# THE PAIN AND HOPE OF MY PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

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America's sins – racism, oppression, and white supremacy – are the foundations upon which this country is built. Although this country proclaims "liberty and justice for all," liberty and justice exists for the privileged few. For those who are deemed as the "other," they are simply obscure precepts, existing in policy and rhetoric only, not in practice.

Beginning with the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade and persisting to this day, black people in America must continually struggle against personal, structural and institutional racism that clearly exists to systemically and systematically subjugate, oppress and in many cases eliminate people of African descent. These sins have been the cause of much pain, misery and strife in the black community leading to our collective, conscious, passive han. This han has in turn become so imbued in the psyche of the black community that it in turn has caused us to inflict further pain and suffering upon ourselves. These self-inflicted oppressions then cause further han, which then causes additional self-inflicted oppressions, until we find ourselves caught up in a vicious cycle of pain, which begins with the sins of America.

While working to fight against the injustices that exist in this country, it is imperative that blacks work towards healing the han within the black community as well,

from both a cultural and spiritual perspective.  It is in this way that we will begin to disrupt the cycles of pain and stand in unity, rebuild hope, and live into our destiny as children of God.

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

The horrific, gut-wrenching screams of agony as villages are plundered and Africans are massacred, abducted and chained like animals. The incessant weeping of tortured souls forced to travel on slave ships down the Middle Passage and into the New World. The tight, enclosed spaces saturated with the revolting odors of blood, urine, feces, filth, disease and rotting corpses. The surging blue waters teeming with black bodies who chose to jump to their death rather than be enslaved. The crack of the whip as soft, tender skin is violently ripped to shreds, sadistically pried away from weary, aching bones. The disfiguring scars left behind by the open, festering wounds of shame and humiliation. The piercing cries of innocent children being mercilessly torn from their mother's loving arms. The unrelenting savagery as girls and women are brutally raped and ravaged. The vicious slaughtering of boys and men being maliciously lynched and quartered. The smell of burning flesh as human beings are branded like cattle with searing, hot irons. The dehumanization of shackled hands, feet and necks as enslaved Africans are proudly displayed on the slave holder's auction blocks. The wicked schemes deliberately designed to rip families apart, to turn slave against slave, to undermine the human intellect and to destroy the human spirit. The eternal suffering caused by a cavernous abyss of agony, sorrow and despair, deep within their souls. The subjugation. The degradation. The anguish. The misery. The

insufferable pain of broken backs, broken hearts, and broken spirits. This is the pain of my people. And this is only the beginning…

American history reeks of the foul stench of violence, bloodshed, tyranny, oppression and abuse. The various oppressions committed against people of African descent all date back to slavery, which laid the foundation for the discrimination and injustices that persist in American society to this day. Although Africans have been freed from slavery for approximately 150 years, the oppressions that we continue to struggle against, such as economic, political, religious, and social oppressions, have historically been based on both race and class (and in many cases gender), and have been the result of racism, white supremacy and white privilege. This reality has been thoroughly examined by numerous scholars, and has been understood to subsist in the various structures and systems around which our country is organized. In an article entitled "Racism" found in the text *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, authors Bell, Castaneda and Zuniga explain that institutionalized racism did not end with the Civil Rights Movement, and although significant progress has been made since the abolition of slavery and legalized segregation, racist practices still flourish in this country, giving rise to economic, political and social disparities. These authors explicate further on the realities of racism:

> While recent advances offer hope, we cannot relax our efforts to push for change in a system that has institutionally embedded racism in all areas of social life, be it immigration, job opportunities, health-care practices, housing, or education. People of color continue to be disproportionately poor, unemployed, underemployed, segregated in decaying communities, on reservations, incarcerated at staggeringly disproportionate rates, and psychologically and physically threatened by stereotyping, bigotry, and hate crimes. Racism impacts the quality of all our lives because it resides within all significant structures of society. (Bell, et al. 63)

This has led to the subjugation and domination of African peoples over the course of many centuries. People of African descent have existed in a society where they were not even legally or socially considered to be human, but simply a piece of property, chattel, to be used and abused for the benefit and profit of others. For generation after generation, people of the African Diaspora, not just African Americans but those who are legally and racially defined as black, have suffered a myriad of devastating effects that have been passed on throughout our history as a culture of people. This infernal suffering that is infused into the lives of black people in this country, which began on another continent, is referred to as the Maafa in the black community. According to Iva Carruthers, professor of sociology:

> The TransAtlantic Slave Trade is truly one of the greatest violations of God's plan for justice and righteousness among His people. This triangular trade in humanity resulted in the horrible journey of captured Africans from Africa to Europe and the Americas. The journey across the Atlantic was referred to as the Middle Passage. The protracted trade, the horrors of forced labor and destruction of family and community over 400 years are referred to as the Maafa. (Caruthers 3)

While the Maafa encompasses the horrors of enslaved Africans across the Middle passage and throughout the centuries of bondage that followed, there is an additional concept utilized by another oppressed group of people to express the horrors of multiple oppressions that have existed within their culture as well. This is the Asian (particularly Korean) concept of han. According to Korean liberation theologian Andrew Sung Park, han "describes the depths of human suffering," and it is "the abysmal experience of pain" (Park 15). It is "the collapsed pain of the heart due to psychosomatic, interpersonal, social, political, economic, and cultural oppression and repression. The reality of han is the emotional, rational, and physical suffering of pain rooted in the anguish of a victim"

(Park 16-17). This concept is one that is extremely significant because it is one that is deeply rooted in the suffering of a culture of people who have also been victimized by various oppressions, and although this is an Asian concept, Park proposes that it has the ability to traverse the cultural divide and speak to all people who have been victims of oppression. I believe this to be true, and suggest that it is especially poignant to the struggles of people of African descent. Black people in this country may not refer to our suffering as han, but we know han. Similar to the concept of Maafa, han has the ability to speak to our hearts. We feel the pain of han. We live the pain of han. Whereas Maafa centers more around the Middle Passage and the horrors of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade System and forced labor, han centers on deep suffering, both personal and collective, that go even further beyond systems of forced labor. It describes all pain felt by anyone who has been hurt by another, and this includes any oppressed group of people. This is what makes it very relevant to the suffering of black people in this country, in addition to Maafa. And similarly to Park's theory in the Korean context regarding Koreans being born into han as opposed to sin, blacks in America are also not born into sin, we are born into han.

As previously stated, the han of black Americans stems from the endemic sins of this country – racism, oppression, and white supremacy – which were the root cause of the enslavement of Africans hundreds of years ago. And although it began with our subjugation as slaves, it did not end with the abolition of slavery. Racism and white supremacy continue to pervade every facet of this country, and I wish to suggest that these sins are the cause of the deep pain of the han that continuously permeates the very essence of black culture and the black spirit. Borrowing heavily from this Asian concept

of han as described by Park, I propose that it is these transgressions that have been inflicted upon us that are the root cause of our han. Additionally, it is this collective han that has become so deeply embedded in the psyche of black Americans that even the han itself had led to the unfortunate, but perhaps foreseeable, result in which black people may then become the victims of their own self-inflicted oppression, including their own self hatred. This internalized oppression then leads to further suffering, or self-derived han, which leads to even further self-inflicted oppression, until it becomes a vicious, unrelenting, self-sustaining cycle of pain, which all began with the sins of this country (see Figure 1).

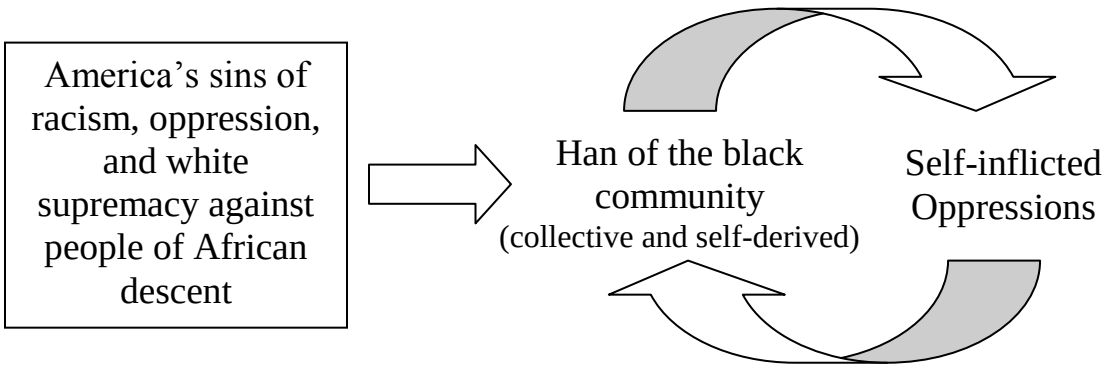


Figure 1. Cycle of Pain. America's sins leading to the cycle of collective han, self-inflicted oppressions and self-derived han of the black community

Although final resolution of the han of the black community will ultimately never be possible devoid of the complete eradication of the systemic and systematic oppressions committed against us, there are various approaches that we may appropriate ourselves in order to disrupt the cycles of our han and self-inflicted oppressions. Without the desire and the means with which to do so, we are in danger of continuing on a downward spiral to our own cultural and spiritual hell. To that end, in addition to the

Cycle of Pain depicted in Figure 1, I also propose a multi-layered approach which members of the black community may adopt in an attempt to disrupt the cycle, in order to work towards healing, from both a cultural and a spiritual perspective. By cultural I mean as a united community of black people with a common heritage and common struggle. By spiritual I mean from a religious or theological perspective, in this case specifically from a Christian theological perspective (although I fully recognize that other spiritual and theological perspectives may be equally valid). I believe that for a community of people that has been so deeply wounded in mind, body and soul by its own country, and then to a certain degree by its own people, it is not only black culture that must be healed, but the black spirit as well, i.e. the fullness of our humanity, and it is in this way that we will be able to bring ourselves and our community back to wholeness.

I will review and discuss a number of the various oppressions committed against the black community that have previously been examined by scholars, historians and theologians, and the ways in which these oppressions have contributed to our han, however, I believe it is also imperative that we perform a thorough self-examination to understand our han and the manner in which we continually oppress ourselves as a result of our woundedness. This is a very crucial step required to begin the process of disrupting the cycles of pain. Next, I borrow again from Park in proposing a few solutions that he discusses for the Korean culture in the positive unraveling of han that I believe may also be applied to black culture, in addition to the implementation of additional cultural solutions that are very specific to the black community. Lastly, to the black Christian community, I strongly advocate the application of black liberation and womanist theologies, to give a spiritual dimension to the solution. These theologies will

be supplemented with this new understanding of the concept of collective han in the black community and the way in which our han leads to our self-inflicted oppressions and self-derived han. I propose both cultural and spiritual solutions because cultural solutions do not fully speak to the spirit and spiritual solutions do not fully speak to the entire culture. However, taken together, I believe that members of the black community will feel empowered to continue to make a difference in their lives and in their community, whereupon we may continue to progress as a people and heal our han-ridden hearts.

I propose this multi-layered approach because I understand this to be a particularly complex problem that requires a thorough examination of the problems and solutions, and I do not believe that any element of this taken alone has the ability to fully address the issues at hand. It is for this reason that I am attempting to bring together all of these concepts in a novel way that creates the connection between all of them, in order to bring a richer, fuller understanding to the problems at hand, problems which began at slavery and have caused my people immense misery and strife, but have in turn become so infused in our collective subconscious that we have unknowingly adopted the domineering behaviors of our oppressor and inflict them upon ourselves. In summary this thesis will illustrate the inter-relatedness between all of these concepts and make the connection between the sins of this country, the han of the black community, our self-inflicted oppressions, our self-derived han, and the ways in which we may disrupt these cycles of pain.

My purpose in all of this is not to simply condemn white people for slavery and oppression, blaming them for all of the problems of the black community. Nor is it to condemn black people for the self-inflicted oppressions and self hatred that we have

developed over the course of time, as this has the potential to relegate us to the status of mere victims who are unable to overcome the reality of our circumstances. My purpose, and my hope, is that we may all take a critical look at ourselves and fully acknowledge the role that each of us has played and continues to play in the dysfunctions of our society. Although I am unable to elucidate the full breadth and depth of the myriad of problems and solutions within the scope of this thesis, I am prayerful that this will be an important contribution to the ongoing discussions, and that it will provide a modicum of hope, a spirit of kinship, and a sense of freedom to those whom this is destined to reach. We will never be completely free until we choose to be completely free, and that will require both blacks and whites to make a conscious effort to no longer embody the face of the oppressor.

## Chapter 2

## THE PANDEMIC SINS OF A "GREAT" NATION

People of African descent have suffered in the United States since its inception, as a consequence of racial discrimination. This has led to a multitude of institutional and structural oppressions (or pandemic sins) that have origins dating back to slavery. It is the destructive dimensions of these systems that are the root cause of the han of the black community and have led further to our self-inflicted oppressions and self-derived han. The greatest of these dates back to the days of colonial America, when the so-called founders of the New World made the conscious decision to become involved in the business of human trafficking. This was initiated with the very first sin – separating us

from Africa when our ancestors were enslaved, which was purposely designed to create division amongst us, and to create a feeling of abandonment, rejection, and hopelessness.

Slaves were separated from their mother land, separated from their native language, and separated from their native religion forever. Due to our separation from Africa, African Americans are orphans in this country. We were children abducted from our mother Africa so long ago that we are no longer remembered by her. Our mother no longer sees her resemblance to us, nor us to her. She does not recognize our voice. She cannot remember our sweet smell. Her weeping for her children has endured for so long that she is completely numb, unable to feel even her own pain. As orphans abducted and transported to a foreign land, we have resided with our captors for most of our lives and have been unloved, unwanted and abused. Our captors stripped us of our identity and removed any recognizable characteristics that resemble our mother, so much so that even if we were standing directly in front of her, she would no longer recognize us. Many of us do not even recall that we had a mother, while others of us believe the lie that our mother no longer loved or wanted us and willingly gave us away. The tears we cry and the longing of our hearts are no longer for the mother whom we scarcely remember, but for the love and acceptance of the one who captured us and brought us to a foreign land, the one who stands guard over us day and night, the one whom we depend on for scraps of clothing and bits of food, the one who sneaks into our room and molests us in the middle of the night, the one who told us that we belong to them now and must follow their rules or be destroyed physically, mentally and spiritually, the one who goes by the name America.

This metaphor of orphanage has deep psychological significance to the question of identity and memory and is similarly discussed by historian John Henrik Clarke in his book entitled *Christopher Columbus and the Afrikan Holocaust: Slavery and the Rise of European Capitalism.* Clarke makes the following statement:

> But with the bringing of the Africans to the New World, every effort was made to destroy his memory of having ever been part of a free and intelligent people. The greatest destroyer of African culture, the greatest exploiter of the African, was the plantation system of the New World. The African was transformed into something called a Negro. He was demeaned. This is the thing that is uniquely tragic about the African slave system. Of all the slave systems in the world, no other dehumanized the slave more than that started by the Europeans in the fifteenth century. Using the church as a rationale, they began to set up myths that nearly always read the African out of human history, beginning with the classification of the African as a lesser being. The Catholic Church's justification for slavery was that the African was being brought under the guidance of Christendom and that he would eventually receive its blessings. The rationale was that slavery was a blessing to the African. (Clarke 82-83)

This memory loss caused by our separation from Africa has caused an identity crisis in both Africans and African Americans. This is due to the fact that while many Africans believe the lie that African Americans are lazy, shiftless, criminals, many African Americans believe the lie that Africans are savage heathens who have contributed nothing to human history. The consequences of these horrible and deceitful fabrications still reverberate throughout both African and African American cultures to this day.

Looking further at some additional systems of oppression will illustrate the ways in which the dreadful effects of each of these evils have permeated our history as a culture of people. These are the pandemic sins of a "great" nation, a nation that is duplicitous in nature, founded on the one hand as a nation that proclaims a life of freedom, equality, liberty and justice for all. However, on the other hand, founded upon

the hegemonic principles of hatred, violence and patriarchy that subsist in every walk of life and work to marginalize, disenfranchise, and discriminate against those who are in vulnerable positions, those who have been designated by American society as the "other." For people of African descent, we are deemed as the "other" because we are legally defined in terms of race, so as to advantage some people over others. This results in the dominant race having the advantage of enjoying the liberty and justice, while the "other" races have the disadvantage of being victimized by the violence and hatred. This is further explained by Bell, et al., who describe the fact that race is a sociopolitical construct, not a biological one, that was created to reinforce social and institutional norms and practices. This in turn has led to racism, which is based on these norms and practices to create advantages for people whom the government legally defines as white, and disadvantages for those whom are legally defined as non-white. This includes all people who are defined as black, and we must not only deal with other people's personal racism, but also with the institutionalized racism that has become systemic and systematic in a society that claims to be "post-racial."

Racist practices and policies thrive in areas of politics and the government, the justice system, big business, the welfare system, the educational system, religion, healthcare, the food industry, law enforcement, immigration laws, the prison industrial complex, the national economic structure, banking institutions, housing and real estate, the military, the entertainment industry, news & media, environmental and ecological systems, in the indoctrination of whites to make them believe that their position of "privilege" is in jeopardy because of people of color, and in the manipulation of non-whites to make them turn their backs on each other in their quest for white "approval."

These ills are both covert and overt, and these systems have been powerfully entrenched into American society and manipulated in order to keep the cycles of oppression, inequality, marginalization, stereotyping, and injustice in constant and intense motion. As Bell, et al. state, "white supremacy and racism rationalize inequality (as natural and given) and homogenize experience by compressing social diversity into binaries and dividing racialized groups into artificial hierarchies" (Bell, et al. 62). These oppressions are brutal forms of violence against marginalized people, some more extreme than others, because they exist in order to create inequalities and inequities, and each has the ability to cause overwhelming and irreversible damage to the livelihood of the people who are its targeted victims.

**Slavery and Post Slavery**

In order to continue the discussion on the sins of America, which will subsequently lead into the discussion on the han of the black community, we must also take a look at the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade (TAST) and the time period immediately following the abolition of slavery. As is well known, the TAST is clearly documented to have begun centuries ago on the continent of Africa. While slavery is known to have already been taking place at that time in other countries, including West Africa, according to historians it was a much more humane system of slavery than that which was implemented in the United States. However, as historians begin the discussion on the European involvement in the TAST, this is where historical scholarship begins to diverge. There are many historians who make the claim that contrary to what has been previously declared as accurate historical information regarding the TAST, and the way

in which Europeans acquired the Africans they were to later enslave, black Africans themselves kidnapped, enslaved and sold the vast majority of African people whom the Europeans bought and brought into this country. There are many other historians who maintain that this point of view on the TAST is false and misleading, and a gross misinterpretation and misrepresentation of historical data that also completely and falsely exonerates Europeans for their role and responsibility in the slave trade. This is a point of intense debate among historians, and a point of passionate concern for most Africans and African Americans. Therefore, a few key professors and historians from both sides of the issue will be briefly discussed.

As demonstrated in the following excerpt from Clarke's book, this point of contention is not a new one, but has existed among historians and scholars for a number of years. He explains:

> The African slave period is best known to us because it is the best-documented. However, these documents are often confusing because they were created by people who were trying to justify the slave trade. Most people, especially Europeans who created most of the documents on slave trade, write about the subject with the intent to make the victim of slavery feel guilty and to vindicate the perpetrators of the slave trade.
>
> There is probably more dishonesty related to the interpretation of this subject than any other subject known to man. The African slave trade, like African history, is often written about but rarely understood. This misunderstanding probably grows out of the fact that we nearly always start the study of the African slave trade in the wrong place. The germ, the motive, the rationale for the African slave trade started in the minds of the Europeans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The slave trade could not have started at all had there been no market for it. The slave trade started when the Europeans began to expand out into the broader world; the market was created by Europeans for European reasons. (Clarke 57-58)

Clarke then goes on to explain the way in which racism became infiltrated into the slave trade, thus leading to the exploitation and enslavement of Africans by Europeans:

> The European, coming from a society where nature was rather stingy and where he had to compete with his brother for his breakfast, his land, and his woman, had acquired a competitive nature that the African could not deal with. In order to justify the destruction of these African societies, a monster that still haunts our lives was created. This monster was racism. The slave trade and the colonial system that followed are the parents of this catastrophe. The Europeans, mainly the Portuguese, who came to the west coast of Africa in the fifteenth century, were not at first looking for slaves. The search for gold and other treasures lured them to Africa. They did not have to fight their way into the continent they came as guests and were treated as guests. Then they grew strong, decided to be conquerors, and turned on their hosts…
>
> Fifty years later, when they wanted to justify the slave trade they started the myths about savage Africa, with no organized societies, no cities, even no knowledge of the wheel. The European did not enter Africa to bring civilization. In fact, no nation ever invaded another nation for any reason other than to exploit that nation for its own reasons. (Clarke 58-59)

One professor and literary critic who opposes this position is Henry Louis Gates, who has produced more than one documentary that proclaims the contrary. Because of this he is currently under fire for his role in this controversial matter because he is one of the main proponents of the perspective which supports the idea that it was black Africans who sold other black Africans to the Europeans in the TAST. He has been accused of perpetuating racist propaganda against his own people, African people, the descendants of all African Americans. In his documentary film, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*, Gates explores the history of Africans and African Americans from slavery through modern times. In episode one, he supports the claim that historical data shows that it was black Africans who sold other black Africans into the European slave

trade. He discusses the ways in which the acquisition of slaves was essential to the acquisition of wealth. He goes on to explain that by the time the first slave arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, slavery had already been ongoing in Brazil, Mexico and the Caribbean, and because it was the free labor of these African slaves that brought wealth to the Portuguese and the Spanish, the British desired to employ these same methods as a means for acquiring their own wealth, which meant the pursuit of African slaves. What Gates articulates next is the point at which his claims differ. He states:

> Sierra Leone was once a major hub for the slave trade. More than 300,000 people were taken from here and shipped to the New World in bondage. But the first slave traders in this place weren't Europeans, they were other black Africans. Africans practiced slavery long before they ever saw a white person. All across this continent, slaves were part of a system based not on race, but on ethnic difference and brute power; a system involving an enormous array of monarchs, merchants and mercenaries. (*The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* episode 1)

Gates continues:

> Though some find it difficult to face, the crucial role of Africans in the slave trade is now well documented. Historians estimate that the overwhelming majority of the slaves shipped to the New World were captured and sold by African kingdoms. (*The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* episode 1)

In an African Studies Association publication entitled *The Atlantic Slave Trade Was Not a "Black-on-Black" Holocaust,* African historian Lansine Kaba takes great offense to the claims made by Gates, who apparently maintains the identical stance in another documentary entitled *Wonders of the African World.* Kaba explains that this documentary caused an uproar among those viewers who are already well informed about the history of the slave trade in Africa. He calls Gates' documentary "challenging and disturbing," as well as "a reinvention of the past." Kaba declares:

> The term "slave kingdoms" that Gates uses in referring to part of the west coast of Africa reflects some misapprehensions about these societies and ignores the complexity of the African external trade. Despite the size of the slave population in Ashanti, Dahomey, and other states, free-labor farming rather than slavery was the basis of the economy. The engagement of West Africans in the European-controlled slave trade was defensive rather than offensive. As the presence of the gun-carrying merchants became frequent and pervasive on the shores, the polities were seriously threatened. Local rulers had to accommodate the Europeans and develop trading relationships with them in order to ensure the security of their states. Ashanti and other kingdoms entered the slave trade not in order to exploit or victimize other Africans, but to survive the onslaught of European firearms. (Kaba 9)

Kaba goes on to describe the ways in which the slave trade "disrupted and bled" Africa and the ways in which arguments made by Gates have "armed black people's adversaries with arguments that can be used fallaciously to defend the notion of white innocence (or mere parity with African co-culprits). He has thereby damaged the very movements for pan-Africanism and reparations that he claims to support" (Kaba 9-10).

