy. With the moral understanding leading the fight it will enlist more soldiers in the battle. Moses was not initially a religious leader, but a moral one and ultimately a prophet that took on the system for the transformation of Israelite condition.

Again, the old and new must come together. Secular activists with no ties to religion and religious activist must unite to address the current crisis, not because they want to but rather because the times, the context demands it. At different times in American history God will allow a tyrant to rise so that radical revolutionaries can rise from their slumber and lead the people to freedom. We have witnessed this throughout this paper. God has not slumbered nor slept. The persistent presence of racism demands that the people with a conscious for freedom must continue to stand up and fight for freedom. Resistance to government invasion and hostility in

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people’s lives must be preserved as a radical method of speech and can be used to totally dismantle systems and transform conditions.

Although resistance can be applied randomly and solely, it can also be applied uniformly with leadership. One must ask themselves the question of how did the divide between the old guard which is made up of mostly preachers and religious activists become so divided (morally and spiritually) and estranged from the new generation of social activists? Although both generations seem to claim King as their paradigm, there seems to be deep divisions and resentment in both philosophy and tactics. Cornel West suggests that there was and is a breakdown in family and communal relations over decades in the African American community.

One reason quality leadership is on the wane in black America is the gross deterioration of personal, familial and communal relations among African-Americans. These relations—though always fragile and difficult to sustain—constitute a crucial basis for the development of a collective and critical consciousness and moral commitment to and courageous engagement with causes beyond that of one’s self and family.155

The lack of religious and philosophical cohesion from generation to generation on social and political issues along with technological advances have led to a breakdown in leadership in the black community. Instead of fighting for the cause, many civil rights activists of today are fighting for the spotlight resulting in less follow up to condemn racial actions and a collective agreement to produce legislation and rid racist opponents. This is dangerous and must be ameliorated if true transformation is to take place and rid racism for good. We need a unified solution. One way that solution is being seen is in public resistance to issues of police misconduct and economic inequality. The young and the older generation are both seeking ways

155 Cornel West, Race Matters (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 36-37
to publicly disgrace a racist and unjust system. The problem is how do we bring these two resistance entities together to promote justice with a stronger hand to move from rhetoric and public outcry to tangible long lasting social transformation that comes with policy?

The biggest problem today with resistance from old and young is that it is not consistent. During slavery Frederick Douglas consistently confronted Lincoln about the dread of slavery until an Emancipation Proclamation was issued. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. protested and boycotted until judicial decisions and legislation were passed in favor of black people. Today’s crisis is the lack of consistency, no one is sacrificing enough time to stay on the wall until changes are made.

This is where reconciliation and resistance come together. One the ability to bring generations together the other the ability of both generations to tackle a racist system. There must be a coming together, with an understanding of the system as the enemy and not each other. And that each generation can come together with various leadership skills at the table to address ways to transform the hegemonic system.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have seen how virtue and morality impart themselves into human agents for the good of others. Socrates exemplified the good life by dying for principles that he believed in. When Christian ethics of justice, freedom, love and compassion are incorporated into the Christian soul, they are not only used for the purpose of individual salvation but social salvation as well. Social salvation is interested in condemning the system of oppression that damage people’s humanity, equal opportunity and God’s community. Social salvation changes the character of its agents from one of fear and reluctance to one of faith and boldness for the purpose of confronting an oppressive and unfair system. When God called Moses, Moses became a prophet interested in social salvation for the Israelite community. His soul took him from individual confrontation with an Egyptian to massive confrontation with a nation, a system that belittled the dignity of God’s humanity and needed to be dismantled for the freedom of the Israelites. The spirit that had been passed down to Moses is the spirit of social salvation that had also been passed down to Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas for the freeing of black people from institutional bondage during the “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Slavery” period which lasted from the middle of the seventeenth century to 1863. The success of Tubman and Douglas to challenge and ultimately end slavery was a result of their virtuous soul, vigilant spirit and divine mission as ordered by God. The continuation of social salvation and virtue becomes necessary to complete the mission and establish God’s presence for the purpose of a new social reality. Joshua continued the mission with the same spirit as Moses. Joshua is divinely appointed to lead the children of Israel into the new context which is about inclusion. God wants to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey which is a total departure from their contexts in Egypt and the wilderness. To succeed Joshua must lead them in breaking down walls
and challenging foes that are against their entrance to God’s promise. And Joshua does so with
great success and virtuousness.