While many scholars and historians agree with Gates' claims, many others vehemently disagree with his claims based on their own comprehensive research of the historical data that exists. However, even with these conflicting reports regarding which civilization of people initially enslaved the Africans who were brought to this country, Africans or Europeans, they all appear to agree on two very important points: 1) chattel slavery in this country was based purely on race, and 2) the European innovation of slavery was much crueler and resulted in the dehumanization of an entire race of people here in America. Prior historians and professors, such as John Henrik Clarke, laid the groundwork for understanding this difference between the slave system that did occur in Africa, and the slave system that was implemented by the Europeans. He states:

> The fact that slavery existed in West Africa prior to contact with Europeans is often used to excuse the European slave trade. The two

> systems had few similarities. The tragic and distinguishing feature of the slave trade that was introduced by the European was that it totally dehumanized the slave. This dehumanization continued in many ways throughout the slavery period and well into the colonial era. This crucial act was supported by a rationale that was created in part by the Christian church and later extended by the writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The myth of a people with no history and culture comes out of this period. (Clarke 52-53)

Clarke explains the dehumanization aspect of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade as well. He states:

> Slavery in ancient societies was appreciably different from the type of slavery that was introduced into Africa by the Europeans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In most ancient societies the slave was held in servitude for a limited time, for specific reasons, and, in most cases, the slaves were captured in local wars. Skin color was not a factor as to whether a person did or did not become a slave and, in most cases, the slave had some rights that the master had to respect. In ancient Egypt, Kush, Greece and early Rome there were clearly defined codes of conduct governing the relationship between the slaves and their masters. Some of the earliest of these codes are recorded in the laws of Moses. (Clarke 51)

Gates' documentary *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* also supports these arguments. In episode one he states that "…Africans did not invent slavery, it existed everywhere, dating back to the most ancient civilizations. Nor did Africans envision slavery as something that would be passed on from one generation to the next, something based exclusively on race. That was a European innovation." He goes on to explain the ways in which this tyranny and subjugation became worse as cotton planters began benefitting financially from the great demand for cotton, which produced a great demand for slave labor. This meant an increase in slave labor to nearly 4 million people of African descent by the outbreak of the Civil War, whereby a large portion of the increase was due to forced breeding.

Chattel slavery was just the beginning of the subjugation that blacks have had to endure throughout the history of this country and it was this transgression that laid the foundation for the various forms of racism and oppression that blacks still endure to this day. In the years that followed the abolition of slavery, forced labor continued for blacks, however, these newer forms of slavery were operated more covertly under several other systems throughout the south. The PBS documentary entitled *Slavery by Another Name* addresses three of these alternate forms of forced labor, or involuntary servitude, that took place after the Civil War known as convict leasing, debt peonage, and sharecropping. According to the documentary, by the 1890's white voters had reversed many of the civil rights gains made during the Reconstruction. New laws were put into place that effectively ended the Reconstruction and specifically targeted blacks in the south. These laws not only restricted the livelihood of blacks, but essentially criminalized black life, with the most damaging of these new laws being the vagrancy statutes, put into place to criminalize anyone in any southern state who could not prove at any given moment that they were employed. Black men were targeted, arrested, thrown in jail, and subsequently became part of the new slave system known as "convict leasing."

The documentary goes on to explain the ways in which convict leasing thrived in the south. This occurred when southern states would place prisoners with industries that would bear the cost of guarding and housing them in exchange for their labor (their forced labor that is). Then states also began to charge fees, renting out prisoners to companies by the month. This became the new form of economic development in the south and blacks would be arrested for vagrancy or some other petty crime and would be

sent to these labor camps. These bogus arrests would peak in numbers at times that consistently coincided with cotton picking season. Blacks were being arrested at such alarming rates that this helped cement the image in society of blacks as criminals, to the degree that it became seen as something that was inherent.

Additional forms of forced labor began emerging that also targeted blacks outside of the convict leasing system. Debt peonage (also known as debt slavery) occurred throughout the south with many thousands of blacks tied to white employers through various forms of debt. The system was purposely designed so that blacks could never pay off their debt, would continually remain in debt, and would be forced to enter into the hard labor system. This system trapped thousands of blacks into debt slavery. Another form of slavery that was implemented for blacks after the abolition of chattel slavery was sharecropping. A sharecropper would agree to work for a percentage of the proceeds from the sale of their crop. When sharecroppers had to take out loans in order to run their business and support themselves financially, they would be charged 50% – 90% interest, a rate which they were guaranteed to never be able to pay off. This kept them indebted sometimes for the rest of their lives. The system of debt slavery is akin to the predatory lending practices that economic institutions engage in today. In the many years that followed the Civil War, it is estimated that as many as 800,000 blacks had faced the south's corrupt system of justice and huge numbers of them were forced into involuntary servitude, or slavery by another name. The documentary describes these forms of forced labor as being worse than slavery itself.

**Social Oppression**

In order to make sense of the world we live in, we must assign value and meaning to it. We assign meaning to everything that we encounter in our everyday lives, such as people, places, objects, events, nature, and ideas. These various meanings that we've assigned *to* our world will eventually lead us to develop belief systems *about* our world and everything in it. Once our individual beliefs find commonality and consistency with another individual's beliefs, then with a group of beliefs, this will ultimately lead us to cultivate shared cultural or societal norms and value systems that will include more sophisticated and advanced concepts such as our beliefs about humanity, creation, and the divine. When these concepts are organized around people in our society we begin creating ideas and beliefs about such things as race, gender, ethnicity, class, etc. Sociologist Floya Anthias states that "gender, ethnicity, 'race' and class relate to social ontologies, that is to conceptions about different realms in the world or ways the world is organized. These act like maps, point to where sets of relations are situated, manifested in categories and materialized in concrete relations" (Anthias, 6).

As we begin to place more value on one set of ideals, we may in turn begin to devalue others. The same is true when these concepts are organized around people. It is in this way that we begin to develop paradigms, or constructs, within which we understand and relate to people in our society. We begin creating ideas and beliefs about such things as race, gender, ethnicity, class, ability, etc. and this eventually leads us to a system in which we label and categorize people. As Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey state in an article entitled "Identities and Social Locations: Who Am I? Who Are My People?" in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice,* "It is at the meso level – at

school, in the workplace, or on the street – that people most frequently ask 'Who are you?' or 'Where are you from?' in an attempt to categorize us and determine their relationship to us" (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 10).

When this categorization of people is carried out by a majority group of people in such a way as to purposely create an advantage for themselves and a disadvantage for everyone else, they are then in a position to declare themselves to be the standard by which everyone else is to be measured. This has the ability to lead to both the conscious and the unconscious development of injustices, marginalizations and stereotypes against the people whom this majority group has deemed as the "other." Kirk and Okazawa-Rey discuss this even further. They explain the ways in which social categories established and maintained a particular type of social order whereby the meaning and significance of these categories "were often imputed to justify the conquest, colonization, domination and exploitation of entire groups of people, and although the specifics may have changed over time, this system of categorizing and classifying remains intact" (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 11). In terms of identifying the racial identity of those who are marginalized by society, these categorizations have been destructive, hurtful and dehumanizing and have justified social inequities against blacks and other ethnic groups while at the same time devaluing and reducing us to the status of "second class citizens."

Beyond individual identity, there is national identity. Since its inception, this country has come to be known as the land of the free. However, we must ask ourselves exactly what that means, because even though it may be the land of the free, that measure of freedom is not identical for everyone. In addition, there exists a huge disparity between freedom and equality. People in American society persistently make the claim

that because slavery has been abolished and black people are free (which is only freedom from chattel slavery), it means that we are also equal and have equal opportunities to succeed in life. These self preservationist attitudes and perpetual states of hypocrisy and denial lead the people who benefit from racism to maintain the assertion that racism is no longer problematic in this country, and that all black people need to do is "get over it" and "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." This gets perpetuated throughout American culture and is used as a weapon to further humiliate and demoralize black people into believing that we are somehow inferior. Meanwhile the truth is that it is because of the systemic and systematic hegemonic principles and practices that are in perpetual motion for the purpose of maintaining structures of inequality by intentionally privileging one group and discriminating against all others. This reality, which is part of our everyday lived experience as people of African descent, has the power to have a near crippling affect on the ability of marginalized people to attain upward mobility.

The horrific reality of slavery and its lasting effects on this country and on the lives of black people cannot be trivialized by being denied or denigrated. Many would like to simply dismiss or diminish our struggle, consigning it to the status of "ancient history" when the reality is that this history is the very foundation upon which our country is built. Blacks were enslaved for hundreds of years longer than we have been free, and we have continually been victimized by racism and oppression in the 150 years since that time. While it is true that we are now free from chattel slavery, freedom from slavery is not synonymous with equality. Blacks in America have never been equal. Following the abolition of slavery and the end of the Reconstruction era, racism in this country took on a new form of wickedness with the lynching of black people. Social

activist Reverdy Ransom summarized the frame of mind of those who committed such cruelty and violence against black people with the following statement:

> Much of the persecution and brutality visited upon members of the negro race in America is justified by the plea that it is necessary in order to protect the homes of white men and chastity of their women; the highest ambition of the negro, it is claimed, is to achieve social equality with the whites, therefore, he may be beaten, hung, shot and burned at the stake, in the name of the preservation of social purity. (Ransom 344)

In his book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* professor and theologian James Cone explains that lynching developed primarily as "mob violence and torture directed against blacks" which began not long after the Civil War ended. It was the implementation of the Reconstruction that provided the fast and furious momentum to the violence of lynching because black men were being granted the preliminary rights to participate in the social, political and economic systems of this country (Cone 4).

Lynching continued in the south well into the Jim Crow era, when the fight for equality intensified with the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed the essentiality of equality in an essay written for the journal *Christian Century*. He states:

> After his emancipation in 1863, the Negro still confronted oppression and inequality. It is true that for a time, while the army of occupation remained in the South and Reconstruction ruled, he had a brief period of eminence and political power. But he was quickly overwhelmed by the white majority. Then in 1896, through the Plessy v. Ferguson decision, a new kind of slavery came into being. In this decision the Supreme Court of the nation established the doctrine of "separate but equal" as the law of the land. Very soon it was discovered that the concrete result of this doctrine was strict enforcement of the "separate," without the slightest intention to abide by the "equal." So the Plessy doctrine ended up plunging the Negro into the abyss of exploitation where he experienced the bleakness of nagging injustice. (King 6)

Equality under the law exists in policy and rhetoric, but it does not exist in praxis, not then and not now. Equality means one thing – justice. According to historian Nancy Koester, as described in *The History of Christianity in the United States,* abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison believed that making slavery illegal was not enough, that "there must be complete social and political equality for blacks throughout the United States" (Koester 88). This is absolutely true, and it requires even much more than this. Justice (and therefore equality) demands social, political, economic, religious, judicial, educational, ecological, gender, sexual orientation, medical, generational, and disability justice. Until there is justice for all people, in all of these areas, there is no equality; not for blacks and not for any other marginalized group of people in this country.

Nancy Koester describes a German Reformed theologian who observed the intermingling of slavery and race in this country and commented on the way in which race impacted U.S. culture even beyond the sin of slavery. He stated, "Of all the forms of slavery the American is the most difficult to dispose of, because it is not only a question of domestic institution and political economy, but of race. The negro question lies far deeper than the slavery question" (Koester 80). This is the cause of this country's inability to establish equality for all people, because the evils of racism and white supremacy are even more heinous than the sin of slavery. It was racism and white supremacy that established and propagated slavery. These are the underlying factors that sanctioned the implementation of it at the outset. Former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass discusses the hypocrisy that existed on issues of justice among the slaveholders dating back to his era in his autobiography entitled *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Douglass states:

> The slaveholder himself, the daily robber of his equal brother, discourses eloquently as to the excellency of justice, and the man who employs a brutal driver to flay the flesh of his negroes, is not offended when kindness and humanity are commended. Every time the abolitionist speaks of justice, the anti-abolitionist assents says, yes, I wish the world were filled with a disposition to render to every man what is rightfully due him; I should then get what is due me. That's right; let us have justice. By all means, let us have justice. Every time the abolitionist speaks in honor of human liberty, he touches a chord in the heart of the anti-abolitionist, which responds in harmonious vibrations. Liberty – yes, that is evidently my right, and let him beware who attempts to invade or abridge that right. Every time he speaks of love, of human brotherhood, and the reciprocal duties of man and man, the anti-abolitionist assents – says, yes, all right – all true – we cannot have such ideas too often, or too fully expressed. So he says, and so he feels, and only shows thereby that he is a man as well as an anti-abolitionist. You have only to keep out of sight the manner of applying your principles, to get them endorsed every time. Contemplating himself, he sees truth with absolute clearness and distinctness. He only blunders when asked to lose sight of himself. (kindle location 5931 – see note)

This demonstrates the way in which these slaveholders were capable of speaking agreeably concerning the need for justice as a basic human right, however, their consensus was solely meant in terms of themselves. They were unable to see beyond their own selfish needs to recognize that justice and equality were necessary for all.

This manner of thinking is still common today, and explains why, in the year 2014, despite the abolition of slavery, and despite all of the progress that has been made, equality still does not exist – because racism and white supremacy continue to be endemic and pervasive in this country. This is not to deny the great strides that have been made, and we should all be forever grateful for the efforts of all people who have fought and died (and continue to fight) for peace, liberty, and justice for all black Americans. However, true equality is still an elusive concept in this country, and this deficiency is oftentimes cleverly disguised by such terms as "tolerance," "inclusiveness" and "diversity," none of which demarcate the full meaning of justice and equality for all.

Martin Luther King (in *Testament of Hope*) and Ida B. Wells (in *Crusade for Justice*) both made powerful statements in their time expounding on the fact that radical change is required in order to truly implement justice.

> Justice for black people will not flow into society merely from court decisions nor from fountains of political oratory. Nor will a few token changes quell all the tempestuous yearnings of millions of disadvantaged black people. White America must recognize that justice for black people cannot be achieved without radical changes in the structure of our society. The comfortable, the entrenched, the privileged cannot continue to tremble at the prospect of change in the status quo. (King 314)

> Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, and it does seem to me that notwithstanding all these social agencies and activities there is not that vigilance which should be exercised in the preservation of our rights. This leads me to wonder if we are not too well satisfied to be able to point to our wonderful institutions with complacence and draw the salaries connected therewith, instead of being alert as the watchman on the wall. (Wells 415)

These statements are just as true for our time as they were for their time; and these truths apply to everyone. We must all make radical changes, in our way of thinking and in our way of being, in order to attain equality and justice for all. There will almost certainly never exist any point in time in which we may simply become complacent or complicit with our current circumstances, therefore we must continue fighting for the rights of those who are discriminated against and are marginalized to the dregs of society. Social activism must remain an active part of our lives as Americans.

## **Religious Oppression**

Slavery is not only one of the most gruesome atrocities ever committed against Africans and African American people, it is also one of the most malicious and immoral acts of violence committed against God. Korean theologian Andrew Sung Park defines

sin as "the volitional act of offense against God or others" (Park 76). Slavery was one of these acts, and one of the most disturbing facts known about slavery is that it was a sinful act enforced by many who were self-proclaimed Protestant Christians who fled Europe in search of religious freedom for themselves, while at the same time eradicating the physical and religious freedom of others for approximately 400 years. These Christian slave holders audaciously disobeyed God's two greatest commandments – to love God and to love one's neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). This is a volitional act of offense against God and others and it is this lack of love that has led this country to believe that black bodies do not matter – not black men, black women or black children – and attempting to rid the world of them is of no consequence to those who engage in such hateful and sinful behaviors.

Religion, and more specifically Christianity, was an extremely significant component of slavery. "The Christian Church," states Iva Carruthers, "was constitutive to the institutionalization and implementation of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade System (TASTS). The Church provided the theological, moral, and ethical justification to sustain and protect the TransAtlantic Slave Trade System" (Carruthers, 1). She goes on to explain that her research is designed to contribute to a new, more truthful narrative about the involvement of Christians in the TASTS. She states, "Such a narrative emphatically acknowledges that the TASTS was and is a crime against humanity and God." (Carruthers, 1). When Africans were abducted from their native land, they were also stripped of their native religions. Nancy Koester explains this in further detail:

> Slavery had deeply religious dimensions. The Africans brought with them many tribal religions and probably some forms of Islam. But the slave trade disrupted African religions; it tore families apart, destroyed entire villages, and removed people from sacred places. Slave trade patterns

> often threw together Africans of diverse languages and beliefs. And slave owners suppressed African religions, fearing, above all else, a slave revolt. Any religious practice that might subvert the slave owner's power was forbidden. (Koester 14)

Koester goes on to describe that initially Christianity was thought to be adverse to the slaveholders' interests with regards to their ability to keep the Africans enslaved. The slaveholders chose to withhold Christianity from the slaves, not only because they feared that many of the biblical narratives may incite insurrection, but also because baptism of slaves would declare them to be children of God, rather than the property of their slaveholder. However, as time progressed, a more malicious plan was established, whereby slaveholders saw the advantage of allowing slaves to be converted to Christianity as a means to coerce slaves, in a non-physical manner, into strict obedience.

This form of religious oppression by slaveholders was yet another form of violence and persecution used to subjugate and exploit Africans. Iva Carruthers explains one of the ways in which this was achieved:

> The Christianity of slavocracies was dualistic in that it theologically separated earthly freedom from spiritual liberation; it justified the sacrament of baptism as birth into heavenly salvation without implication for earthly human and civil rights and it ordered the slavemaster-slave relationship as divine and perpetually made manumission of the slave who was dependent solely upon the will and agency of the master. (Carruthers 6)

Baptism was one of the many ways in which the slaveholder attempted to persuade slaves that it was their Godly duty to be slaves, to believe that God pre-ordained them to be enslaved. Slaveholders would allow preachers to convert their slaves to Christianity so long as they instilled in the slave's mind that salvation meant simply salvation of the soul and not earthly freedom. Fracis LeJau, a southern preacher who travelled throughout the

south evangelizing and converting slaves to Christianity with their slaveholder's permission, was one such preacher. Before LeJau would baptize any slave, he required them to make the following declaration:

> You declare in the presence of God and before this Congregation that you do not ask for the holy baptism out of any design to free yourself from the Duty and Obedience you owe to your Master while you live, but meerly [sic] for the good of Your Soul and to partake of the Graces and Blessings promised to the Members of the Church of Jesus Christ. (LeJau 26)

This was accomplished even further by the laws that were put into place forbidding slaves from learning to read and write – this included the Bible. Slaves were "taught" the Bible through the slaveholder's own deceitful interpretation of scripture and the manipulative manner in which slaves were barraged with selective scriptures that were used to support slavery, to beat them into submission, and to attempt to control the slave's beliefs about God and God's divine purpose for them. All the while scriptures that disputed slavery were purposely excluded from the slave's limited purview. In Frederick Douglass' autobiography, he discusses the ways in which his slaveholder was guilty of quoting a passage of scripture that referred to slavery while thrashing a disabled female slave (who was Douglass' cousin) for being "lazy." Douglass states:

> … I have seen him tie up the lame and maimed woman, and whip her in a manner most brutal and shocking; and then, with blood-chilling blasphemy, he would quote the passage of scripture, "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." Master would keep this lacerated woman tied up by her wrists, to a bolt in the joist, three, four and five hours at a time. He would tie her up early in the morning, whip her with a cowskin before breakfast; leave her tied up; go to his store, and, returning to his dinner, repeat the castigation; laying on the rugged lash, on flesh already made raw by repeated blows. He seemed desirous to get the poor girl out of existence, or, at any rate, off his hands. (kindle location 2466)

One of the distressing aspects of this story, aside from the way in which she was

whipped, is that it occurred after Douglass' slaver converted to Christianity. The other distressing aspect is that upon further examination of this bit of scripture, which is from Luke 12:47, one may determine that it was taken out of context of the entire passage. Jesus was speaking in parables about the kingdom of God, about how believers need to be watchful for Jesus' return, only using slaves and masters as an example to illustrate the real meaning of his parable, in which believers are to be like slaves and God is the Master. But this is not how it was interpreted by slaveholders for their slaves because the bible was consistently bastardized for the perpetuation of white supremacy. C. Eric Lincoln explains this misdeed even further in his article entitled "The Racial Factor in the Shaping of Religion in America" in *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology.* He affirms that:

> Black Christians were given to understand that slavery was God's will and his enactment. It was a consequence of black people's peculiar sinfulness and depravity that they should suffer, and that white men should be the agents of providential justice set over them. The proper response, indeed the only acceptable response, was complete submission, joyful acceptance, loyalty, and patience forever. (Lincoln 183)

Slaveholders were not the only ones to blame for the religious oppression of slaves. Southern preachers, men of God, who were also pro-slavery, were even more appalling in the deceitful ways in which they used scripture to support slavery. This is demonstrated by a pro-slavery Baptist minister in the antebellum south by the name of Thorton Stringfellow (among others), whose treatise entitled "A Scriptural View of Slavery" uses the stories of Canaan, Ham, and Abraham, as well as other Old Testament scriptures and many of the epistles of Paul, as justification for the enslavement of black people. In *Stony the Road We Trod,* biblical scholar and professor Cain Hope Felder informs us that there were no elaborate definitions or theories regarding race in antiquity.

This is a post-biblical movement that was used by slaveholders and ministers to justify their iniquities – to themselves, to anti-slavery abolitionists, and to the slaves. Felder explains:

> Ancient authors of biblical texts did have a color consciousness (awareness of certain physiological differences), but this consciousness of color/race, as we shall show, was by no means a political or ideological basis for enslaving, oppressing, or in any way demeaning other peoples. In fact, the Bible contains no narratives in which the original intent was to negate the full humanity of black people or view blacks in unfavorable ways. Such negative attitudes about black people are entirely postbiblical. (kindle location 1610)

Stringfellow used these Old Testament scriptures, in addition to others, to justify his assertions that slaves were considered by God to be nothing more than property, that slave holders had the right to impose their religion on slaves (because they were property), that slavery exercised grace and glorified God when the duties of the slave were faithfully carried out, and that God singled out the greatest slaveholders as objects of his special favor. He then goes on to use the epistles of Paul (Ephesians, Colossians, Corinthians, Philemon) as further justification. He made no mention of any of the scriptures in the Gospels, except to draw the conclusion that slavery was acceptable to Jesus because Jesus didn't speak out against it, therefore because of the absence of Jesus' prohibition of slavery in the gospels, it not only made it acceptable, it indicated that slavery was indeed a Godly institution.

When this is viewed strictly from within its own skewed context, it is difficult to argue against many (not all, but many) of Stringfellow's conclusions, simply because many of the biblical texts he cites are indeed in the Bible. However, upon closer examination of the text, and using one's own interpretive lenses, it becomes clear that many of the texts that Stringfellow is citing are being twisted to create the narrative that

he wants it to create to fit his agenda as a strong advocate of slavery. In addition when other scriptures are taken into account, which he conveniently ignores, one sees a completely different account of the many ways in which we are commanded by God to love our neighbor. Abolitionists of that same era, however, made an even stronger argument against slavery, using in some cases a different interpretation of the same scriptures, or referring to additional scriptures. One such abolitionist was Angelina Grimke, who makes a scriptural appeal herself in support of the dissolution of slavery in her writings entitled "Appeal to the Christian Women of the South." In it she argues that Jesus' lack of condemnation of slavery in the Bible was because the Jewish laws of Moses' time already protected the rights of those in servitude, and if Jesus did not condemn Jewish servitude, "this does not prove that he would not have condemned such a monstrous system as that of American slavery, if that had existed among them. But did not Jesus condemn slavery? Let us examine some of his precepts" (Grimke 223). Grimke then goes on to discuss the primary two scriptures from the New Testament that describe how we are to treat others: a) Love your neighbor as yourself in Matthew22:37-39, and b) in Matthew 7:12, "… do to others what you would have them do to you."

The abolition of slavery was not the end of religious oppression against people of African descent in this country. The primary forms of religious oppression that plague black Americans today are the ways in which race and racism shape the authority of scripture, the authority of the Christian church, and the interpretation of Biblical texts. Felder elaborates on this further, as he describes the "…postbiblical problems of racism and ethnocentrism that continue to bedevil both church and society in many nations

today, including those of the Third World" (kindle location 1620). He explains that two processes are operating in this regard:

> First, there is the phenomenon of sacralization. By this I mean the transposing of an ideological concept into a tenet of religious faith (or a theological justification) in order to serve the vested interest of a particular ethinic/racial group. Second, there is the process of secularization: the weakening of a powerful religious concept under the weighty influence of what today we call "secular" (i.e. socio-political and ideological) pressures. In this second process ideas and wrenched from their original religious moorings due to the weighty influence of nationalistic ideologies and cultural understandings. This is not to say that the process of sacralization or secularization was a conscious design on the part of ancient biblical writers. On the contrary, I only suggest that the process was circumstantial and subtle. It becomes problematic when the meaning of ancient texts assume a normative character centuries later. (kindle location 1626)

Sacralization and secularization of Biblical texts are the powerful tools utilized by the church and by society in order to continue to manipulate people's beliefs regarding race. Felder explains that they "often cultivate patterns of ethnocentrism and even racism that in turn can have harmful effects on certain racial and ethnic groups who are inevitably scorned and marginalized" (kindle location1632). If is for this reason that Cone, in his book *God of the Oppressed*, says that the theologian must assume the role of exegete, prophet, teacher, preacher, and philosopher:

> The theologian is *before all else* an exegete, simultaneously of Scripture and of existence. To be an exegete of Scripture means that the theologian recognizes the Bible, the witness to God's Word, as a primary source of theological discourse. To be an exegete of existence means the Scripture is not an abstract word, not merely a rational idea. It is God's Word to those who are oppressed and humiliated in this world. The task of the theologian is to probe the depths of Scripture exegetically for the purpose of relating that message to human existence. (kindle location 373)

Sacralization and secularization are clearly functioning in the ways in which the Christian church and society use the Biblical scriptures that have come to be known as

the "problem texts" in order to oppress the black community, women, and the LGBTQ community. This includes (but is not limited to) the texts concerning slaves ("slaves obey your masters"), the texts regarding women ("A woman should learn in quietness and full submission"), and the texts regarding homosexuality (the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, although this is currently under intense debate as to whether this story is about homosexuality, or actually about rape instead). In the case of African Americans, in an article entitled "The Haustafeln (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: 'Free Slaves' and 'Subordinate Women,' " biblical scholar Clarice Martin expounds on this in more detail. She states, "Few New Testament narratives have exerted as profoundly a malefic and far-reaching impact on the lives of African Americans as have the Haustafeln – the table of household codes or domestic duties found in Colossians 3:18 – 4:1; Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9; and 1 Peter 2:18 – 3:7" (kindle location 2557).

The distorted biblical hermeneutics that proliferate within an oppressive society continue to marginalize black people. In *God of the Oppressed* James Cone recalls the way in which this affected blacks of his generation:

> White people did everything within their power to define black reality, to tell us who we were – and their definition, of course, extended no further than their social, political, and economic interests. They tried to make us believe that God created black people to be white people's servants. We blacks, therefore, were *expected* to enjoy plowing their fields, cleaning their houses, mowing their lawns, and working in their sawmills. And when we showed signs of displeasure with our so-called elected and inferior status, they called us "uppity niggers" and quickly attempted to put us in our "place." (kindle location 263)

He goes on: "It is so obvious that because white theologians were not enslaved and lynched and are not ghettoized because of color, they do not think that color is an

important point of departure for theological discourse" (kindle location 1144). Even more recently, in Raphael Warnock's 2014 publication entitled *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, & Public Witness,* he states, "Often through the complicity of silence and sometimes through a conspicuous biblical hermeneutics of white supremacy, the theological thinking of white Christians actually emerged from their actions, and their actions have reinforced their thinking" (Warnock, 18-19).

The black church is also guilty of a form of sacralization and secularization. Black liberation theologians fully acknowledge and greatly appreciate the significant and impactful role that the black church has played in the history of black Christians. As Albert Cleage describes in his article "The Black Messiah:"

> The Black Church has not always been revolutionary, but it has always been relevant to the everyday needs of black people… However uneducated the old-time preacher was, he was relevant and significant. What he offered was an ingenious interpretation of a slave Christianity to meet the needs of an oppressed and suffering people. He took it and used it so that black people could go to church on Sunday morning and find the strength to endure white folks for another six days. (Cleage 103)

Recently, however, the preaching of the black church appears to be at odds with the teachings of black theology. Professor and theologian James Evans, Jr. offers a critique of this trend in his book entitled, *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology:*

> It has unfortunately been the case that the work of black theologians and the work of African American churches have often been construed as separate types of activities. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the leadership of many black congregations, large and small, and the ranks of professional black theologians have looked on one another with caution and, at times, suspicion. This has resulted in a chasm in the black religious community between the theology and practice of Christian faith, leaving the churches with a religion that appears to be no more than a cultural performance, and the theologians with a theology that seems to consist only of abstract concepts. The question, then, is "How can the

> dialogue between professional black theologians and other members of the African American churches be strengthened so that it becomes clear that Black Theology is rooted in the faith of the church and that the faith of the church is given intellectual clarity and expression in Black Theology?" (Evans 1)

Professor and theologian Dale Andrews addresses this very same issue in his book entitled *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion.* In this excerpt he states:

> Along with others, however, I am convinced that the chasm between black theology and black churches evinces a lost synthesis between "liberation and sanctification" or, more specifically, between "the radical message of black liberation" and "the message of healing and self-fulfillment through a saving faith in Jesus Christ." Black theology recognizes that the refuge image in black churches was instrumental to their formative years. Black churches grew from their "underground folk" existence into conventional institutions as havens from racist practices in white churches. Black churches had already begun to flourish prior to the expulsion of African Americans from white churches in the post-Civil War years. Unfortunately, many black theologians ultimately view these events culminating in a transmutation of black churches from an ecclesial form of protest into one of escapism. For these black theologians, church ministries in self-empowerment and faith identity formation no longer constituted an ecclesial form of protest. (Andrews 52)

The most evident, and perhaps the most dangerous, way in which sacralization and secularization continue to pervade Christianity and society is the way in which Jesus has been depicted over time. As explained by Felder, "Scholars today generally recognize that the biblical Hebrews probably emerged as an amalgamation of races rather than from any pure racial stock. When they departed from Egypt, they may well have been Afro-Asiatics" (kindle location 1620). However, for centuries, up to this very day, Jesus is continually portrayed as the blond-haired, blue-eyed, fair-skinned fleshly manifestation of God. This powerful, biased imagery was purposely designed in order to equate what society has defined as "whiteness" with divinity and purity. This continues

to render violence against those with brown skin, creating the utterly false notion in society that those with brown skin are inherently evil, sinful, and the complete opposite of divine. In his article entitled "The Black Messiah" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, Albert Cleage explains this further:

> That white Americans continue to insist upon a white Christ in the face of all historical evidence to the contrary and despite the hundreds of shrines to Black Madonnas all over the world, is the crowning demonstration of their white supremacist conviction that all things good and valuable must be white. On the other hand, until black Christians are ready to challenge this lie, they have not freed themselves from their spiritual bondage to the white man nor established in their own minds their right to first-class citizenship in Christ's kingdom on earth. Black people cannot build dignity on their knees worshipping a white Christ. We must put down this white Jesus which the white man gave us in slavery and which has been tearing us to pieces. (Cleage 101)

**Economic Oppression**

The gravest form of economic oppression that blacks had to endure in this country of course dates back to slavery as well. Slaves built this country, and the wealth that was acquired in the south, as well as many parts of the north and west, was acquired on the backs of slaves. Blacks were viciously exploited economically during the era of slavery and beyond. According to the PBS documentary entitled *Slavery by Another Name*, during Reconstruction (which only remained in place for approximately ten years after the Civil War), many former slaves began buying land, working for themselves, and becoming economically successful. However, because poverty was widespread in the south, there were significant numbers of poor whites who were illiterate and whose conditions began worsening economically due to the abolition of slavery. This led the poor whites to become very resentful and to begin seeing blacks as their competition. They began to believe that the more that black people were beginning to gain, the more

that they (the poor whites) were beginning to lose. Thus a new period of violence against blacks commenced, mainly in the form of lynching and intimidation.

According to the documentary *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* black men began being killed during the Reconstruction because they became a threat to white supremacy. Blacks that were particularly targeted were those whom whites felt had achieved unreasonable success (according to their prejudiced standards), and leading blacks began being lynched in public to send a message to other blacks. The documentary goes on to explain the ways in which lynching became the weapon of choice for enforcing Jim Crow laws and white supremacy. By the turn of the century as many as three lynchings occurred each week, whether it be man, woman or child. Leading anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells is stated as describing lynching as an "unjustifiable act of economic jealousy and sexual anxiety, an instrument of terror and control" (*The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* episode 4).

Economic oppression continues to be a very tangible disparity in this country. This is true not just for blacks, but for millions of people of various races and ethnicities. In an article entitled "Class in America – 2006," author Gregory Mantsios discusses four myths that exist in the U.S. regarding the class structure in this country:

Myth #1: the United States is fundamentally a classless society

Myth #2: we are essentially a middle-class nation

Myth #3: we are all getting richer

Myth #4: everyone has an equal chance to succeed (Mantsios 149)

Mantsios then goes on to debunk these myths with seven realities:

Reality #1: there are enormous differences in the economic standing of American citizens

Reality #2: the middle class in the United States hold a very small share of the nation's wealth and that share is declining steadily

Reality #3: class affects more than life-style and material well-being; it has a significant impact on our physical and mental well-being as well

Reality #4: from cradle to grave, class standing has a significant impact on our chances for survival

Reality #5: class standing has a significant impact on chances for educational achievement; class standing and consequently life chances are largely determined at birth

Reality #6: all Americans do not have an equal opportunity to succeed; inheritance laws ensure a greater likelihood of success for the offspring of the wealthy

Reality #7: racism and sexism significantly compound the effects of class in society (Mantsios 150-154)

This last reality is one that requires further mention. The author expounds on this point by making the following statement:

> Despite what we like to think about ourselves as a nation, the truth is that opportunity for success and life itself are highly circumscribed by our race, our gender, and the class we are born into. As individuals, we feel hurt and anger when someone is treating us unfairly, yet as a society we tolerate unconscionable injustice. A more just society will require a radical redistribution of wealth and power. We can start by reversing the current trends that further polarize us as a people and adapt policies and practices that narrow the gaps in income, wealth, and privilege. (Mantsios 154-155)

In an article written by Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro entitled "Race, Wealth and Equality," the authors give further clarification to the fact that economic equity in this country is woefully tainted with racism. The authors delineate the practices implemented by the government at the point in which they became involved in home financing through the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), and advanced their agenda for

the methodical development of suburbs and ghettos in American neighborhoods. This began with the process known as "red-lining" whereby white communities were designated as most desirable and were assigned the color green and communities that were becoming increasingly black were designated as least desirable and were assigned the color red. The FHA then provided loans based on these designations and the economic growth rooted in access to housing was confined to the suburban areas. The red-lined areas sustained huge economic losses and gradually developed into ghettos, inhabited mainly by blacks. Oliver and Shapiro explain the lasting effects these actions have had on the black community:

> The FHA's actions have had a lasting impact on the wealth portfolios of black Americans. Locked out of the greatest mass-based opportunity for wealth accumulation in American history, African Americans who desired and were able to afford home ownership found themselves consigned to central-city communities where their investments were affected by the "self-fulfilling prophecies" of the FHA appraisers: cut off from sources of new investment their homes and communities deteriorated and lost value in comparison to those homes and communities that FHA appraisers deemed desirable. (Oliver and Shapiro 165)

The authors go on to describe the way in which the racist practice of redlining exploded onto the front pages of an Atlanta newspaper and revealed the truth about banking discrimination that was prevalent in that area. Later studies conducted by the Federal Reserve confirmed suspicions of the racial bias in lending practices on mortgage applications and displayed a "widespread and systemic pattern of institutional discrimination in the nation's banking system" (Oliver and Shapiro 165). These various forms of economic oppression have left a lasting legacy of injustice in the black community.

**Oppression of Black Youth and the Criminal Justice System**

At the time when my youngest daughter was in second grade, at age six, there was a little girl in her class whom she would always have little tiffs with. It was nothing serious, just what little kids do – "she took my pencil" or "she's looking at me" – things like this. One day however, their little tiff took a very ugly turn when the other little girl (who was also six) said to my daughter, "I don't like black people." Where would a six year old girl learn such hateful and hurtful words? Of course this is a rhetorical question because she learned it at home. I know this because I know her mother and because of the lack of concern she showed when we were called into the school to discuss this matter, all the while maintaining a very cavalier, unapologetic attitude that conveyed the message that she didn't care. This little girl, and the adults from whom all children learn such hatred, are the reasons why my husband and I had to begin explaining racism to our daughter when she was still practically a baby. Part of her innocence was destroyed that day by five simple words, uttered by another six year old child. While other parents have the luxury of teaching their children simply about matters that are appropriate to their child's age, my husband and I had the burden of having to teach our six year old child about hatred, ignorance, and racism, as do many other black parents. My personal story is but one example of the ways in which black youth are also affected by the larger issues of racism and oppression in this country. In this particular case this example of racism may have simply occurred at my daughter's school, however, the issue is not the location of where the particular incident occurred, the issue is that my child is a black child who was demeaned by a racist comment uttered by a white child in a public sphere because of the color of her skin. This did not occur in 1963, it occurred in 2009. It did not occur in

the deep south, it occurred in northern New Jersey. It did not occur because my child said anything racist or demeaning to the other girl, it occurred because this other six year old child knew exactly how to articulate herself in a manner that would hurt and insult my child to her very core, simply because she wanted to.

Moving ahead three years, when my daughter was nine years old, one of the most tragic events to occur during her young lifetime took place on February 26, 2012, when an unarmed black teenager by the name of Trayvon Martin was mercilessly killed and his murderer subsequently set free. This tragedy now made our conversations with our daughter take on a whole new level of meaning, and spurred a completely different approach on our end regarding the ways in which we were going to deal with the complexity of this issue with her. It caused us to have to handle this on a much more mature level, giving her a much broader context and a deeper degree of understanding to the issues of racism. This was the beginning of our conversations with her on the institutionalized racism that exists in the various structures and systems of this country, in this case the justice system. This case has left an indelible mark in my innocent child's mind, causing her grave concern and prompting her to ask the question, "Mommy, am I safe?"

This country's history is stained with the blood of innocent black people, most notably young black men and teens and we continually witness the senseless brutality and murder of many young, innocent, unarmed, defenseless black males. Black youth are deeply affected by these events, experiencing the same societal oppressions that black adults face because if it does not affect them directly, it will affect them indirectly. Black men in this country have been the victims of vicious, racist, hatred, initiated in many

cases by those who have sworn an oath to protect and serve – Emmett Till, James Byrd Jr., Yusef Hawkins, Amadou Diallo, Abner Louima, Rodney King, Sean Bell, Patrick Dorismund, Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Oscar Grant, and a myriad of others. Black men are being relentlessly pursued by societal injustice and their lives have been determined to be expendable. They are considered by many to be a menacing threat to society that must be exterminated, and they are being hunted down like animals. In an article entitled "Police Make Life Hell for Youth of Color," author Kathy Durkin explains the ways in which African American and Latino youth are racially profiled by the police and other state agencies in disproportionate numbers in New York and around the country. Each of the stories of these young men ends in a sea of bloodshed, with each victim either having their life cruelly taken away from them or being beaten within an inch of their life. They were each unarmed and they were each young, black males. One of the heartbreaking truths about this is that these stories only represent a tiny fraction of the brutality that African-American males in this country have had to endure for centuries. There are countless others whose names and stories didn't warrant being acknowledged by mainstream media. For each of these young men, their silent cries echo the unheard screams of an entire ethnicity of people.

In an article entitled, "Look Out, Kid, It's Something You Did: The Criminalization of Children" author Bernadine Dohrn opens with a sobering declaration: "A seismic change has taken place. Youngsters are to be feared. Our worst enemy is among us. Children must be punished, held accountable, expelled. We have developed zero-tolerance for children" (Dohrn 547). In this article Dorhn discusses the manner in which America has turned on its children, due to changes that have occurred in criminal

and juvenile law making, effectively criminalizing children for minor offenses, offenses that at one time or another were handled by school officials, teen counseling, school suspension, and the like. However, there has been a paradigm shift in our society so that we have been reconditioned in the ways in which we view children. Dohrn goes on to state that "casting children as frightening makes full use of racial, ethnic and gender stereotyping." She explains the way in which there is a current trend to place more children at younger ages into the adult criminal justice system. "Schools have become a major feeder of children into juvenile and adult criminal courts; simultaneously, schools themselves are becoming more prisonlike" (Dohrn 549). She continues, stating:

> This pattern of accelerating school incidents into delinquency offenses or criminal acts further heightens disproportionate minority arrest and confinement in juvenile justice. To date, it is the large, public, urban high schools that have become sites of substantial police presence, that are under pressure to control youth misbehavior, and that are without influential parents with resources to buffer their children from the juvenile justice system. (Dohrn 550)

This indicates the ways in which the school-to-prison pipeline is a real and dreadful phenomenon in the black community.