Rosa Parks and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. continued the mission for black
advancement after slavery during the “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Institutional
Racism” period; particularly during the years of 1954-1969. Their souls are steeped with virtue
and prophesy. Rosa Parks sparks the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King sets it on
fire by breaking down walls of segregation in buses, public accommodations, and voting. African
Americans gain civil, equal and human rights. Gains that could have never been imagined during
slavery. A new social reality is established and new advances are made as a result of the virtuous
spirit and prophetic voice of two of God’s called agents.

After Moses and Joshua, Jesus steps on the scene as one ordained to continue the virtues
of freedom and inclusion with that of justice. The Israelites had made great strides but had been
set back. Jesus comes as a soul as well as social savior in their eyes to preach good news to the
poor and set the captives free. Many of the Israelites are healed and empowered by his presence.

During the “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Persistent Institutional Racism”
period from 1970 to 2016. African Americans see their hopes realized as a result of the Civil
Rights and Voting Rights Acts, the ultimate result is a black President of the United States of
America. A grand achievement from the days of slavery. However, even with a black President
the persistent presence of racism is still active: police shootings, segregation in public education,
high prison rates for African Americans and disproportionate wealth gaps leaving African
Americans way behind economically from white America. However, the problem is not racism
for the 21st Century, the problem is leadership. There seems to be no universal or unified
leadership emerging out of the context of persistent institutional racism in the spirit of Moses,
Joshua, Jesus, Harriet, Frederick, Rosa and King. The social activists are divided and there seems to be no real continuation of social salvation agents to pass the baton too; although the context begs for a leader. Moses had Joshua, Joshua had Jesus. Harriet had Rosa and Frederick had King, but who does King have?

The black church and prophetic leadership have been handicapped and silent for decades. The relevance of black church leadership seems to have dissipated in the areas of social justice and confrontation of political powers of oppression since the days of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. According to Rev. Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson in recounting Martin Luther King’s legacy on the fiftieth anniversary of his assassination, “The [black] church has been disengaged. Churches that have social consciousness are pushed by this anniversary into a place of reflecting on how far we have come or not come, and have we abandoned what he gave his life for?”

Justice wise the black church is in crisis and most of it is due to the fact that many black church leaders will not align sincerely with other social justice advocates unless the black church is at the forefront of movements against racism. Too many black church leaders are disillusioned at the prospect of nostalgic revelations of transforming the nation single handedly as King did during his day. Many of the newer leaders today have taken the lead in addressing and protesting racial discrimination and have done so with and without the presence of black religious leaders causing tension between the two. If black church leaders want to get back in the forefront of the movement they must also learn to come from behind and allow the current stream of social justice advocates to lead the way. Humility is a virtue necessary for healing and advancement as recorded in 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If my people will humble themselves and pray…then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land.

156 John Eligon, Where Today’s Black Church Leaders Stand of Activism, New York Times April 3, 2018
Secondly, the ideals of Moses as liberator is not proclaimed by black church leaders today as they confront social justice issues. Moses is not as relevant in discussion or oration as he was during Slavery or the Civil Rights Movement. The issue of racism in connection with police misconduct is often spoken of for the purpose of confronting injustice but without the calling of Moses. Many religious leaders have sought to address issues of inequality and racism without referring biblically to the likes of Joshua and Jesus. In other words, black religious leaders have worn the cloth and kept the title but have not referenced the Bible. This could be due to the younger generation of clergy that are more interested in speaking the language of the people outside the church, hoping that speaking the language of the people will bring them into the church. Young clergy do not want to seem too holy or religious that they cannot reach those outside the church. Also, many black church leaders have restricted their association with Rev. Martin Luther King to his holiday or death day. There are church services, breakfasts, and dinners but no consistent social justice activism that would mimic King in philosophy and strategy for a continuous attack on racism and poverty.