Within the criminal justice system exists a malevolent and suffusive presence that is seeking out additional means through which to incarcerate people of color. This is also occurring via the highly structured system of mass incarceration and the privatization of prisons. As explained by law professor Michelle Alexander in her revolutionary book entitled *The New Jim Crow,* she provides a new perspective on the ways in which the old Jim Crow era took on a new face and became the new Jim Crow era. Alexander describes the ways in which this was put into practice to specifically target black men, under the guise of the War on Drugs, making them helpless victims of the criminal justice

system by means of mass incarceration. This is an historic phenomenon that began with convict leasing in the post slavery era and has continued throughout this country's history, with current trends occurring at such an alarming rate that it is evident that this system is working towards ridding society of black men. In Alexander's book she explains the three phases involved in how this system of mass incarceration against black men is occurring – 1) the roundup, 2) formal control, and 3) invisible punishment. The following excerpt is quoted at length in order to gain a more thorough understanding of each of these phases and the systemic inequities that occur in the criminal justice system and work towards criminalizing black men:

> The War on Drugs is the vehicle through which extraordinary numbers of black men are forced into the cage [the jail cell]. The entrapment occurs in three distinct phases… The first stage is the roundup. Vast numbers of people are swept into the criminal justice system by the police, who conduct drug operations primarily in poor communities of color. They are rewarded in cash – through drug forfeiture laws and federal grant programs – for rounding up as many people as possible, and they operate unconstrained by constitutional rules of procedure that once were considered inviolate. Police can stop, interrogate, and search anyone they choose for drug investigations, provided they get "consent." Because there is no meaningful check on the exercise of police discretion, racial biases are granted free rein. In fact, police are allowed to rely on race as a factor in selecting whom to stop and search (even though people of color are no more likely to be guilty of drug crimes than whites) – effectively guaranteeing that those who are swept into the system are primarily black and brown.
>
> The conviction marks the beginning of the second phase: the period of formal control. Once arrested, defendants are generally denied meaningful legal representation and pressured to plead guilty whether they are or not. Prosecutors are free to "load up" defendants with extra charges, and their decisions cannot be challenged for racial bias. Once convicted, due to the drug war's harsh sentencing law, drug offenders in the United States spend more time under the criminal justice system's formal control – in jail, or prison, on probation or parole – than drug offenders anywhere else in the world. While under formal control, virtually every aspect of one's life is regulated and monitored by the system, and any form of resistance or disobedience is subject to swift sanction. This period of control may last a lifetime, even for those

> convicted of extremely minor, nonviolent offenses, but the vast majority of those swept into the system are eventually released. They are transferred from their prison cells to a much larger, invisible cage.
>
> The final stage has been dubbed by some advocates as the period of invisible punishment. This term, first coined by Jeremy Travis, is meant to describe the unique set of criminal sanctions that are imposed on individuals after they step outside the prison gates, a form of punishment that operates largely outside of public view and takes effect outside the traditional sentencing framework. These sanctions are imposed by operation of law rather than decisions of a sentencing judge, yet they often have a greater impact on one's life course than the months or years one actually spends behind bars. These laws operate collectively to ensure that the vast majority of convicted offenders will never integrate into mainstream, white society. They will be discriminated against, legally, for the rest of their lives – denied employment, housing, education, and public benefits. Unable to surmount these obstacles, most will eventually return to prison and then be released again, caught in a closed circuit of perpetual marginality. (Alexander 185-186)

Alexander's highly acclaimed book offers readers new insight into a legal, yet unjust system that has been purposely designed to incarcerate black men and further reinforce the image of black people as criminals. These three stages of mass incarceration exist in a vicious cycle that becomes increasingly difficult to break down. With the roundup leading to formal control, which then leads to invisible punishment, this final stage actually becomes the catalyst for the next round of the cycle because these black men will have been demonized and marginalized by a racist, economically and socially oppressive society giving them little to no opportunity to better their lives. Scarcely able to live a normal human existence, unable to put food on their tables or clothes on their back, they get caught up in the roundup yet again, to begin the cycle anew.

One of the central motives for this mass incarceration of black men in the prison industrial complex is not only to remove black men from society, but also to provide them as resources for the system of forced labor that is known to still exist in prisons. A

young black man named Ray L Jasper, who was convicted of a crime as a teenager and was given the death sentence, describes this system of forced labor. While sitting on death row for a robbery that he committed and a murder that he maintains he did not commit, he wrote a letter from his prison cell which appeared on the website gawker.com as part of their Letters from Death Row series. In his letter he brought attention to several issues that plague our society, especially those that plague the prison system, and black American youth today. At the time the letter was written (Feb. 15, 2014) Jasper had already spent sixteen years behind bars, giving him the time and opportunity to fully grasp the harsh realities of the prison system. Jasper's letter discusses the ways in which the prison system is akin to slavery. He states:

> We look at slavery like it's a thing of the past, but you can go to any penitentiary in this nation and you will see slavery. That was the reason for the protests by prisoners in Georgia in 2010. They said they were tired of being treated like slaves. People need to know that when they sit on trial juries and sentence people to prison time that they are sentencing them to slavery.
>
> If a prisoner refuses to work and be a slave, they will do their time in isolation as a punishment. You have thousands of people with a lot of prison time that have no choice but to make money for the government or live in isolation. The affects of prison isolation literally drive people crazy. Who can be isolated from human contact and not lose their mind? That was the reason California had an uproar last year behind Pelican Bay. 33,000 inmates across California protested refusing to work or refusing to eat on hunger-strikes because of those being tortured in isolation in Pelican Bay. (www.gawker.com)

Jasper then goes on to discuss the way in which prison sentences have gotten out of control in terms of the sentence not fitting the crime, where much longer, much harsher sentences are handed out as forms of oppression:

> I think prison sentences have gotten way out of hand. People are getting life sentences for aggravated crimes where no violence had occurred. I know a man who was 24 years old and received 160 years in prison for two aggravated robberies where less that $500 was stole [sic]

> and no violence took place. There are guys walking around with 200 year sentences and they're not even 30 years old. It's outrageous. Giving a first time felon a sentence beyond their life span is pure oppression. Multitudes of young people have been thrown away in this generation. (www.gawker.com)

Lastly, Jasper explains his own death sentence:

> I'm on death row and yet I didn't commit the act of murder. I was convicted under the law of parties. When people read about the case, they assume I killed the victim, but the facts are undisputed that I did not kill the victim. The one who killed him plead [sic] guilty to capital murder for a life sentence. He admitted to the murder and has never denied it. Under the Texas law of parties, they say it doesn't matter whether I killed the victim or not, I'm criminally responsible for someone else's conduct. But I was the only one given the death penalty. (www.gawker.com)

Jasper's life was not spared, and on March 19, 2014 (just ten days prior to the time of this writing) he was executed. His letter gives us a glimpse into prison life from the prisoner's perspective, explaining the various ways in which prisoners are mistreated and the ways in which slavery in the prison system, via forced labor, is propagated.

Sadly, black women have increasingly become part of the prison population via the War on Drugs as well. In an article entitled "Celling Black Bodies: Black Women in the Global Prison Industrial Complex" in the *Feminist Review* Journal, Julia Sudbury explains this newest trend, "the prison industrial complex plays a critical role in sustaining the viability of the new global economy and black women are increasingly becoming the raw material that fuels its expansion and profitability," (Sudbury 162). She goes on to discuss the ways in which black women have been, and still are, criminalized in U.S. culture, which began during the Civil Rights Movement, and also picked up speed with Ronald Reagan's supposed "War on Drugs." Sudbury explains that this disparity can be seen in the difference in criminal penalties given for the use of powder cocaine, used primarily by whites versus crack cocaine, used primarily by blacks, the penalty of

which is 100 times harsher. And since crack cocaine is inexpensive, it flooded poor inner city neighborhoods in the 1980's and 1990's, giving the prison industrial complex all the raw materials it needs in black female bodies. Once in the prisons, these women become wards of the state, in which they are subjected to sexual abuse, separation (sometimes permanently) from children, medical neglect and forced labor or convict leasing And with the implementation of the "three strike" rule, this ensures that basic human rights can be taken away from convicts and ex-convicts forever.

One of the challenges encountered with bringing an end to the injustices that occur in the criminal justice system with the perpetual evolution of systems of mass incarceration of black bodies and the development of the prison industrial complex is that it is primarily a question of humanity. In the documentary film *Vocabulary of Change: In Conversation with Angela Davis and Tim Wise*, activist and author Tim Wise explains why this is the case:

> Somewhere along the way there has been something of an empathic collapse in the culture and in the society so that the reason we don't think about those who are incarcerated in a way that is likely to bring an end to the prison industrial complex is because we have decided that they are not us, and we are not them, nor could we ever be them nor could they possibly be like us. So we don't have the empathy necessary to really see incarcerated folk as human beings, full human beings. …a highly racialized narrative has been created around these issues to determine who are the "haves" and the "have nots." (Wise, *Vocabulary of Change)*

And in hundreds of thousands of cases, the "have nots" are black men and women whose full humanity is either not recognized or of absolutely no consequence to those who have been designated as the "haves."

Each of the oppressions outlined in this chapter offers but a small glimpse into the pain and suffering of an entire race of people. The oppressions stem from racism and

white supremacy and have existed in this country since its inception, and continue to exist today. Each of these contribute to the distress and grief that have infiltrated into the hearts, minds and spirits of an entire race of people, and have become a ubiquitous presence in the tears that are shed, the resentment that is felt, and the sorrow that is experienced. Each of these oppressions is the origin of the collective han of the black community.

## Chapter 3

## INTRODUCTION TO HAN

Han, as explained in the introduction, is an Asian (particularly Korean) cultural concept, which describes the inexplicable deep suffering of a culture of people who have been oppressed. It is a concept that has profound theological significance and is highly complex in meaning, and requires a substantial amount of explanation and deconstruction prior to discussing the ways in which it may also relate to the pain that subsists within the black community. For this, I turn to the book by Korean theologian Andrew Sung Park entitled *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*, which will help give a bit more thorough understanding of han. For a deeper understanding of han I would highly recommend reading Park's book, as it is only within the scope of this thesis to give a basic understanding.

Simply put, han is the experience of deep pain and suffering. It is the pain experienced by those who have been wounded physically, mentally, emotionally and/or spiritually at the hand of another. Park explains further:

> Han can be defined as the critical wound of the heart generated by unjust psychosomatic repression, as well as by social, political, economic, and cultural oppression. It is entrenched in the hearts of the victims of sin and violence, and is expressed through such diverse reactions as sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, resentment, hatred, and the will to revenge. Han reverberates in the souls of survivors of the Holocaust, Palestinians in the occupied territories, victims of racial discrimination, battered wives, children involved in divorces, the victims of child molestation, laid-off workers, the unemployed, and exploited workers. (Park 10)

This pain is encountered by an endless number of individuals (individual han) as well as entire groups or cultures of people (collective han). The full breadth and depth of han extends across the entire spectrum of human existence.

Park explains the structure of han in chapter two of his book, giving an understanding of the main divisions of han. It exists as: 1) conscious and unconscious (or subconscious), 2) individual and collective (or group), and 3) active and passive expressions. Further examination of collective han will aid us in understanding the presence of han in the black community, as individual han is outside of the scope of this thesis. First, it must be noted that collective han does have an individual component to it, but it is the common experience, or shared reality, among individuals that makes it collective. Collective han is also that which is experienced by an entire group of people. For blacks who have been oppressed through much of the history of our existence, we have a collective experience of han. Going one step further to examine collective han as it exists in its four categories: 1) conscious/active, 2) conscious/passive, 3) unconscious/active, and 4) unconscious/passive will give a better understanding of the structure of han.

Collective han that is conscious/active is also known as the "corporate will to revolt." It is han that occurs in a group or culture of people when oppressive public

policies and unjust work are met with public resistance, wrath and rage. Park explains that it was this type of han that led "African-Americans to transmute their oppressed experience into the civil rights movement in the 1960s" (Park 36-37). Collective han that is conscious/passive is known as "corporate despair." It is the feeling of hopelessness that dwells within victims who have been oppressed for long periods of time. This type of han has the ability to be transformed into active/collective/conscious han (or the corporate will to revolt) if circumstances allow.

Collective unconscious han is more complicated than collective conscious han because it can be buried so deep within the psyche of groups or cultures of people that it becomes exceedingly difficult to resolve. Park explains that collective han at the unconscious level "…is immersed in the ethos of group or racial mourning. Many years of social injustice, political oppression, economic exploitation, or foreign invasions create collective unconscious han. The victims who experience unjust suffering over many generations develop collective unconscious han deep in the soul" (Park 38). He goes on the explain that the structure of this type of han is "transmutable to another generation through the framework of ethnic ethos, tradition, and culture" (Park 39). When this collective, unconscious han becomes active it results in racial resentment. It is a "deep-seated antagonism" that exists in the unconscious ethos and can sometimes explode in the form of violence between two groups. He explains that this can be observed between Israelis and Palestinians and between Japan and Korea. On the other hand, when collective, unconscious han is passive it results in the ethos of racial lamentation. This is the type of han that creates an avenue through which victims of han may share their pain with others through literature, music, poetry, and other forms of art.

For ease of understanding these structures of collective han, they are illustrated in the following table format (see Table 1):

| **Structures of Collective Han** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Conscious** | **Unconscious** |
| **Active** | Collective/Conscious/Active Han<br>"the corporate will to revolt" | Collective/Unconscious/Active Han<br>"racial resentment" |
| **Passive** | Collective/Conscious/Passive Han<br>"corporate despair" | Collective/Unconscious/Passive Han<br>"the ethos of racial lamentation" |

Table 1. Structures of collective han

Next, in chapters three, four and five, Park looks at han in context of the Christian doctrine of sin. He explains that "the various structures of han have their roots in the diverse structures of sin" (Park 45). He continues, stating that "…collective han derives from collective sin, but they are entangled in cause-effect relationships. Collective sin, however, generates a great deal of personal han as well as collective han" (Park 45). Park names the collective structures of sin which are the major causes of collective han in the world: 1) the capitalist global economy, 2) patriarchy, and 3) racial and cultural discrimination. Looking further at racial and cultural discrimination, Park describes four factors that are responsible for the development of racial and cultural discrimination: 1) personality aspect – which is the psychodynamic aspect of racial prejudice and discrimination derived from individual attitudes, values, and need; 2) structural aspect – this describes the way in which prejudice and discrimination have given rise to racist social structures and systems; he explains that institutionalized racism is a form of structural racism because as a structural racist practice is sanctioned by law (such as

slavery, red-lining in black urban neighborhoods and Jim Crow laws) it becomes institutional; 3) cultural aspect – where cultural prejudices are passed down from one generation to the next; 4) religious aspect – where religion plays an important role in the development of racism because it "integrates the beliefs and values of society and provides the sense of the goal of society. If a religion is prejudiced, its culture becomes racist, and vice versa" (Park 65). Park explains that the church is also guilty of apathy toward racial matters, and explains that this in and of itself is a form of racism. He goes on to convey the idea that racism is a religion, one that has its own belief system, with its major dogma being the superiority of one race over another. Park states:

> [Racism] is an idolatry which makes a god of one's own race. In racism, ethnocentrism wins out over theocentrism. It worships skin rather than God. Further, racism disproves the image of God in all races. It refuses to accept the fact that God created humanity according to the inviolable image of God. The belief in the image of God in everyone will elicit respect for every human being, regardless of race.
>
> Finally, racism rejects the reality of God by debunking the work of the Trinity. Racial discrimination denies the order of creation which God installed. God did not create the order of superior or inferior races. Racial prejudice means the denial of God's magnificent creation of human beings. Racism also nullifies the reconciling work of Christ by setting races against one another. Christ came into the world to break down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Greeks (Eph. 2:14). Christ is the symbol of God's emphatic desire for racial reconciliation. Jesus himself defied racism in his mission by talking with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn.4) and by healing the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Mt. 15:21-28). (Park 65)

Looking more closely at the way in which these sins cause han in others, Park explains that the theological counterpart to han is sin, and both sin and han exist in a cyclical pattern whereby they are both causes of han (this will be discussed further in the next chapter of this thesis). Sin is of the oppressor and han is of the oppressed. The way in which Park explains the relationship between sin and han, there appears to be an

enormous theological tension which exists between them based on the common Christian religious doctrine which focuses on sin, but not han. Park states that "traditional Christian understandings of sin, repentance, and forgiveness have all but unilaterally focused on the sinner" (Park 69). He goes on to explain that it has been preoccupied with the well-being of sinners / oppressors and has devoted little attention to their victims. He calls for a radical shift in which sin should be addressed from the perspective of those who have been oppressed and their subsequent han.

Han has the ability to lead to shame and guilt in the person or group that has been victimized by the sin of others. Much of the doctrine of forgiveness of the oppressor, especially in terms of collective sin, is to ease their guilty consciences. Park elaborates extensively:

> It is my view that the guilt of the oppressor is not a matter to be resolved through the unilateral proclamation of forgiveness and absolution by a priest or a pastor, without regard to their victims. Forgiveness must take place in cooperation with victims and must involve offenders' participation in the dissolution of their victims' han-ridden shame. The one-sided forgiveness proclaimed by any authority is not forgiveness, but false comfort. Even though true forgiveness involves sinners' participation in the dissolution of their victims' disgrace shame by making restitution, such restitution does not guarantee that their victims will forgive them. An offender is required to have the sincere intention to love the victim, repent his or her sin, and assist the process of the restoration of the victim's dignity. Forgiveness is not a mechanical process resulting from an offender's repentance, but a dynamic relational fruit yielded through the work of grace. Devoid of genuine intention to repent, all the work of full restitution turns into futile ostentation. The end of authentic forgiveness is reconciliation. Not with full restoration, but with the initiation of authentic forgiveness, does reconciliation begin. Reconciliation does not occur in the full compensation of damage but transpires in the cooperative construction of a better quality of life for both perpetrators and their victims. (Park 84-85)

Park explains that the reason the church developed its doctrines on forgiveness in terms of the sinner, absent from the han of the sinned against, is because its concern is on the

sinner's relationship with God, not their relationship with their victims. He states: "Sinners may suffer their guilt, but they do not suffer from the injury of their victims. By excluding the healing of the injury of the victims, the salvation of sinners loses its intrinsic meaning" (Park 103).

This brief introduction to the concept of han helps lay the foundation for a more thorough understanding of the way in which this Korean concept may also be applicable to the pain and suffering felt in the black community. The concept of han helps fill in the gaps a bit more in terms of our understanding of the way in which our pain is experienced as an oppressed group of people. It may also help us reconcile our conflicting feelings regarding the one-sided doctrine of forgiveness (being solely about the forgiveness of the sinner) when we understand it from the perspective of the han of the person or group who has been sinned against.

## Chapter 4

## HAN OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY

Looking specifically at the han of the black community, there are two means through which the brokenness of the black community is executed and subsequently experienced. It is executed through the collective sins of oppression and it is experienced through personal, collective and self-derived han. It is the structural aspect of racial and cultural discrimination that stemmed from the detestable practices of American society and have resulted in the collective han of the black community. Our han is unfortunately inherent in the color of our skin, the texture of our hair, the thickness of our noses, the fullness of our lips, and the width of our hips. Our han reaches the far corners of this

earth. Black bodies all over the world have been chained like animals, hanged from trees, beaten with whips, set on fire, raped, quartered, and slaughtered, simply because we are black. Isaiah 52:14 describes what Christians believe to be the appearance of Jesus during his crucifixion, "… his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness…" These very words resonate within the hearts and minds of black Christians not only because they vividly describe the carnage and cruelty that was inflicted upon our Savior, but because these same words also reflect the violence that is continually inflicted upon millions of black bodies. This becomes even more germane because the Hebrew Bible describes this suffering person as a servant or slave, which is why it resonates with persons under oppression. Photographs of Emmett Till after he was lynched and drowned, images of the mutilated bodies of the victims of genocide in Rwanda, Darfur, or South Africa, visions of the disfiguring scars on the backs of those held in the throes of bondage. Each of these brings to the fore the misery and suffering of the tortured souls of people of African descent, the people who are part of my heritage, the people whose blood runs through my veins, people who endured the savage and merciless cruelty of pure hatred. This is the agony of our han-ridden hearts.

The han of the black community is caused in two ways: 1) by the collective sin of the many racist structural and institutional practices that have been implemented into the norms of our society (which will be the focus of this chapter), and 2) by the many self-inflicted oppressions that the black community engage in that cause our self-derived han (which will be the focus of the next chapter). The structures of collective sin have affected the black community in very real and very significant ways and contribute to our han. Our han is both personal and collective and each of the four structures of collective

han that Park describes in his book are experienced (or have been experienced) by people of African descent.

1) Collective/conscious/active han – also known as "the corporate will to revolt." This occurs in resistance to the many injustices and pure havoc that are wreaked upon an entire group or culture of people. It is used as a means for survival. As Park mentioned, this was displayed during the Civil Rights movement, but it was also displayed with the many slave insurrections that took place, and the protests that occurred in response to lynchings.
2) Collective/conscious/passive han – also known as "corporate despair." This is the feeling of hopelessness that develops in a group or culture of people who have been victimized by various oppressions for a long period of time. This is common in the black community. Frederick Douglass made a comment on the hopelessness of slavery in his autobiography. "Life is not lightly regarded by men of sane minds. It is precious, alike to the pauper and to the prince – to the slave, and to his master; and yet, I believe there was not one among us, who would not rather have been shot down, than pass away life in hopeless bondage" (kindle location 3504). This sentiment was not uncommon, and reflects the feelings of anguish and misery that many blacks have experienced throughout our long history of oppression. Thankfully however, this structure of han is not eternal. According to Park it can be converted into conscious/active han. Therefore, hopelessness has the ability to be transformed into hopefulness.
3) Collective/unconscious/active han – also known as "racial resentment." This is when the han that has developed as a response to long-term oppression

accumulates over a long period of time, and may become the unconscious han of that group or culture of people. This han becomes subliminal and may be directed towards persons of the domineering race. It has the ability to cause racial strife between the oppressed and the oppressor, and it has been witnessed in this country for many centuries between blacks and whites. This type of han may sometimes explode into violence between the two groups. The danger of this type of han is that the explosiveness of it may be directed towards individual people, instead of at the larger systems and structures of injustice that exist in the racist underpinnings of this society.

4) Collective/unconscious/passive han – also known as "the ethos of racial lamentation." According to Park, this is the type of han whereby "hundreds and thousands of years of oppression mold a race into a certain mode of moaning spirit – the dark soul where the suffering people share their agony" (Park, 40). This type of han is evidenced in the black community in music, literature, and other forms of art. It was alive during slavery and the development of the Negro Spirituals, it exploded during the Harlem Renaissance with the tremendous amount of literary works that came on the scene, and it became very infused in the messages of music, such as the Blues and Hip Hop music of the late 1980s, the 1990s, and the early 2000s.

All of these structures of han contribute to the collective han that is experienced by blacks in this country. However, upon further review of each of these structures (referring to the pattern of shading in Table 2 below) one may notice that two of these

structures have produced positive outcomes within the black community while the other two have produced negative outcomes.

1) Positive outcomes (gray shading) – a) Conscious/Active has resulted in those who have been willing to fight for justice and equality; b) Unconscious/Passive has resulted in a sharing of our lived experience of pain to create a kinship among those who suffer
2) Negative outcomes (unshaded) – a) Conscious/Passive has resulted in feelings of hopelessness and despair; b) Unconscious/Active has resulted in racial tensions that have sometimes turned violent

| **Structures of Collective Han** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Conscious** | **Unconscious** |
| **Active** | Collective/Conscious/Active Han "the corporate will to revolt" | Collective/Unconscious/Active Han "racial resentment" |
| **Passive** | Collective/Conscious/Passive Han "corporate despair" | Collective/Unconscious/Passive Han "the ethos of racial lamentation" |

Table 2. Structures of collective han – negative and positive outcomes

Of these structures of han that have produced negative outcomes (the unshaded boxes), it is the collective/conscious/passive form of han that is especially detrimental among the black community. Although it is caused by the collective sins of oppression, it is sustained by the collective han of victimization. It is for this primary reason that many blacks lack a healthy sense of self. Many are full of self-loathing, a false sense of inferiority, and low self esteem. Because of this we have unfortunately developed

various ways to inflict injury upon ourselves (self-inflicted oppressions) that continue to impinge upon our sense of wholeness. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

In Park's treatment of han he develops a comprehensive theory in which he describes the cultural concept of han as wholly intertwined with the theological doctrine of sin in a cyclical pattern whereby both sin and han itself are the causes of han. This cycle would be similar to the cycle depicted in Figure 1, substituting sin for the self-inflicted oppressions. Following Park's reasoning and making the correlation between his premise for the cycles of sin and han, versus the theory that I delineated in the introduction and depicted in Figure 1, the self-inflicted oppressions of the black community would then be considered our own cultural sin. This concept, which I am neither proposing nor opposing, raises very crucial issues and concerns that are capable of not only being culturally devastating but spiritually devastating as well. I call attention to this matter because it raises many theological concerns when considering the precarious position in which oppressed people currently exist. This would imply that the sins which have been inflicted upon an already marginalized group of people, in this case the sins of racism and white supremacy, would not only result in their han, but that han would then be the catalyst for further sin. If this were the case, where would the responsibility lie for the potentially destructive outcomes of this cycle – with the oppressor or with the oppressed? Additionally, are the self-inflicted oppressions depicted in Figure 1 (and discussed further in the next chapter) actually a form of sin? These are not questions that I am prepared to address in terms of a sin-han-sin cycle, however with the proposal I am putting forth in this thesis, I absolutely purport the idea that a culture of people who suffer from han, especially collective/conscious/passive han, may become

involved in patterns of behavior that result in self-inflicted oppressions in a cyclical pattern along with han (as depicted in Figure 1).

If Park's sin-han-sin cycle is indeed a real phenomenon, and sin gives rise to han, which gives rise to further sin and so forth, then this raises an additional number of extremely challenging questions that must be taken into consideration by members of the black community. Where does the sin of oppression originate? Would it actually be from han? It is important to note here that Park strongly rejects the doctrinal concept of original sin, as do I, but how does that relate to his sin-han-sin cycle? This raises the question: did the sin of racism and white supremacy that enslaved black people for hundreds of years occur because the enslavers suffered from han? Or is it more likely that oppression of this sort actually began with evil? Would the oppressions that blacks continue to suffer from today be caused by sin or caused by han? Wouldn't this view be in danger of falsely exonerating oppressors from the sins they commit which in turn cause the pain and suffering of those whom they sin against? On the other hand, would this view also support the fact that the small number of black Africans who were involved in the European slave trade were also victims of the European's sin, and their han was unleashed by aiding and abetting Europeans in the enslavement of their own people?

These are the types of questions that would require further, more intense analysis from both a cultural and theological perspective. While I do not necessarily oppose or support Park's sin-han-sin cycle of oppression (because it raises too many unanswered questions for me), I do propose that black people in this country are mercilessly caught up in a cycle that follows the path as depicted in Figure 1, where each of the oppressions

that we inflict upon ourselves and cause our self-derived han are a consequence of our collective/conscious/passive han, originating from the oppressive sins of racism and white supremacy. And while it is true that white Americans must take responsibility for these oppressions and the han that it has caused in the black community, black Americans must take responsibility for the self-inflicted oppressions and self-derived han that we generate.

## Chapter 5

## SELF-INFLICTED OPPRESSIONS

There is an insidious presence that exists among the black community and has the potential to significantly damage our self-esteem and create feelings of hopelessness in many people of African descent and in the black community at large. This presence has pervaded our subconscious, and it subtly and deviously manifests itself into our psyche, in the self-deprecating manner in which we tend to view ourselves, and in the adverse ways in which we interact with one another. Our collective han as a community of black people who have been oppressed over the course of centuries provides the formidable momentum necessary for this presence to set off a cascade of dreadful events, causing an even deeper pain within us. This ominous presence is self-hatred and it has manipulated us into becoming the oppressor of our own people.

**Inferiority Complex, Identity Crisis, and Assimilation**

Within the black community the collective/conscious/passive han that we suffer creates three types of self-inflicted oppressions of identity – inferiority complex, identity crisis, and assimilation. The inferiority complex and identity crisis are coupled together and stem from the mental and emotional abuse that blacks have had to endure over many centuries at the hands of white America. It began with our separation from Africa, and continues as we are constantly barraged with negative stereotypes and images that convey the message to society that we are substandard, unintelligent, lazy, shiftless, immoral, uncivilized, sexually promiscuous, and less than human, all because of the color of our skin. Huey P. Newton, the founder and theoretician of the Black Panther Party, expounded on this same issue during the Civil Rights Movement in his book entitled *To Die for the People:*

> The lower socio-economic Black male is a man of confusion. He faces a hostile environment and is not sure that it is not his own sins that have attracted the hostilities of society. All his life he has been taught (explicitly and implicitly) that he is an inferior approximation of humanity. As a man, he finds himself void of those things that bring respect and a feeling of worthiness. He looks around for something to blame for his situation, but because he is not sophisticated regarding the socio-economic milieu and because of negativistic parental and institutional teachings, he ultimately blames himself. (Newton 77)

We have been victimized by this phenomenon to such a great extent that many of us begin to passively accept and further embody these labels and oppressive ideologies as part of our identity and in the way we interact with each other. We begin to live into them as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, which may cause many blacks to become complacent with their abject position in life. David Walker, a black abolitionist, spoke of this in his publication entitled *Walker's Appeal:*

> If any of you wish to know how free you are, let one of you start and go thro' the southern and western States of this country, and unless you travel as a slave to a white man (a servant is a *slave* to the man who he serves), or have your free papers (which if you are not careful they will get from you) if they do not take you up and put you in jail, and if you cannot give evidence of your freedom, sell you into eternal slavery, I am not a living man; or any man of color, immaterial of who he is or where he comes from, if he is not the 4th from the *"Negro race"* (as we are called), the white Christians of America will serve him the same, they will sink him into wretchedness & degradation forever while he lives. And yet some of you have the hardihood to say that you are free & happy! I met a colored man in the street a short time since, with a string of boots on his shoulder; we fell into conversation, and in course of which I said to him, what a miserable set of people we are! He asked why? – Said I, we are so subjected under the whites, that we cannot obtain the comforts of life, but by cleaning their boots and houses, old clothes, waiting on them, shaving them, etc. Said he, (with the boots on his shoulders), "I am completely happy!!! I never want to live any better or happier than when I can get a plenty of boots and shoes to clean!!!" (kindle location 517)

This repressive and regressive attitude has the ability to keep the cycle of han and self-inflicted oppression turning at an unyielding pace, and many blacks today still fall victim to this "slave mentality," or to the feelings of inferiority and self-hatred.

In his book entitled *Race Matters,* Professor Cornel West explains this even further, making a very powerful and prophetic statement regarding how blacks in America have developed this complex as a consequence of the ways in which we have been taught to hate ourselves. He states:

> Black people in the United States differ from all other modern people owing to the unprecedented levels of unregulated and unrestrained violence directed at them. No other people have been taught systematically to hate themselves – psychic violence – reinforced by the powers of state and civic coercion – physical violence – for the primary purpose of controlling their minds and exploiting their labor for nearly four hundred years. The unique combination of American terrorism – Jim Crow and lynching – as well as American barbarism – slave trade and slave labor – bears witness to the distinctive American assault on black humanity. This vicious ideology and practice of white supremacy has left its indelible mark on all spheres of American life. (West vii)

This self-hatred is a direct result of the han that blacks suffer as a consequence of the oppressions of white supremacy. The collective/conscious/passive han (also known as "corporate despair") that we carry deep within our souls, which is caused by our past history as a culture of people, is so pervasive throughout the black community that it has led us down the path of our own self destruction. What we strive for is peace, justice, equality, and acceptance, however, the reality of what we must live with in our society is disharmony, injustice, inequality and rejection, and because we have been perpetually victimized by a society that has not and will not fully repent of its sins, we have developed certain behaviors in response to our han that have been detrimental to our own well-being.

In the article entitled "The Complexity of Identity" in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, author Beverly Tatum gives the details about a classroom exercise that she regularly conducts with her students. She asked them to complete the sentence "I am _____" using as many descriptors as they could think of in sixty seconds. Students use many different types of trait descriptors and students of color usually identified their racial or ethnic group and white students who strongly identified with their ethnic background (Italians, Irish) would identify their racial group, but in general the white students never identified themselves as being white. These results indicate that when a person was a member of the dominant or advantaged group, that category is usually not mentioned. This is because it was taken as a given, considered to be the standard, setting the parameters within which all other groups, considered to be subordinate, must operate. Tatum describes this trend by explaining that "the relationship

of the dominants to the subordinates is often one in which the targeted group is labeled as defective or substandard in significant ways" (Tatum 7). She continues:

> The dominant group assigns roles to the subordinate that reflect the latter's devalued status, reserving the most highly valued roles in the society for themselves. Subordinates are usually said to be innately incapable of performing the preferred roles. To the extent that those in the target group internalize the images that the dominant group reflects back to them, they may find it difficult to believe in their own ability. (Tatum 7)

The reality of the inferiority complex and identity crisis that many blacks suffer from leads to another of these learned behaviors that many blacks use to prove to ourselves and to society that we are not substandard human beings. This is the practice of assimilation, which should not be confused with integration. When viewed from a cursory perspective, assimilation is sometimes understood as the level of achievement that blacks wish to accomplish – gaining full acceptance, full equality, and being able to "fit in" to American society. However, when viewed from a deeper, truer perspective in light of the issues of race and white supremacy that still exist, one understands assimilation to be nothing of the sort. Assimilation is when black people give up a part of themselves as black people in order to fit into "white" America. This means looking at everything white as the standard, and everything black as the aberration. This means denying our heritage, denying our culture, denying our struggle, denying our accomplishments, denying our intellect, and denying the people that God created us to be, in order to make white people more comfortable with "allowing" us to sit at their table. This is one of the many ways in which we inflict injury upon ourselves. Integration on the other hand also describes the way that blacks have been able to fit into certain areas of American society, however, this doesn't involve a denial of self and a denial of heritage. This refers more to breaking the color barrier and paving the way for other

blacks to be able to participate in those areas as well. Examples of people who effectively integrated into certain areas of society would be Jackie Robinson, Marian Anderson, Jack Johnson, Jarena Lee, etc.

In his book *Race Matters,* Cornel West summarizes the ways in which blacks continue to view themselves through the lenses of white America as it was discussed by Malcolm X. He states, "Malcolm X's notion of psychic conversion holds that black people must no longer view themselves through white lenses. He claims black people will never value themselves as long as they subscribe to a standard of valuation that devalues them" (West, 96). When blacks strive to achieve assimilation in this society it is because as a community, we continually view and value ourselves through the tainted lenses of white America, and no matter how contaminated those lenses are, no matter how much this country degrades, demeans and denies the beauty, strength, character, determination, and intelligence of persons with brown skin, we incessantly seek acceptance and approval. However, this is not acceptance of our true selves as black people, it is acceptance of who this country is comfortable with us being as black people. The han that we suffer from creates these three types of self-inflicted oppressions of identity.

**Colorism**

Another form of self-inflicted oppression caused by our han is one that has unfortunately persisted since slavery and has infiltrated the everyday life of black Americans (from the very youngest, to the very oldest) and has committed perhaps the greatest amount of damage to our sense of self worth as people of African descent, and

that is the issue of colorism. Colorism, as defined in the documentary film entitled *Dark Girls,* is "prejudice or discrimination based on the relative lightness or darkness of the skin; generally a phenomenon occurring within one's own ethnic group." In the U.S. colorism began during slavery because of the ways in which white slave owners treated their slaves, treating those with lighter skin better than those with darker skin, making the ones with lighter skin feel superior simply because their skin was closer in hue to their white oppressors than to their fellow brother or sister in bondage, and making the ones with darker skin feel inferior in every way.

In the *Dark Girls* documentary, there was an interview with one actress that truly troubled my heart because it is one of the greatest depictions of colorism that exists. Actress Viola Davis, who is a beautiful dark brown complexion, retells her experience with colorism as she was growing up. She says that she grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood and she was always called names such as "nigger," "black nigger," "black ugly nigger," etc. She said that what happened when she would leave her predominantly white neighborhood and go to the black neighborhood was no different. When she would go to the low income camp for black children, the black children there would call her the same names, "nigger," "black nigger," "black ugly nigger." She then asks the question, "Where do you get it from? Where do you pull it from?" The short answer is that we get it from emulating white people, but the more complex answer is that we truly get it from our own people – black people who have developed a learned behavior that exemplifies their sense of self-loathing for the color of their own skin due to our oppressor's pure hatred of it. Oppressed people suffer from a need to prove that

they are worthy of being loved and accepted by their oppressor, because of the relentless amount of tyranny and abuse that has been inflicted upon them. The best way to prove that is to hate what the oppressor hates, and to love what the oppressor loves, even if it means hating yourself. This behavior stems from the inherent need for self preservation. Because of this, colorism has suffused its way into the psyche of black America and continues to plague our community to this day.

There is a classic experiment that is commonly used with little black girls to demonstrate the self-oppressive ideologies of colorism that continue to plague the black community. It is conducted with the use of baby dolls or drawings of other little girls, in which identical baby dolls (or pictures) are placed before the child, with the exception that one is black and the other is white. The girls are then asked questions about the dolls, such as which doll is prettier, which doll is uglier, which doll is smarter, which doll is dumber, which doll is good, which doll is bad, etc. Invariably, for every question asked which portrayed a positive trait, every child chose the white doll, and for every question asked which portrayed a negative trait, every child chose the black doll. This experiment has been repeated in the documentary film *Dark Girls*. In this experiment the difference is that drawings of five identical girls were used, varying in complexion from very dark brown to white, with four being girls of color and only one being white. One would think that giving more choices in skin tone may vary the results a bit, where a child of color may have been chosen for positive traits, however, this was not the case. In this experiment the results remained the same. The girl in the experiment chose the picture of the white child for every positive trait. Not only that, but she chose the picture of the black child with the darkest complexion for every negative trait. The test

administrator then asked why she chose the pictures she did, giving the girl the opportunity to verbalize her reason for choosing the way she did. For example, when the administrator asked, "Show me the smart child" and the girl picked the white child, she was then asked "Why is she the smart child" and the girl would say "Because she's white." When asked which child was the dumb child, the girl picked the black child with the darkest brown complexion, and when asked, "Why is she the dumb child," sadly the girl responded "Because she's black."

Colorism does not just occur with people who have dark brown skin. We also see the effect of colorism from the opposite end of the spectrum when it comes to people who have light skin as well. As stated earlier, there are those blacks with lighter skin who believe themselves to be superior to darker skinned black people, thinking that they are better because they are closer to white. However, there is another effect that colorism has on black people with lighter complexions and there are many people, especially women, who have also been victims of this same type of hatred from their own people. I've witnessed this myself with my mother, my father-in-law, friends, church members, etc. During an interview with my mother regarding this topic, she expressed that the most hurtful experience that she encountered was her own people not wanting to acknowledge her as black, simply because her skin is a lighter complexion. She said that darker skinned black people have displayed anger, jealousy, even disgust towards her simply because her skin is lighter. She also received a bit of this same type of treatment from her own brother and sister because they are both brown skinned, like their mother, and my mother's complexion is like their father's. I recall my mother always complaining about these experiences while I was growing up, always feeling that she had to prove to

others that she was just as black as they are. As I grew older I began to realize that my mother, not unlike many others, suffers a little from her own sense of self-hatred for having such light skin, because of the hatred that she received from others all of her life.

**Destruction of Black Unity**

Unity among the black community was systematically destroyed during slavery through manipulation, punitive retribution, coercion, execution, and other sinister tactics. Slave was turned against slave and the larger society of the slaveholding south (and the north and west as well) held no remorse for the inhumanity of their exploitive actions. George Lipsitz explains this further in an article entitled "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness" in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, discussing the ways in which white settlers institutionalized an investment in whiteness, making whiteness synonymous with freedom and blackness synonymous with enslavement. Part of this investment in the slave system also involved "pitting people of color against one another." He goes on to explain that "the power of whiteness depended not only on white hegemony over separate racialized groups, but also on manipulating racial outsiders to fight against one another, to compete with each other for white approval, and to seek the rewards and privileges of whiteness for themselves at the expense of other racialized populations" (Lipsitz 80).

This psychological game that is played with black people's minds and emotions, designed to destroy black unity, still continues to this day, and many black people fall prey to this, seeking white approval at the expense of other black people. This lack of unity also occurs between different groups of oppressed people. In the black community,

it occurs most often when blacks are trying to fit into an environment that is deemed by society as suitable primarily for whites, however a token number of blacks will be "allowed" in. Black people are expected to maintain a spirit of indebtedness and gratitude for being allowed into those circles, and to know their rightful place, still playing the subservient role. Once allowed in, there is sometimes no longer a need for white people to oppress blacks any further because our deep-seated han will cause many of these black people to begin the oppression themselves, oftentimes in much harsher and much crueler ways. They may begin to believe they are superior to other blacks who were not allowed in, they may begin to shun other blacks because they don't want white people to think that they are like those "other" black people, they oftentimes don't even want other blacks to be allowed in because they feel that their precarious position will become threatened, or they will uphold the point of view that many racially biased people like to claim, that there is not a problem with racism simply because that token number of blacks have been allowed in.

This is one of the biggest issues that continues to hold us down and it is oftentimes because the blacks who have been able to achieve a modicum of success in their lives support the lie that there is nothing holding any other black person back from doing the same. As if racial, economic, social, political, judicial, religious and academic oppressions have all suddenly disappeared simply because they, and a handful of others, "made it." As if millions of black people choose to be unemployed or underemployed and live in abject poverty. As if millions of black people choose to live in housing projects, homeless shelters, or on the streets. As if millions of black people enjoy not knowing where their next meal is coming from, having to swallow their pride to receive

food stamps, or food from a food pantry or soup kitchen. As if millions of black school children choose to be undereducated in poor, urban public school districts. As if black college students enjoy going into debt for tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars to get a degree, only to graduate and find that their chances of getting a job are slim to none. As if millions of black women choose to raise their children alone, while the strongest component of the black community, the black man, is being strategically removed from society in order to break down the family structure. As if millions of mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and friends of black men are not terrified that one day they will find that black man dead, shot down like an animal, an innocent victim of a racist hate crime, while their murderer may be allowed to circumvent justice by claiming the "stand your ground" law.

In a speech written by Malcolm X entitled, "Message to the Grass Roots," he addresses the theme of black unity, explaining that if we have a common oppressor, we should be able to put aside our differences and stand together. He states:

> What you and I need to do is learn to forget our differences. When we come together, we don't come together as Baptists or Methodists. You don't catch hell because you're a Baptist, and you don't catch hell because you're a Methodist. You don't catch hell because you're a Methodist or Baptist, you don't catch hell because you're a Democrat or a Republican, you don't catch hell because you're a Mason or an Elk, and you sure don't catch hell because you're an American… You catch hell because you're a black man. You catch hell, all of us catch hell, for the same reason.
>
> So we're all black people, so-called Negroes, second-class citizens, ex-slaves. You're nothing but an ex-slave. You don't like to be told that. But what else are you? You are ex-slaves. You didn't come here on the "Mayflower." You came here on a slave ship. In chains, like a horse, or a cow, or a chicken. And you were brought here by the people who came here on the "Mayflower," you were brought here by the so-called Pilgrims, or Founding Fathers. They were the ones who brought you here.
>
> We have a common enemy. We have this in common: We have a common oppressor, a common exploiter, and a common discriminator.