Finally, Moses and Joshua were concerned with government oppression and were ordained by God to carry out a particular prophetic mission on behalf of the Israelite community. Jesus, although confrontational with government officials and died as a result of it, was also interested in other acts of social welfare; such as feeding the hungry, assisting the elderly, helping the blind and deaf, and uplifting families. Jesus also valued independent ways of humans uplifting themselves. This view of Jesus has caused many black church leaders to look at other forms of social activism that would qualify for transforming the lives of the poor, heavy burdened, and marginalized which have mostly been seen in the African American community. If we go back to Rev. Joseph Jackson, Marcus Garvey, and Elijah Muhammad all of them would
agree that there were other ways to help black people and it did not depend entirely upon the government. Bishop Charles E. Blake who is the pastor of the West Angeles Church of God in Christ with over 25,000 members asserts that black people need “to take charge of our destiny.” Although Bishop Blake is not against rallies and protests he sees beyond the traditional movements of social justice advocates and looks to the future of black advancement. Much of these advancements can be found with housing development, counselling to homeless and ex-convicts, and assistance with black entrepreneurship. Because of Jesus, justice can be seen in so many lights and the lights can shine on the black clergy to transform the condition of the black community to bring them into a new social reality.

The moral strand of righteousness remains consistent throughout the history of oppression for Black people in America. God has allowed leadership to emerge to tackle racism in every context. Although context differs so does leadership and the leadership has been poignant for the times. When we look at slavery, the leadership that emerged with Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas was consistent and on point for the times in order to tackle an unjust system and the success of the freedom fighters were a testimony to God’s glory. The same is true during the Civil Rights Era. Rosa Parks birthed the movement and the prophetic voice of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King came crying out to challenge segregation, discrimination, and outright racism in public facilities and voting. The success shows that God raised up a servant, a prophetic activist for the time to transform undesirable and inhumane conditions.

Today although the light is dim with the absence of black clergy leadership leading the movement against racism, it is not dark. The light shines on the moral conscious of people that are not only religious but in search of justice. Moses started out as a moral man disturbed by a violent act upon an Israelite. His disturbance led him to action and his action led him to a higher
calling and divine indwelling that took him from virtuous character to prophetic leader. Some may ask “Where is the Moses of today?” Well the Mosses are those with a virtuous appetite for freedom and justice whether they are clergy or not, God can still use them to start a revolution. Joshua came with a calling to lead the people to the promise land, he did not hesitate and used his military tactics and uncompromising leadership to knock down walls and break down doors for access to the promise land.

I believe the light will shine again on clergy, but the situation will have to get dark enough where the nation not only needs a moral cry but a prophetic voice, one ordained by God to tackle the evils of oppression and tyrannical leadership. As we speak, there is a new sheriff in town, a new election has taken place, Donald Trump, billionaire, republican, racist, misogynistic, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim is the President and the Congress is controlled by Republicans. In the past, this meant disaster for black progress, but it also meant the cultivation and the emergence of prophetic leadership, resistance, and activism at its best. The “tyrant” that John Calvin refers to has risen but so should moral leadership. Since the tyrant has arisen God’s people who love justice must rise higher to take on a foe that seeks to further turn back advantages for the black communities and people in general. God’s people must join with others in their struggle for justice and equality which includes: women, immigrants and gays. Leadership may not emanate as it did in the past, with one man or one woman guiding the lost, it may be multiple methods of leadership that arise out of the context of the current generation and older generation to combat the current crisis. It may be solely by social media means or pop up marches to bring attention to the issues. Whatever the method the focus must be clear: We are under attack, our rights, our souls, our black lives.


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