> But once we all realize that we have a common enemy, then we unite – on the basis of what we have in common… (Malcolm X 4-5)

The lack of unity leads to extensive individualism and feelings of helplessness. It has the ability to cause further division among us. In the documentary *Vocabulary of Change,* Angela Davis describes this in the ways in which people have given in to the notion that they are powerless to affect any real social change in this country. She states, "As isolated individuals we will always be powerless. We will never have the means with which to even imagine justice in the future. But as communities we can achieve anything" (Davis, *Vocabulary of Change).* This is why black unity is so very important. It will help give us the sense of feeling empowered enough to transform our lives by making changes within ourselves, within our community and within American society as well. Our chances for survival, and our ability to make it, do not stand alone, but stand on the shoulders of all the great black men and women who came before us and fought for the abolition of slavery, the end of lynching, the right to vote, the end of racial segregation, etc. Our chances for survival are wholly dependent on our unity. If we are unable to stand together and unite as one, we will fall divided.

## **The Paradox of the Black Church**

The black church has become, and perhaps always was, somewhat of an enigma, because it has the ability to be both liberative and oppressive in its message, thereby creating a preaching paradox. The same argument may be made about Christianity and religion in general, however, the way in which this paradox exists within the black church requires special attention. There are three main thrusts that structure the theological and Christological message of the black church: one that focuses mainly on the heavenly

salvation of the soul, another which focuses heavily on the earthly liberation of the body, and the third which is a combination of the two. This has created somewhat of a schism in the religious beliefs of the black Christian community, where on the one hand Christian piety informs the theology of the black church and on the other social justice informs the theology. In his book *The Divided Mind of the Black Church* Baptist minister and author Raphael Warnock refers to this as a "double consciousness." He explains this further:

> However, the double consciousness of black Christianity – that is, a faith profoundly shaped by white evangelicalism's focus on individual salvation (piety) yet conscious of the contradictions of slavery and therefore focused also on sociopolitical freedom (protest) – provides a meaningful angle and a conceptual framework through which to inquire into the black church's sense of vocation and a basis for teasing out the nuances of a meaningful theology of the church. (Warnock 3)

It is in this way that the black church can be both oppressive and liberative – oppressive in that Christian piety is often understood to mean Christian passivity, even in the face of injustice, but liberative in the sense that the sociopolitical fight for justice and equality has always been understood to be a significant element within the black church's identity.

One of the other issues that plague the black church is not only the double consciousness of heavenly salvation vs. earthly liberation, but also the framing of the message to the black congregations. This is due in part to the controlling nature that the white church has had over black Christians for centuries, and the persistency of the han that has been caused by prolonged religious oppression. Mainstream white Christian systematic theology permeated a large part of black religion up until the 1960s when black liberation theology began to emerge. This created a theme in black Christianity that was antithetical to the realities of the injustices that blacks were facing outside of the

church. Suffering blacks were inundated with the belief that all they had to do was to "wait on God" and this ability to wait was a testament to the degree of their faith, their Christian piety. In the book entitled *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* professor Gayraud Wilmore explains that "there has been and continues to be a significant difference between black religion and white religion in their approaches to social reality and social change – whether in reference to theological liberalism or to fundamentalism" (Wilmore ix). Warnock goes even further to say that this was due to the way in which black church leaders conflated the messaging that was preached in black churches:

> Black church leadership has too easily conflated Western Christian doctrine with its own sensibilities about freedom. The controlling assumption has been that whites simply failed to live up to the ethical mandates of Christian faith but that their understanding of the God of Christian faith was essentially correct. (Warnock 16)

Therefore, while white Christian doctrine shaped the beliefs of mainstream America, regarding both religious and social issues, black Christians rejected the assertions made regarding social justice, but accepted the assertions made about God and the Christian faith. These inconsistencies proved to be challenging for many and began to raise numerous theological questions and concerns among black Biblical scholars, thus creating a need for a theological perspective that spoke more truly and consistently to the needs of black Americans. This was the beginning of the black liberation theology movement.

When first introduced, black liberation theology was not fully embraced by all and it encountered much resistance from both white and black scholars, as it still does today. Its founder and strongest proponent James Cone noted the backlash that he received in his book *God of the Oppressed*. He says that white theologians were

disturbed by the militancy of black liberation theology. They believed he was being too strongly influenced by Malcolm X and they countered his views that God was on the side of the oppressed with Dr. King's messages about nonviolence, love and forgiveness. They also had a tendency to speak as if they alone could set the rules for thinking about God. Regarding other African American scholars he wrote:

> Other African-American scholars felt that the politics of black liberation needed to be balanced with an equal accent on black-white reconciliation. In addition they saw my theological ethics as arbitrary and not sensitive to rational debate and responsible conclusions. The black critique reminded me of similar criticisms by white theologians. I was not too kind in my response, because I felt that these black theologians were more concerned about not offending white oppressors than they were about empowering oppressed blacks in their struggle against white supremacy. (kindle location 54)

His experience demonstrates the dichotomy that continually persists in the black Christian community. While many have deemed it acceptable to have a fresh, new theological view on social justice, they sometimes strongly disagree with the aspects of black liberation theology that provide a fresh, new perspective on Christology. Many have adopted the attitude (to put it in the vernacular), "don't mess with my Jesus." Warnock explains the role that black pastors have played in this:

> Many black pastors, some even while very much engaged politically, have tended to emphasize in their preachments and privilege in their ministry the pietistic side of black faith aimed at the freedom of the soul, in this world and the next. On the other hand, black theologians, informed by a distinctive and undeniable trajectory in black faith, have focused primarily on the political side, radical protest aimed at the freedom of the body in this world, expressed eschatologically by slaves who bore witness to it in their subtle songs about the next world. (Warnock 13-14)

Warnock continues:

> Yet, as Christian ethicist Peter Paris has noted, even after the civil rights movement and the birth of black theology, black churches and the theological schools sponsored by black denominations have been slow to

> recognize the value of systematic theological reflection on their own history and distinctive commitment to justice and the extent to which therein is a faith that set black Christianity radically apart from the theology of white churches. (Warnock 16)

This dualistic nature of the black church, as both liberative and oppressive, has perhaps the most profound effect on those black Christians who live furthest on the margins of society. If the gospel message is seen to be oppressive to an already oppressed group of people, how are they to receive that message, especially if it is coming from their own churches? How is it acceptable to tell suffering people that they must continue to "suffer like Christ?" Professor Howard Thurman makes the following statement in his book entitled *Jesus and the Disinherited:*

> The masses of men live with their backs constantly against the wall. They are the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed. What does our religion say to them? The issue is not what it counsels them to do for others whose need may be greater, but what religion offers to meet their own needs. The search for an answer to this question is perhaps the most important religious quest of modern life. (kindle location 189)

James Cone asked a similar question, "What has the gospel to do with the oppressed of the land and their struggle for liberation? Any theologian who fails to place that question as the center of his or her work has ignored the essence of the gospel" (kindle location 402).

And yet, while these statements ring true to many black Christians and theologians, many black churches still fail to incorporate an earthly liberative message into their heavenly salvation message. They believe, like the slaves were told to believe, that freedom means freedom of the soul, not the body. This Christian credo comes dangerously close to advocating a societal belief that blacks must become complacent and complicit with their subordinate position in life, while others are allowed to, and are

intended to, thrive. Warnock makes the following statement regarding the evangelical message of white Christian churches:

> Indeed as black theologians have consistently pointed out and as a handful of white theologians have acknowledged in print, the European and American theology that informs the work of white churches, in much of its evangelical, liberal, and neo-orthodox variations, has reinforced the status quo of a racist society, has marginalized black people and has largely ignored their struggle as a theological problem. Decades after the rise of black theology, few white theologians have taken seriously black theology's claims regarding the centrality of the black struggle for understanding the meaning of the gospel in our times. (Warnock 17)

Therefore, if many black Christian churches are developing their theological messages from the beliefs of white Christians and historically oppressive religious messaging, where does that leave us? This is the paradoxical nature of black Christianity and the black church.

## Black Youth

Black youth also suffer from the same oppressions that black adults do, however, their han is compounded by the fact that many black adults inflict injury upon them as well, wounding their han-ridden hearts even further. The behaviors of today's youth are primarily a cry for help because they feel completely abandoned by everyone, abandoned by the larger society and abandoned by their own black communities, and too many people, too many black people, continue to turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to their pain, dismissing many of them as nothing more than thugs, drug dealers, and gang bangers. They are constantly being referred to as the "lost youth" of today. While there may be some truth to that, what is most troublesome about this label is that people of my generation refuse to admit that these kids are lost because we are the ones who lost

them!! We are a generation of "selfies," by which I mean those who are incessantly involved in pervasive individualism (to use Angela Davis' term) and cannot see beyond themselves in order to see the needs of others.

I have over twenty years of experience working with children as a teacher, youth leader, instructor, tutor, mentor, etc. I have encountered students who have been molested, students with parents who were addicted to drugs or alcohol, students who lost one or both parents, who had family members that were incarcerated, who had been physically abused, who abused drugs themselves and were placed in rehabilitation facilities by the ages of fourteen and fifteen, students who had contracted sexually transmitted diseases, some who were members of gangs, who sold drugs, who carried and used weapons, who were victims of crimes, who had friends that had been murdered, a few students who were suicidal, and one student that had even murdered his younger brother as a result of the abuse he endured himself for years. When a student sat down in my classroom I never knew what they may have been dealing with at home or in their neighborhood the night before. There were days when I had to be their mother, social worker, guidance counselor, medical advisor and probation officer. Some days the last thing a student was concerned about was learning about biology or algebra.

This type of trauma that my students experienced is unfortunately commonplace in large, predominantly black, economically depressed urban areas. In a book written by professor of Africana Studies Shawn Ginwright entitled *Black Youth Rising: Activism and Radical Healing in Urban America*, he discusses in great detail the after school youth program that he and his wife developed and the youth that they worked with in the program. Ginwright tells of similar stories. One of his students was involved in a gang,

another student was homeless, dropped out of school and witnessed a murder and then had her life threatened if she went to the police, the list goes on. Ginwright explains that the anguish experienced by black students in urban neighborhoods caused by events such as these would be categorized as post traumatic stress disorder, however he offers a broader understanding of the term to encapsulate the full scope of their ordeals because their experiences are not just one single event, these youth experience ongoing trauma, one event after another. Ginwright also asserts the claim that "one of the most significant difficulties black youth experience is the way in which trauma in black communities is treated by the general public. Embedded in newspapers and in evening new accounts of violence in urban black communities is the notion that violence in black communities is entirely the fault of the people in the neighborhood" (Ginwright 55). This is the sad reality that black youth of today must live with.

Black youth today need us more than ever and too many people simply wish to wash their hands of the situation and chalk them up as a lost cause. If young people appear to have no hope for their future, it is because they suffer from feelings of hopelessness. If they seem to only live for today, it is because they cannot see their tomorrows. If they don't know their own worth, it's because they are made to feel worthless. If they don't know who they are, it's because we don't take the time to help them discover who they are. And if they have no dreams, it is because we don't help them to dream. Too many of them have nowhere to turn, and then many of them must deal with the fact that people in their own culture and in their own communities have given up on them. They recognize this and they are suffering because of it. They understand when someone truly cares for them and when someone does not, and

oftentimes, even when people do reach out to help them, they lash out so harshly because they have been hurt so deeply. I've experienced this myself on several occasions. They need to know that the person's intentions are genuine and that the person isn't going to abandon them at the first sign of difficulty.

In one of the schools where I was teaching, which was a private Catholic school in a poor, predominantly black urban area, I was sexually harassed by two of my students – two whom I had reached out to and tried to help on numerous occasions. They carved into a desk and wrote on a note that they left behind in the classroom for me to find "I f***ed Mrs. Edwards" (without the censoring of course), and they drew pictures of women with large breasts. Presumably that was supposed to be me. Of course no one confessed, and no one snitched since that goes against the "hood rules," but I was able to figure out who the two students were. One student was expelled before I had the chance to confront him, but at the end of the school year (after a couple of months went by) I did confront the other student. He came to see me to get work that he had missed and that was my opportunity to speak with him alone. I told him that I knew he and the other student were the guilty party, but I told him that I wanted him to know that I forgave them. I explained to him that it took a lot of tears and a lot of prayer for me to be able to get to that point because they truly hurt me, but I also told him that I understand that students sometimes lash out at the people who try to help them the most because they don't believe that these adults genuinely care about them when no one else seems to care. And sometimes it's simply that kids just make mistakes, just like adults do, but I thought it was important for him to know that he was forgiven. While I was talking he never said a word. He simply listened and then hung his head in shame. Once I said what I needed

to say, I told him he could go, and he quietly left the room. I have never seen either one of them since.

This story is included not for the purpose of displaying the positive way in which I handled this situation, because I did not handle it well in the beginning at all. I was very hurt and very angry, and it took a lot of time, prayer and tears for me to be able to forgive them, and it was not an easy thing to do. However, it was an extremely important learning experience for me, and I simply wish to display the significance of what I discovered in the process, what I believe we must all bear in mind when interacting with children who live in ghettoized neighborhoods and have unfortunately been victimized by their circumstances. I realized that I had to take into serious consideration what I knew about them as individuals, what I knew about their home life, and what I knew about the types of trauma they too experienced as a result of the larger issues of structural and institutional oppression that abound in their neighborhoods. I felt that I had to prioritize all of that over my hurt feelings. This is not to make little of a clearly malicious act of violence that they committed against me, and it was not taken lightly by me or the school, but I chose to consider the ongoing onslaught of trauma that they continually experienced, both in their home life and as a result of societal oppressions. One student's mother had died a few years prior and he was having a difficult time adjusting to his loss, the other student was separated from his mother by the court system and he was having a difficult time adjusting to his living situation with his father. Both students were constantly being suspended from school because of their parents' inability to pay their tuition on time, which led to extreme embarrassment for them, and many other students, among the entire school population. This was in addition

to other issues. They were both smart students, but they had both previously displayed problematic decision-making throughout the year when their circumstances got the better of them, decisions that also sometimes landed them in trouble in my class. I came to realize, however, that if I was sincere about my decision to help them and show them I cared, I had to demonstrate to them that I was still able to care despite what transpired between us. I recognized that in comparison to the types of trauma that these students had experienced, my hurt feelings would heal much sooner than their devastated hearts, and letting them know that someone cared took precedence for me. Ginwright also discusses the ways in which we must care for black youth who have experienced trauma. He says:

> In communities ravaged by violence, crime, and poverty, care is perhaps one of the most revolutionary antidotes to urban trauma because it ultimately facilitates healing and a passion for justice. Without investments in caring relationships, young people internalize trauma which can hinder their capacity to transform the very conditions that created it. (Ginwright 57)

Adults often expect young people to experience and understand themselves and the world the same way in which adults do, thereby behaving in ways that would be deemed acceptable for an adult to behave. This is simply not going to be the case and it is unfair for any of us to expect this of them. Young people must be allowed to be young. They must be allowed to make mistakes and to be frivolous, while at the same time to depend on others who truly care for them. Instead of taking the time to understand where they are coming from, many of us just want them to do what we tell them to do, no questions asked. Young people are crying out in pain, pleading for help. Their hearts are bleeding and their souls are dying, but many of us simply want them to "straighten up and fly right." In order for that to happen we must be willing to teach them to fly, or at

least help them discover that they have wings. Too often though, we simply want to kick them out of the nest with the expectation that they'll learn to fly on their own. Well, some of them will learn, but the others may die trying. Similarly to the metaphor of movement used in the opening of this thesis to depict the forceful abduction of Africans from their homeland down the Middle Passage, the metaphor is used here to depict the way in which movement may be either oppressive or liberating to our youth as well. If we assist in their learning to fly, we will help liberate them. However, if we forcefully kick them out of the nest when they are not prepared to fly, it may have similarly devastating effects on them as the forced movement down the Middle Passage had on the enslaved Africans.

As has already been discussed, our self-hate is caused by the collective sins of racism and oppression. However, it is the many self-inflicted oppressions that we continually impose upon each other and our youth, that contribute even further to our han, in this case becoming our self-derived han. This self-derived han occurs in other communities of oppressed people as well, and Park discusses the way in which it occurs in the Asian community, in the ways women educate their young daughters by perpetuating the domineering attitudes of sexism and patriarchy. In the black community, the same phenomenon occurs, in that we have the distressing ability to transform our collective han negatively and appropriate the destructive consequences of racism upon ourselves, becoming the agents of our own self-inflicted oppressions and our own self-derived han. We must recognize and acknowledge this, as we work towards transforming our han in a positive way that will allow us to disrupt the overall cycle of pain depicted in Figure 1.

## Chapter 6

## DISRUPTING OUR PAIN

"A specter of despair haunts late twentieth-century America. The quality of our lives and the integrity of our souls are in jeopardy." So begins the preface to the book entitled *Restoring Hope: Conversations on the Future of Black America* by Cornel West. This despair that haunts America and is particularly disturbing to black America, while it is rooted in racism and white supremacy, it is also rooted in our han and self-inflicted oppressions. It begins with the fact that equality does not exist for numerous cultures of people in this country, added to the variety of ways in which society denies and disguises the reality of the racial crisis that is endemic in the systems and structures of American culture. It then moves toward the collective han that pervades the psyche of the black community, and ends with the injury that we, as black people, continually inflict upon ourselves, which then leads to further self-derived han. This then becomes a cycle of pain.

These truths, along with the maelstrom of tyranny and violence that undergird these truths, some of which are self-inflicted, are significant elements in what has led to our darkest days as people of African descent. However, contrary to the immensity of the bitter landscape that has unfolded before us, all is not lost. Black people are a people of courage, strength, determination, and resilience. We have the ability to stand strong in the face of adversity. Our history includes men, women and youth who have fought for our rights with dignity and pride. We maintain hope and faith that we will have better and brighter tomorrows. Our pain may be deep, but our tenacity is even deeper. Within

our hands exists the power to positively transform our han and disrupt these cycles of pain and begin a process of healing. Our healing must take place from a cultural perspective, as a people with a common heritage and common struggle, and a spiritual perspective, in this case specifically from a Christian theological perspective. The crucial first steps of the process begin with an understanding of the ways in which collective sin has led to our collective han, the way that han leads to our self-inflicted oppressions and self-derived han. From that point we may begin to use the resources that we have available to begin disrupting the cycle of pain.

## Healing Our Han

Returning to Andrew Sung Park's book *The Wounded Heart of God*, he offers many viable solutions for healing collective han. These are worthy of further examination, as some aspects of his solutions may be utilized as a useful component for the disruption of han of the black community from a cultural perspective. Although Park calls for resolution, I call for a disruption because I propose that full resolution is not at all possible without the full cessation of racist practices in this country. Therefore I call for a disruption to the cycles of pain, as this focuses more on the han and self-inflicted injury of the black community and will empower us to affect change outside of the systems of oppression. It also lends itself to helping us rise above the status of being viewed as nothing more than victims. Although it is extremely imperative for disruption within the systems of oppression to occur concomitantly with disruption outside of these systems, my focus at this time is on methods that we may utilize to disrupt our own cycles of han and self-inflicted oppression. It is important to note that throughout Park's

chapter on the resolution of han (chapter nine), there are several points that he makes that I disagree with and/or find very challenging. Therefore I am not suggesting that members of the black community adopt all of Park's solutions, but I will discuss only the main scope of the resolutions that I believe will be helpful in the disruption of our cycles of pain.

As Park and many other theologians and historians state, Christianity began largely as a religion for the oppressed, however, after the rule and conversion of Constantine, it quickly became a religion of the oppressor (sinner). Because of this shift in focus on the sinner, forgiveness of sins centers primarily on the divine forgiveness of the oppressor and not on the enduring han of the oppressed or sinned against. Therefore, the main trajectory of Park's argument is on the dissolution of han. It is for this reason that Park's solutions may also be applied to the disruption of the self-sustaining cycle of han and self-inflicted oppressions in the black community. Park explains that there are four ways to positively resolve (or unravel) han. He states, "If han is unraveled positively, it can be converted into the fuel for transforming the social injustice which causes han in the first place and for building up a new community (Park 138).

1) The first step to positively unravel han is awakening. This is the realization (or awakening) that han-ridden people need to grasp regarding the reality of their own han and the causes and effects of the han. This would be an especially significant first step in the black community because many of us do not fully understand or acknowledge the depths of the han that we suffer, which also means that we will be unable to recognize the effect that han has in terms of our self-inflicted oppressions and further self-derived han. Park makes this point clear:

> "…people do not acknowledge the pain of han in themselves; even if they are aware of it, they deny its pain until its severity will allow them to deny it no longer. Han quite often operates at an unconscious level, and as such is invisible and unrecognizable. People need to recognize their han, or the deep pain of suffering. At this point, the dissolution of han begins. (Park 138)

2) The second step to positively unravel han is through understanding. This refers to the way in which understanding the han of the oppressed person or community facilitates the dissolution of their han. Park explains that "han is more easily resolved when it is treated by collective efforts" and "rational understanding also enables victims to perceive others' han through their own han" (Park 142). In terms of the black community, being able to get past our pervasive individualism and seeing the hurt in ourselves and others within our community will allow us to be more empathetic towards each other and come together in unity to work towards disrupting our pain.
3) The third step to positively unravel han is through envisionment, or having a vision for a new world. Park calls for a new worldview that will reform the systems of oppression that have produced han in the world. This means gaining a better understanding of and appreciation for our interconnectedness, or the ways in which we are all related to one another as human beings. This is central to our ability to fight for justice and equality, and our ability to bring an end to our self-inflicted oppressions, especially when it comes to dismantling our inferiority complex. It is important for us to understand ourselves as black people, and how we are interconnected with others, being unapologetic for our self-pride, self-love, and self-acceptance, knowing that our love of self in no way implies a hatred of others.

4) The fourth step to positively unravel han is through engagement, or compassionate confrontation. This step calls for confrontation between the oppressor and the oppressed with the heart of compassion and in this way it will assist the oppressor in understanding the dehumanizing ways in which they are being oppressive. Park also mentions that a victim's unconscious han cannot be resolved by only removing the han-causing elements. It also requires transcendence, and at a collective level it requires the group of victims to identify their han together and work for an alternative society. Again, this has the power to work within the black community. While our fight for justice and equality will always require confrontation between the larger systems of oppression and those whom those systems are designed to oppress, it also requires us to confront ourselves as black people, identifying our collective han and working together to bring an end to our pain.

These four solutions that Park proposes are specific to Korean culture, but I propose that they may also be adopted by the black community as a cultural resource, to aid in the disruption of the cycles of pain that involve our collective/conscious/passive han. However, these steps are only the beginning. There are additional measures that may be taken that are specific to the black community and that are specific to the black Christian community.

## **Rebuilding Hope**

In Cornel West's book *Restoring Hope,* he interviews various authors, theologians, activists, etc. to understand their beliefs on what it means to be a black

person in America and still be able to maintain a sense of hope amidst the racial strife that touches the lives of all of us. The most poignant insights are offered by Charlayne Hunter- Gault, award-winning journalist and investigative reporter, and Maya Angelou, award-winning poet and playwright:

> Well, it's our history that has always been our source of hope, you know. From the words of 'Lift Every Voice and Sing' that remind us that we've been brought out of the dark past and that the present is teaching us hope. Our history of survival and prosperity in the face of societally engineered obstacles. (Hunter-Gault 65)

> In the worst of times, incredibly, that's when hope appears. …in the worst of times, in the dreariest of times, you can look right into the clouds and see hope. …the spring of hope is immersed in the winter of despair. (Angelou 189)

These words are both empowering and comforting – to understand that from within our deepest despair, there is hope; to know that there are others in our history who have dealt with even more dreadful and challenging experiences, but have always maintained their hope for a brighter future. To a certain degree, we are living the future that they envisioned, the future that they longed for and fought to establish. However, our struggle continues, and this is why it is imperative that we continue their legacy, in order that our children have the ability to live the futures that we fight for, and so on. This will require that we never lose hope, and that we teach our children to never lose hope as well.

Martin Luther King's most famous speech "I Have a Dream" is all about hope. His dream was in the hopes for a new America. "I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by content of their character." (King, *A Testament of Hope*, 219). Although this dream has yet to come to full fruition, it is farther along the path of becoming a reality than it was at that time. This is why we must maintain hope, for ourselves and our children and

our people. But this hope should not be misunderstood to be passive, it must be active hope. Having active hope means having the courage to fight for justice, to effect change, and to stand for that which is true. In his book *Restoring Hope* Cornel West explains the active characteristic of hope:

> The country is in deep trouble. We need a moral prophetic minority of all colors who muster the courage to question the powers that be, the courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people, and the courage to fight for social justice. Such courage rests on a deep democratic vision of a better world that lures us and a blood-drenched hope that sustains us. (West xii)

West goes on:

> Hope enacts the stance of the participant who actively struggles against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair. Only a new wave of vision, courage, and hope can keep us sane – and preserve the decency and dignity requisite to revitalize our organizational energy for the work to be done. To live is to wrestle with despair yet never to allow despair to have the last word. (West xii)

## Developing a Black Consciousness

As we seek to maintain our spirit of hope as a people, it is also important for us to continue to develop a certain level of understanding and a healthy appreciation for who we are as a people, meaning we need to develop a black consciousness. This means rejecting the stereotypical images that are always portrayed of us. This means rejecting the notion that we are an inferior people, only worthy of second-class status. This means understanding the history of our struggle as an enslaved people, appreciating those who fought for our justice and equality, recognizing the ways in which we continue to be marginalized, continuing the fight against systemic and systematic oppression caused by racism and white supremacy, and taking a proactive stance against victimization of

people within our community, even if the victimization is caused by one of our own. This idea of developing a black consciousness is one that is widely discussed among many black thinkers, especially during the 1960s with the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements. Stokely Carmichael, the head of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, made the following statement in an essay entitled "Toward Black Liberation" in the book entitled *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*:

> Our concern for black power addresses itself directly to this problem [the distortion of black history and black imagery], the necessity to reclaim our history and our identity from the cultural terrorism and depredation of self-justifying white guilt.
>
> To do this we shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized. This is the first necessity of a free people, and the first right that any oppressor must suspend. The white fathers of American racism knew this – instinctively it seems – as is indicated by the continuous record of the distortion and omission in their dealing with the red and black men. (Carmichael 119-120)

James Cone also discusses the importance of developing a black consciousness in his book *Black Theology and Black Power,* "Black consciousness is the key to the black man's [and woman's] emancipation from his distorted self-image" (kindle location 408).

This belief in the need to develop a positive self-image is continually discussed. More recently, in *Race Matters,* Cornel West discusses the way in which the "quest for black identity is integral to any talk about racial equality" (West, 65). Also, in the documentary entitled *Vocabulary of Change: In Conversation with Angela Davis and Tim Wise,* Angela Davis makes the following statement:

> We have to learn how to engage, interpret and criticize all of the images that are around us – in television, movies. We have to learn how to develop a different kind of fluency, a different kind of literacy so that the ideology that circulates through all of these images doesn't just lodge itself in our hearts and in our minds. (Davis, *Vocabulary of Change)*

This different type of fluency that she speaks of will lead to a positive sense of self-awareness, self-pride, and self-love as a culture of people. This different type of fluency will lead to a sense of black consciousness. Our black consciousness must lead our actions and social justice must inform our black consciousness and our commitment to cultural unity as a people with a common heritage and common struggle must tie it all together.

Developing a sense of black consciousness in our youth is essential to our survival as well. If our youth do not understand our past and our present, they will be ill-equipped to fight for their own rights and the rights of future generations. Too many children are ignorant of the issues that affect them as black children just as much as they affect us as black adults. For example, when Trayvon Martin was killed my daughter came home from school one day disillusioned and exasperated because she tried to bring up the issue with some of her friends, only to find out that most of them do not even know who he is or know anything about his murder. If these kids are not being taught by us, there will be no one to teach them. Even worse than this, when slavery was being discussed in her Social Studies class, the kids (including other black children) had no idea that slavery was so brutal. To them all slavery meant was that people didn't get paid for their work, which in and of itself is bad enough, but the sheer ignorance of all that slavery was is inexcusable. Children cannot be blamed for their lack of knowledge. Their lack of knowledge is due to the lack of knowledge and utter indifference of the adults within their realm of influence – teachers, parents, etc. America's entire history of slavery cannot be relegated to a system of unfair wages.

*Black Stories*

While developing our black consciousness it is important that we know our story, as told by us, through history, literature, academia, etc. Although black history is American history, and should be treated as such, there is much to be said about the need to preserve black culture and the need for blacks to continue to develop a sense of black pride. We cannot allow our story of who we are as a people to be dictated to us by others. When we know the greatness of our culture as a people, it helps to empower us, to give us a feeling of hope, strength and courage. We need to know our African history and our African American history. We must know the stories of greatness of the people we came from, but we must also the stories of the tragedy. We must know about our contributions to humanity. The following is a list of a number of the stories and the people who contributed to those stories that we may use as we embark upon this journey to develop a greater sense of ourselves as a people, to develop our black consciousness:

A) African history – including the history of the Africans who traveled to North America before Columbus; the history of Africans' contributions to math, science, medicine, etc.; the tragedies of slavery, and the genocide in Cambodia, Darfur, Rwanda, and South Africa

B) The African National Congress, which is the national liberation movement against apartheid in South Africa – Nelson Mandela, Winnie Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Allan Aubrey Boesak

C) The black abolitionists and insurrectionists who lived and died fighting against the system of slavery, fighting for freedom for other blacks – Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, William Still, Nat

Turner, David Walker, Olaudah Equiano (also known as Gustavus Vassa), Denmark Vessey, Gabriel Prosser, and others

D) The social and political activists who fought in the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Freedom Movement, the Black Power Movement, the anti-lynching crusaders, and the Black Panthers Party – Mary McLeod Bethune, W.E.B. DuBois, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Stokely Carmichael, Marcus Garvey, Angela Davis, Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, Amiri Baraka, Dorothy Height, Medgar Evers, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Fannie Lou Hamer, and others

E) The black youth who were also Civil Rights activists – Ruby Bridges, Claudette Colvin, the Little Rock Nine, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and others

F) The great literary works of those writers who used that platform to make social and political statements against the systems of injustice in this country – James Weldon Johnson, Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, Zora Neal Hurston, Alice Walker, Nikki Giovanni, Ralph Ellison, and others

G) The great music of those who also used song to make social and political statements against the systems of injustice in this country – the spirituals, gospel music, the blues, R&B, old school hip hop

H) The great black scholars, historians, intellectuals, and theologians who have helped blacks gain a greater understanding of various injustices and to recognize our rightful place in society and our rightful place in the kingdom of God –

Richard Allen, Jarena Lee, Carter G. Woodson, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Howard Thurman, James Cone, Cornel West, Jeremiah Wright, Allan Aubrey Boesak, Delores Williams, Michelle Alexander, bell hooks, Renita Weems, John Henrik Clarke, Yosef ben-Jochannan, Ivan Van Sertima, and others

I) The entertainers who have used their celebrity status as a platform to speak out and fight against the injustices against black people – Harry Belafonte, Paul Robeson, Dick Gregory, James Brown, Tupac Shakur, Bob Marley, Don Cheadle, Denzel Washington, Harry Lennix, Billie Holiday, and others

**Liberating Our Souls**

In every moment of every day in our society we must wrestle with the various ways in which our race defines us. No matter if we are black, white, Latino, Asian, etc., in this country we are all defined by race. The race that we are born into then determines the way in which society interacts with us, the way in which society views us, and the way in which we view ourselves. For people who are continually oppressed, as mentioned earlier, we tend to view ourselves through the oppressor's eyes. This creates a great deal of turmoil and inner conflict within us and causes many of us to suffer from various forms of self-hatred, the results of which are not merely that we hate ourselves, but it also fills us with the desire to become more like the one who oppresses us. James Cone addressed this in an article entitled "Theology's Great Sin" in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*. He states:

> Europeans imposed their racist value system on people of color and thereby forced them to think that the only way to be human and civilized was to be white and Christian. It not only makes the oppressed want to be something other than they are but also to become like their oppressor…

> The poison of white supremacy is so widespread and deeply internalized by its victims that many are unaware of their illness and others often do not have the cultural and intellectual resources to heal their wounded spirits. (Cone 144)

During an interview between Cornel West and James Washington, professor and minister, in West's book *Restoring Hope,* West discusses with him the origins of the these very tensions that have been created by society and the ways in which black spirituality is affected by them. West states:

> Inside black folks' souls there is this tension because the voices from the larger society are still heard. And the voices from behind the veil – of Mom, Dad, aunts, uncles, deaconess, cousins, Little League coaches, dance teachers, and so forth – those voices are still there. But they're in tension because they're often in stark contrast. And is it the case that with the weakening of black institutions, the weakening of black families, the weakening of the black civic infrastructure, the weakening of black churches, the crisis in black spirituality becomes more manifest? (West 92)

Washington's response is as follows:

> When you live in a society that developed irrational forms of life – such as Jim Crow culture and even cold war culture – this is absurdity. And it seems to me that you've got to have a lot of courage to postulate the possibility of another way of looking at the world when the whole culture is caught up in what I would call a Disneyland that often does not allow for making distinctions between reality and fantasy.
>
> The more we lose control – and we have lost control – over the nurture system, how you raise a child, how you instill self-confidence, the more you limit the possibility of possibility. And the spiritual vision of whatever faith – whether it's Christian, Islamic, or anything else – is the chance that there's an alternative cosmology. That you don't have to be confined to what the world tells you is reality. And in that defiance alone, there is the possibility of at least reconceiving oneself. (Washington 92-93)

All of these comments provide significant insight into the manner in which a crisis has been created in the heart and soul of the black community, revealing the intense need for healing, transformation and restoration.

This on-going inner battle created an urgent need in the black community to address the damage that existed within us, not only from a cultural perspective, but from a spiritual perspective as well. This led to the development of black liberation theology, born out of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, and womanist theology which developed out of black liberation and feminist theologies. One of the defining characteristics of these theologies is that they not only seek to provide theological understanding and guidance to black Christians, they also provide cultural and political awareness as well. They employ a more holistic approach to their ideologies, from the perspective of an oppressed group of people, than does traditional western Christianity. These theologies have allowed for black Christians to affirm who we are as people of God and who God is to an oppressed group of people. Because both society and Christianity relentlessly attempt to distort and control our ideology, theology, self image, and sense of self worth, while at the same time marginalizing us to the dregs of society, it became essential for black Christians to begin to cultivate a faith that would speak specifically to our hearts and to our circumstances and would provide us with liberation for our souls.

Black Liberation Theology

In his book *A Black Theology of Liberation,* James Cone, founder and greatest proponent of black liberation theology, has this to say:

> In a society where persons are oppressed because they are *black,* Christian theology must become black theology, a theology that is unreservedly identified with the goals of the oppressed and seeks to interpret the divine character of their struggle for liberation. "Black theology" is a phrase that is particularly appropriate for contemporary America because of its

> symbolic power to convey both what whites mean by oppression and what blacks mean by liberation. (kindle location 44)

While developing this new form of theology, Cone presumed this to be not solely his responsibility, but the responsibility of all Christian theologians, to develop Christian theology as a theology of liberation. His proclamation is that "it is the task of the Christian theologian to do theology in the light of the concreteness of human oppression as expressed in color, and to interpret for the oppressed the meaning of God's liberation in their community" (kindle location 53).

Since the days of slavery black people have always received some sense of liberation from the Bible and within Christianity. The dilemma has been in the interpretation of liberation as either earthly liberation or spiritual liberation. For Cone, as for many other theologians (not just black liberation theologians) the vital need for a theology that interpreted both earthly and spiritual liberation was of grave importance. In *A Black Theology of Liberation* Cone defines it as "a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ" (kindle location 293). Professor and theologian James Evans, Jr. provides us with his view on the liberating aspect of Christianity:

> To speak of liberation as God's work and intention in the world means that one must understand liberation as a permanent, final, and ultimate feature of one's existence. That is, God's will is irresistible, and God's work cannot be thwarted. All Christian hope stands or falls with this conviction. God's liberation of the Israelites under the leadership of Moses and God's liberation of the oppressed through the death and resurrection of Jesus are the cornerstone of Christian hope. (Evans 18)

These are two of the main tenets of Christianity that have traditionally been the impetus of the black Christian's faith – the exodus and the cross – showing God's liberating

power, dating back to slavery. As James Cone tells us in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, "a symbol of death and defeat, God turned it [the cross] into a sign of liberation and new life. The cross is the most empowering symbol of God's loving solidarity with the 'least of these,' the unwanted in society who suffer daily from great injustices" (Cone 156).

The themes of black liberation theology build upon the faith of the slaves. In a 1969 statement written by the National Committee of Black Churchmen entitled "Why Black Theology?" in the book entitled *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, the foundation of black theology is described thusly:

> This indigenous theological formation of faith emerged from the stark need of the fragmented black community to affirm itself as a part of the Kingdom of God. White theology sustained the American slave system and negated the humanity of blacks. This indigenous Black Theology, based on the imaginative black experience, was the best hope for the survival of black people. This is a way of saying that Black Theology was already present in the spirituals and slave songs and exhortations of slave preachers and their descendants. (National Committee of Black Churchmen 564)

Black liberation theology therefore continues the legacy that began with our foremothers and forefathers. Today it primarily explores the meaning of God, Jesus, the cross, liberation, black humanity, suffering and theodicy, revelation, the bible, and the black church all from the perspective of the oppressed. While it is impossible to explore any of these in depth in this thesis, I will give a brief overview of the main ideological principle of a few of these themes, after which I will then turn to womanist theology. My intention is to provide an account of the work of a few black liberation theologians that is ongoing in academia and the black Christian community, which may also be used as a resource for disrupting the cycle of pain depicted in Figure 1 that plagues the black community,

including the black Christian community. With a greater understanding of the interconnection between each of the elements of the cycle, black liberation and womanist theologies provide a source of hope, reconciliation, and liberation – healing for our han-ridden hearts.

*God*

Black liberation theology explores the questions "Who is God to an oppressed group of people, specifically to black people? What is the nature of God?" According to Cone in *A Black Theology of Liberation,* black liberation theology looks at God's participation in the liberation of oppressed people, but this becomes exceedingly difficult in a society that has a history of using the Bible as a weapon. He explains that it is important for black theologians to avoid merging the interpretation of the revelation of God as expressed in black power with white folk-religion. He states, "The black theology view of God must be sharply distinguished from white distortions of God" (kindle location 1363). Cone goes on to distinguish exactly who God is for the black Christian community, with the very powerful declaration that "God is black." He explains:

> Because blacks have come to know themselves as *black*, and because that blackness is the cause of their own love of themselves…, the blackness of God is the key to their knowledge of God. The blackness of God, and everything implied by it in a racist society, is the heart of the black theology doctrine of God. There is no place in black theology for a colorless God in a society where human beings suffer precisely because of their color. The black theologian must reject any conception of God which stifles black self-determination by picturing God as a God of all peoples. Either God is identified with the oppressed to the point that their experiences becomes God's experience, or God is a God of racism. (kindle location 1397)

According to Dennis Wiley, author of the article entitled "God" in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, God is both transcendent and immanent in black theology. He explains that while God is not identical with God's creation, God is not separate or aloof from God's creation either. God is a God of reconciliation, a God of hope, redemption, and survival. God is a personal God who "hears our cries, feels our pain, and answers our prayers. Indeed God is *affected* by our welfare and, consistent with scripture, may even change his mind" (Wiley 80).

*Jesus*

One of the many problems that persist in American Christianity today is that whites and blacks alike have managed to spiritualize and theologize Christ until he is scarcely recognizable as Jesus. This symbolic Christ is the Christ whom we think Jesus *should* be, the Christ that fits *our* standards, *our* pre-conceived notions, *our* interpretive lenses and *our* sanctimonious attitudes and beliefs. Too many of us fail to understand how Christ the King could have been Jesus the Carpenter; how the Son of David could eat and drink with lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners; how our Lord and Savior could have been Jesus of Nazareth. Can anything good come from Nazareth? (adapted from John 1:46). This question continues to reverberate throughout human history, except the question has now become, can anything good come from Newark, New Jersey? Can anything good come from Detroit, Michigan? Can anything good come from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania? Can anything good come from Baltimore, Maryland? Can anything good come from any urban area that is largely populated by

poor black people? This is one of the main reasons why the historical Jesus is extremely relevant to the foundations of Christianity and black liberation theology today.

As previously discussed, Cain Hope Felder, in addition to the many historians that study ancient Christianity, gives a clear understanding of the ethnicity of ancient Hebrews as an amalgamation of races. This means that the historical Jesus was an Afro-Asiatic brother, a poor man of color, who later became the Christ of faith. However, this fact is incessantly ignored or completely devalued in mainstream Christianity. In *God of the Oppressed* James Cone discusses the way in which the Christ of faith has erroneously been separated from the historical Jesus. He states:

> The dialectic of Scripture and tradition in relation to our contemporary social context forces us to affirm that there is no knowledge of Jesus Christ today that contradicts who he was yesterday, i.e., his historical appearance in first-century Palestine. Jesus' past is the clue to his present activity in the sense that his past is the medium through which he is made accessible to us today. The historical Jesus is indispensable for a knowledge of the Risen Christ… If we do not take the historical Jesus seriously as the key to locating the meaning of Christ's presence today, there is no way to avoid the charge of subjectivism… (kindle location 2198)

Therefore black liberation theology accepts the responsibility of raising the awareness of Christians (especially black Christians) to the historical truth, the fact that the Jesus of antiquity was indeed a man of color with skin of bronze. Too many Christians (black and white) hang on so tightly to the fantasy that Jesus was white that it is almost as if their faith would be completely shattered if they accepted the truth. However, this is beginning to change. In his article "The Black Messiah" Albert Cleage tells us that "the historic truth is finally beginning to emerge – that Jesus was the nonwhite leader of a nonwhite people struggling for national liberation against the rule of a white nation, Rome" (Cleage 101). This is analogous to black people's struggle in America.

*The Cross*

The understanding of the cross is one that has perplexed and intrigued Christians since that fateful day when the first nail was driven into our Savior's hand. It is one that continues to be a dichotomy of beliefs, where it is viewed by some as the most horrific event in the history of humankind, and by others as the most beautiful display of love that God has ever provided for humankind. It is the salvific nature of the cross that most Christians hold onto so dearly, but it is also the human degradation of the cross that many black Christians tend to hold onto so dearly. In his book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* James Cone gives a poignantly enlightening account of the symbolism of the cross and its connection to the horrible history of lynching. He describes it in the following manner:

> Both the cross and the lynching tree were symbols of terror, instruments of torture and execution, reserved primarily for slaves, criminals, and insurrectionists – the lowest of the low in society. Both Jesus and blacks were publicly humiliated, subjected to the utmost indignity and cruelty. They were stripped, in order to be deprived of dignity, then paraded, mocked and whipped, pierced, derided and spat upon, tortured for hours in the presence of jeering crowds for popular entertainment. In both cases, the purpose was to strike terror in the subject community. It was to let people know that the same thing would happen to them if they did not stay in their place. (Cone 31)

Many black Christians very often view the cross as both a blessing and a curse, or as Cone put it, a "terrible beauty." Black liberation theology seeks to provide both a cultural and spiritual understanding of the cross as it relates to human suffering. The suffering of Jesus on the cross may be seen as a foreshadowing of the suffering of blacks on the tree.

*Liberation*

The message of black liberation theology is clearly focused on liberation, freedom for the captives who are dominated by oppressive systems of power. In the Statement by the National Committee of Black Churchmen entitled "Why Black Theology?" the document discusses the beliefs of black theology on the topic of liberation. It states:

> The message of liberation is the revelation of God as revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Freedom is the gospel, Jesus is the Liberator! "He… hath sent me to preach deliverance to the captives" (Luke 4:18). Thus the black patriarchs and we ourselves know this reality despite all attempts of the white church to obscure it and to utilize Christianity as a means of enslaving blacks. The demands that Christ the Liberator imposes on all men *requires* all blacks to affirm their full dignity as persons and all whites to surrender their presumptions of superiority and abuses of power. (National Committee of Black Churchmen 565)

The fight for equality and freedom for black Christians is based on the belief that God is in the struggle with us. In the article entitled "The Black Messiah" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, black liberation theologian Albert Cleage has this to say:

> God is going to give us strength for our struggle. As black preachers we must tell our people that we are God's chosen people and that God is fighting with us as we fight. When we march, when we take it to the streets in open conflict, we must understand that in the stamping feet and the thunder of violence we can hear the voice of God. (Cleage 103)

*Affirmation of Black Humanity*

Throughout the history of Christianity affirming ourselves as black people who are equally loved by God and whom God did *not* will to an eternal life of servitude has been of the utmost importance. The manner in which white religion infiltrated black religious thought made this necessary. In the article entitled "The Racial Factor in the Shaping of Religion in America" author C. Eric Lincoln describes the ways in which this distortion has left an indelible mark:

> Unquestionably, three centuries or so of American religion have left their mark. There are black Christians who still yearn to have their blackness washed away at the magic fountain they were taught to believe flowed exclusively from the mysterious inner sanctum of the White Church. This is a lingering testimony about an era when the message of the faith was indistinguishable from the agenda of its sponsors. (Lincoln 180)

For this reason, black liberation theology undertook the responsibility of affirming the humanity of black people as a Christian theological endeavor. This is explained further in an excerpt taken from the statement by the National Committee of Black Churchmen:

> Black people affirm their being. This affirmation is made in the whole experience of being black in the hostile American society. Black Theology is not a gift of the Christian gospel dispensed to slaves; rather it is an *appropriation* which black slaves made of the gospel given by their white oppressors. Black Theology has been nurtured, sustained and passed on in the black churches in their various ways of expression. Black Theology has dealt with all the ultimate and violent issues of life and death for a people despised and degraded.
>
> Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of "blackness." It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says No to the encroachment of white oppression. (National Committee on Black Churchmen 564-565)

*Suffering and Theodicy*

One of the greatest challenges that black people, black Christians and black liberation theology face is the reality of black suffering. Suffering has been such a great part of our history as black people in this country that it may make one question oneself and question God, asking the questions "Why?" "Why must I suffer?" "Is it truly God's will that I suffer?" "What type of good and holy God would allow such suffering in the world?" These are the types of questions that philosophical and theological ideology

attempt to address on the subject of theodicy. In *God of the Oppressed*, Cone provides his thoughts and poses similar questions that the entire black community, since the time of slavery until current day, has wrestled with:

> The reality of suffering and evil challenges the affirmation that God is liberating the oppressed from human captivity. If God is unlimited both in power and in goodness, as the Christian faith claims, why does God not destroy the powers of evil through the establishment of divine righteousness? If God is the One who liberated Israel from Egyptian slavery, who appeared in Jesus as the healer of the sick and the helper of the poor, and who is present today as the Holy Spirit of liberation, then why are black people still living in wretched conditions without the economic and political power to determine their historical destiny? by [sic] does the Holy One of Israel permit white people to oppress helpless black people when the Scripture says God came in Jesus Christ to set the captives free? (kindle location 5341)

Although no one has a fully comprehensive answer to the theodicy questions about black suffering, Cone explains that while there have been many who have tackled these questions by either asserting that God is not good, or that God is powerless to affect change, Cone makes it clear that neither of these viewpoints is the position that black theology takes. He states:

> Black Theology, while recognizing the seriousness of the problem, cannot accept either logical alternative for solving it. It is a violation of black faith to weaken either divine love or divine power. In this respect Black Theology finds itself in company with all of the classic theologies of the Christian tradition. However, the problem is resolved differently in Black Theology, which takes the liberation of the oppressed as its starting point. (kindle location 3027)

Using the perspective of the oppressed as his central locus, Cone explains:

> The cross of Jesus reveals the extent of God's involvement in the suffering of the weak, God is not merely sympathetic with the social pain of the poor but becomes totally identified with them in their agony and pain. The pain of the oppressed is God's pain, for God takes their suffering as God's own, thereby freeing them from its ultimate control of their lives. The oppressed do not have to worry about suffering because

> its power over their lives was defeated by God. God in Christ became the Suffering Servant and thus took the humiliation and suffering of the oppressed into God's own history. This divine event that happened on the cross liberated the oppressed to fight against suffering while not being determined by it.
>
> The resurrection ignites joy and excitement because it is the sign of God's victory over suffering on the cross. The oppressed are set free to struggle politically against the imposed injustice of rulers. The Suffering Servant was raised from the dead, and this means that God is now present not only with Israel but with all who fight for the realization of humanity. (kindle location 3239)

In his book *Black Theology and Black Power* Cone also discusses black suffering. This book reflects an earlier understanding that Cone had of suffering, but his theological stance was the same then as it is now. "In Christ, God enters human affairs *and* takes sides with the oppressed. Their suffering becomes his; their despair, divine despair. Through Christ the poor man is offered freedom now to rebel against that which makes him other than human." (kindle location 647)

Womanist Theology

While black liberation theology seeks to connect with the entire black community as written from the perspective of black men, womanist theology seeks to connect with the black community from the segment of that community that was left behind – black women. Black women are oppressed by race, class, and gender. Therefore as feminist theology emerged (giving only a gender-oppressed perspective), and black liberation theology emerged (giving only a race- and class-oppressed perspective), there remained a need for the voices of those who were oppressed by all three to be heard, thus began the emergence of womanist theology. According to womanist theologian Renita Weems in her article entitled "Re-reading for Liberation: African American Women and the Bible"

in *Womanist Theological Ethics*, womanist theology is critical of the biblical interpretations prescribed by both feminist and black liberation theologies, rejecting the idea that the feminist perspective is universal for all women and the black theology perspective is universal for all black people.

According to womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas in her book entitled *The Black Christ,* the earliest critiques of black theology began in 1979 with the writings of Jacquelyn Grant in an article entitled "Black Theology and the Black Woman." Douglas says that Grant clearly articulated the way in which black theology was ignoring the experiences of black women and that effectively "rendered Black women invisible in their theologies" (Douglas 93). Douglas states that Grant's article ended with a challenge to all black women "to continue to name their experience of oppression and 'to keep the issue of sexism going in the Black community, in the Black church and in Black Theology until it has been eliminated' " (Douglas 93). Weems also explains the ways in which "the experience of African American women has not always been fully appreciated by black male colleagues involved in liberation discourse. Black liberation work often focuses on race oppression in society, but fails to see oppression based on gender as equally unacceptable… It failed to address the sexism and the classism experienced by black women" (Weems 55). Womanist theologians have been unable to find full liberation within the scope of black theology's ideology, therefore womanist theology developed out of a specific need for a theological perspective that spoke to the hearts and souls of black women.

One important difference that exists between womanist and black liberation theologies that is worthy of noting is in their theological differences on the concept of

liberation. While black liberation theology purports the idea that God will liberate oppressed people from their position of subjugation, womanist theology takes a different stance as it pertains to the liberation of the black female body. In the book by Delores Williams entitled *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk,* Williams discusses the theology of liberation for black women as depicted in the story of the slave woman Hagar in Genesis 16:1-9. Hagar runs away from her slaveholder's household because she has been impregnated by the slaveholder himself (Abram) and she is being mistreated by the slaveholder's wife (Sarai), whom at that time was unable to bear children of her own. While in the wilderness Hagar has an encounter with God. God tells Hagar, to return to Sarai and submit to her. This action by God begs the question, "Why?" The understanding of God's action by womanist theology is that instead of God liberating Hagar, God uses a survival tactic instead. As Williams states, "When womanist theologians engage a survival/quality-of-life hermeneutic in the interpretation of biblical texts, an image of God emerges different from the liberator God championed in some liberation theology" (Williams 196). This creates a very different image of the liberator God of black theology versus the survival-tactic God of womanist theology.

Many black churches rely heavily upon the Haustafeln (household codes) as proof texts for their continued oppression of black women, which also includes the story of Hagar. As mentioned earlier, these texts are found in Colossians 3:18 and Ephesians 5:21 – 33, with additional texts found in 1 Timothy 2:9 – 15, and Titus 2:3-5. In her book *The Black Christ*, womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas offers these words, "Black women have addressed the contradiction involved in a church that espouses a belief in a

Jesus Christ who is liberator of the oppressed, yet oppresses its own membership. For instance, many Black churches continue to refuse Black women ordination" (Douglas 92). Weems explains in the following two passages from her article that black womanist theology must be especially critical of Biblical text:

> The Bible cannot go unchallenged in so far as the role it has played in legitimizing the dehumanization of people of African ancestry in general and the sexual exploitation of women of African ancestry in particular. It cannot be understood as some universal, transcendent, timeless force to which world readers – in the name of being pious and faithful followers – must meekly submit. It must be understood as a politically and socially drenched text invested in ordering relations between people, legitimating some viewpoints, and delegitimizing other viewpoints. (Weems 56)

Weems continues:

> That the Bible was not transmitted to American slaves as a fixed, written text that had to be accepted as is proved to be fortuitous. It freed us from rather rigid notions about the infallibility of its contents. As an aural text in the slave community, one passed down to black people through sermons, song, and public instructions, slaves were free to interact with its contents according to their own interests and cultural re(imaginings). For black women that meant that we could elect either to reject totally those portions of the Bible we considered misogynistic, to elevate some portions over others depending upon one's interests, to offer alternative readings in order to counter the dominant discourse, or to supplant biblical teachings altogether with extra-biblical (i.e. cultural) traditions that (in their thinking) offered a fuller, more just vision of the way things ought to be. Because of their fundamental belief in their rights as human beings created in the image of God they rejected antagonistic readings that denied them any subjectivity. (Weems 56)

This is the powerful and empowering ideology of womanist theology that works to help free the mind and spirit (and perhaps even the body) of black women from a society that continually oppresses us. Weems explains that it empowers black women to be the readers, agents and shapers of the discourse of biblical hermeneutics by "uncovering the program and agenda of both biblical texts and dominant cultural readings" (Weems 57).

As womanist theology developed, it sought to define the categories and methods necessary for developing along the lines consistent with the cultural experiences and theological interpretation of black women. In her article entitled "Black Theology and Womanist Theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, womanist theologian Delores Williams explains that womanist theology is informed by four elements that provide the basis for its ideology: 1) a multidialogical intent, 2) a liturgical intent, 3) a didactic intent, and 4) the validity of female imagery and metaphor in the construction of theological statements. A brief overview of each of these four areas follows.

*Multidialogical Intent*

This is the area in which womanist theologians may "advocate and participate in dialogue and action with many diverse social, political, and religious communities concerned about human survival and productive quality of life for the oppressed" (Williams 63). She continues, stating that "the womanist also should keep her speech and action focused upon the slow genocide of poor black women, children and men by exploitive systems denying them productive jobs, education, health care, and living space" (Williams 63).

*Liturgical Intent*

This will reflect the thought, worship, and action of the black church where womanist theology will "consciously impact critically upon the foundations of liturgy, challenging the church to use justice principles to select the sources that will shape the

content of liturgy. The question must be asked, 'How does this source portray blackness/darkness, woman, and economic justice for nonruling-class people?' " (Williams 64). This level of scrutiny also includes critical analysis of the Bible, which must also follow principles of justice.

*Didactic Intent*

The didactic element of womanist theology is concerned with teaching Christians new moral and ethical insights about survival and justice for women, and a productive quality of life for poor women, children and men. While responding to the question "How ought the Christian to live in the world?" the black womanist theologian must give authority to black folk wisdom and black women's moral wisdom. Williams states that "womanist theology, in its didactic intent, must teach the church the different ways God reveals prophetic word and action for Christian living" (Williams 64).

*Female Imagery and Metaphor*

Because of the significant implications of imagery and metaphor, especially as it pertains to blacks, and even more so as it pertains to black women, it was crucial for womanist theology to provide the foundation for the language required to bring positive black female imagery, metaphor and story to the black church. This in turn has the "ability to bring black women's history, culture, and religious experience into the interpretive circle of Christian theology and into the liturgical life of the church. Womanist theological language must, in this sense, be an instrument for social and theological change in church and society" (Williams 64).

**New Understanding**

With this new understanding of the inter-connectedness between the elements of the cycle of pain – 1) collective sin, 2) collective han, 3) self-inflicted oppression, and 4) self-derived han – augmented with the precepts of black liberation and womanist theologies, people of African descent will have a strong foundation upon which to begin to disrupt the cycle of pain from both a cultural and spiritual perspective. By developing and applying the aforementioned cultural tools to be utilized to disrupt our cycle of pain, along with the deep theological reflections of black liberation and womanist theologies, a much needed beacon of hope will infuse its way into and throughout our community. We are a community that may oftentimes lose sight of that hope, however, if nothing else, there is always hope and there is always faith. These can never be destroyed by systems of oppression. We may have suffered severely at times from feelings of hopelessness, but our history of perseverance as a people has demonstrated that our collective hope cannot be destroyed, especially when that hope is based in our faith in God. Even if hope begins to slip away, faith has the ability to restore it. Our history may be one of struggle, but it is also one of great triumph. As the scripture says, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5b, King James Version). Our joy, our faith, and our hope help define who we are as a people.

Analogous to the integrated approach describing the cycle of pain depicted in Figure 1 and outlined throughout this thesis, I would like to offer a cycle of hope (in Figure 2 below), which depicts the way in which we may transform our han in a positive way allowing us to develop the qualities necessary to disrupt the overall cycle of pain and develop an ongoing, self-sustaining cycle of healing and liberation. The cycle of hope

begins with Park's four steps to positively unravel han, in addition to other attributes necessary for developing a sense of active hope. This then leads to healing within the black community, which then brings about liberation of mind, body and soul. This sense of freedom then leads to additional healing until we achieve a self-sustaining cycle of healing and liberation that will combat our self-sustaining cycle of han and self-inflicted oppression. The amount of effort we put into continuously enhancing our attributes of active hope will directly determine the measure of healing and liberation that have the ability to become prevalent characteristics within the black community.

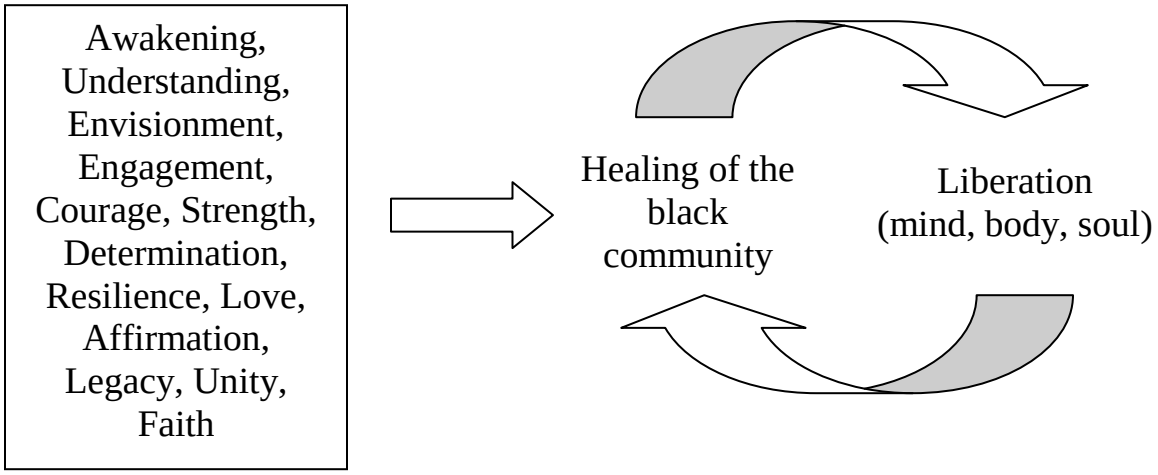


Figure 2. Cycle of Hope. Attributes of active hope that will disrupt the cycle of pain and lead to the self-sustaining cycle of healing and liberation of the black community

# Chapter 7

# CONCLUSION

Over the course of our history as African peoples, God has proven time and again that the tears we cry and the pain we feel have not gone unnoticed. Our omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent Creator sees all, knows all, and will judge all. Just as the Israelites have been oppressed by various kingdoms, yet God delivered them from their oppression, so too will God deliver all people of African descent from their oppression. One of the pertinent questions that many black people ask themselves regarding this is "When is this liberation going to happen?" For that I have no answer. As has already been discussed, there is a different theological and hermeneutical understanding that exists between black liberation and womanist theologies as to whether God is a liberator God or a survival-tactic God. I tend to believe that God is both. I believe that God's purpose for us as a people will go forth, and our burden will be removed. This is why it is critical that we all take responsibility for playing a role in the fight against injustice. If we expect change, we must help foster that change. We cannot leave our liberation up to other people, because it will never occur if we do. We must also not simply leave everything regarding our liberation up to God. While we are waiting for God to act, it is also possible that God is simply waiting for us to follow, to join God in the fight. There are times when divine intervention also requires human action, and it is in this way that our active faith will help us avoid reverting to a form of escapism, simply relying upon God's omnipotence, expecting God to do that which we are called to do ourselves. This is the way in which God can be both a liberator God and a survival-tactic God, and it is

our active faith and active hope that will help lead us in our struggle for justice and equality.

As a culture of people who are constantly dehumanized and demoralized by those who consider us to be inferior, we must recognize that this phenomenon of self-inflicted oppression works to further diminish our humanity. Although these deeply ingrained cultural and racial struggles point toward the learned behavior of self-hatred and the so-called "sin of our skin," we must be willing to take the first step towards freedom, and that is by freeing our minds. We can no longer remain enslaved mentally or spiritually. We must be willing to accept the reality of our han, and the ways in which we inflict injury upon ourselves and our youth. As I stated in the introduction, my purpose in writing this thesis is in the hopes that we may all acknowledge the role that each of us has played and continues to play in the protracted persistence of racist, oppressive ideologies within the black community and American society at large. In an article entitled "Developing a Liberatory Consciousness" author Barbara Love also makes this claim. She states:

> All members of society play a role in keeping a "dis-equal" system in place, whether the system works to their benefit or to their disadvantage. Through the socialization process, every member of society learns the attitudes, language, behaviors and skills that are necessary to function effectively in the existing society. This socialization prepares individuals to play roles of dominant or subordinant [sic] in systems of oppression. (Love 599)

The fight for justice and equality is not only cultural and theological, it is very much a political struggle as well. The politics of race and racism, and the ways in which they work to marginalize various groups of people, will almost certainly elicit an adverse response from those whom these systems are designed to work against. In other words,

oppression breeds the fight for liberation and cultivates an atmosphere that is replete with political unrest. This has been demonstrated by the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa. The cultural and theological resources discussed in this thesis as a means for disrupting the cycle of pain also have relevance to and work cooperatively within the political reality of struggle. With that said however, not everyone has the ability or knowledge required to effectively fight the various structural and institutional oppressions from a strong political position, therefore this thesis focuses more on the cultural and theological resources that may be put into practice for the purpose of healing our pain. There are times when the best defense is a good offense, meaning there are times when it is simply a matter of confronting and enlightening ourselves and affecting change from within. This will require us to be visionaries, and envision a better and brighter future ahead for all of us. We must continue to hold onto our hope and faith. We must be willing to take a stance against injustice (even against the injustice of self-inflicted oppression) and we must empower each other to do the same. We may not benefit immediately from our efforts, but if our children, or our grandchildren will have a better world to live in due to the labor of our hands, we will know that all of our hard work is not in vain.

Black abolitionist David Walker had this to say when making his appeal, asking blacks to help other blacks:

> Men [and women] of color, who are also of sense, for you particularly is my appeal designed. Our more ignorant brethren are not able to penetrate its value. I call upon you therefore to case your eyes upon the wretchedness of your brethren and to do your utmost to enlighten them – go to work and enlighten your brethren! – let the Lord see you doing what you can to rescue them and yourselves from degradation. (kindle location 509)

Using Walker's appeal as an example, I would make the following appeal to the black community: Let us proclaim unity among our people and stand strong in the face of adversity. Let us lift each other up, instead of continually tearing each other down. Let us enlighten ourselves and each other, and save ourselves from degradation. God is calling us to be free – physically, mentally and spiritually. Let us walk into our destiny together, as brothers and sisters. Let us remain hopeful that justice and equality are within our reach. Let us remain faithful in spirit. Let us always remember that God's divine righteousness will reign forever. This is the hope of my people, and this is only the beginning…

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Note

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